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(54) **METHOD FOR PERSONALIZING A TOOTHBRUSH**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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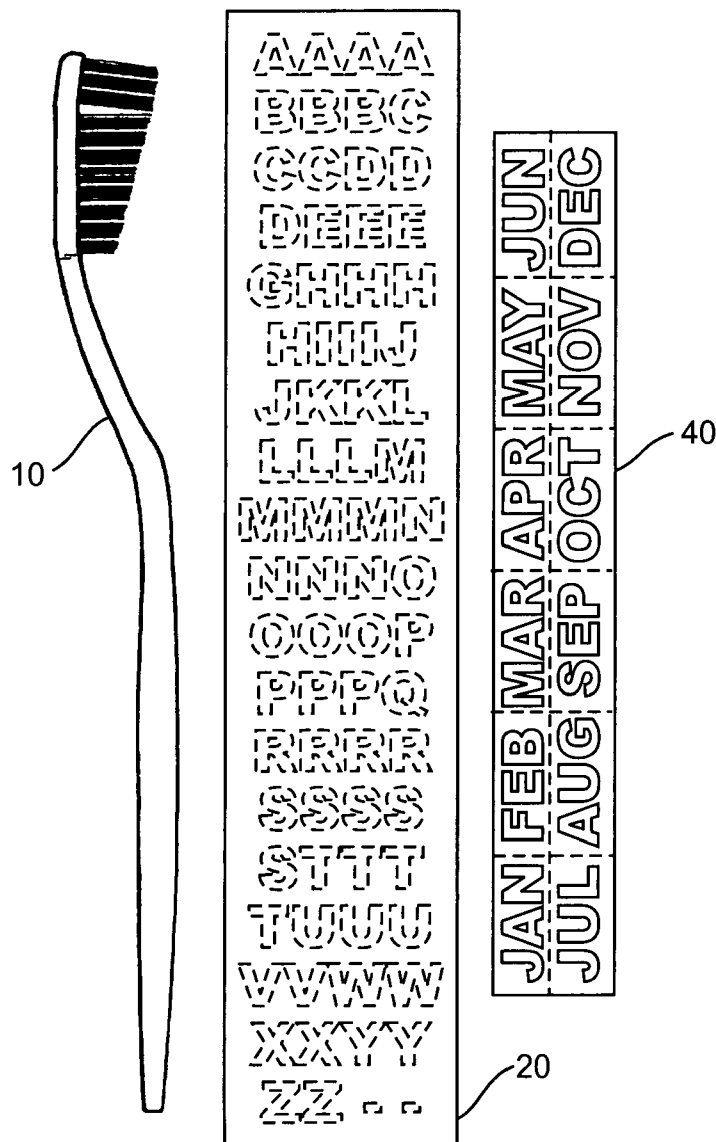
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A package dental hygiene product which consists of the combination of one or more toothbrushes packaged with a set of letters of the alphabet which are attached by a pressure sensitive adhesive to a backing sheet. Selected letters may be removed and applied to a toothbrush so that it is clearly labeled to identify the intended user of the toothbrush. The letters are preferably die cut vinyl letters colored to contrast with the color of the toothbrush to which they are applied and sized to fit on a flat smooth surface on the toothbrush handle.



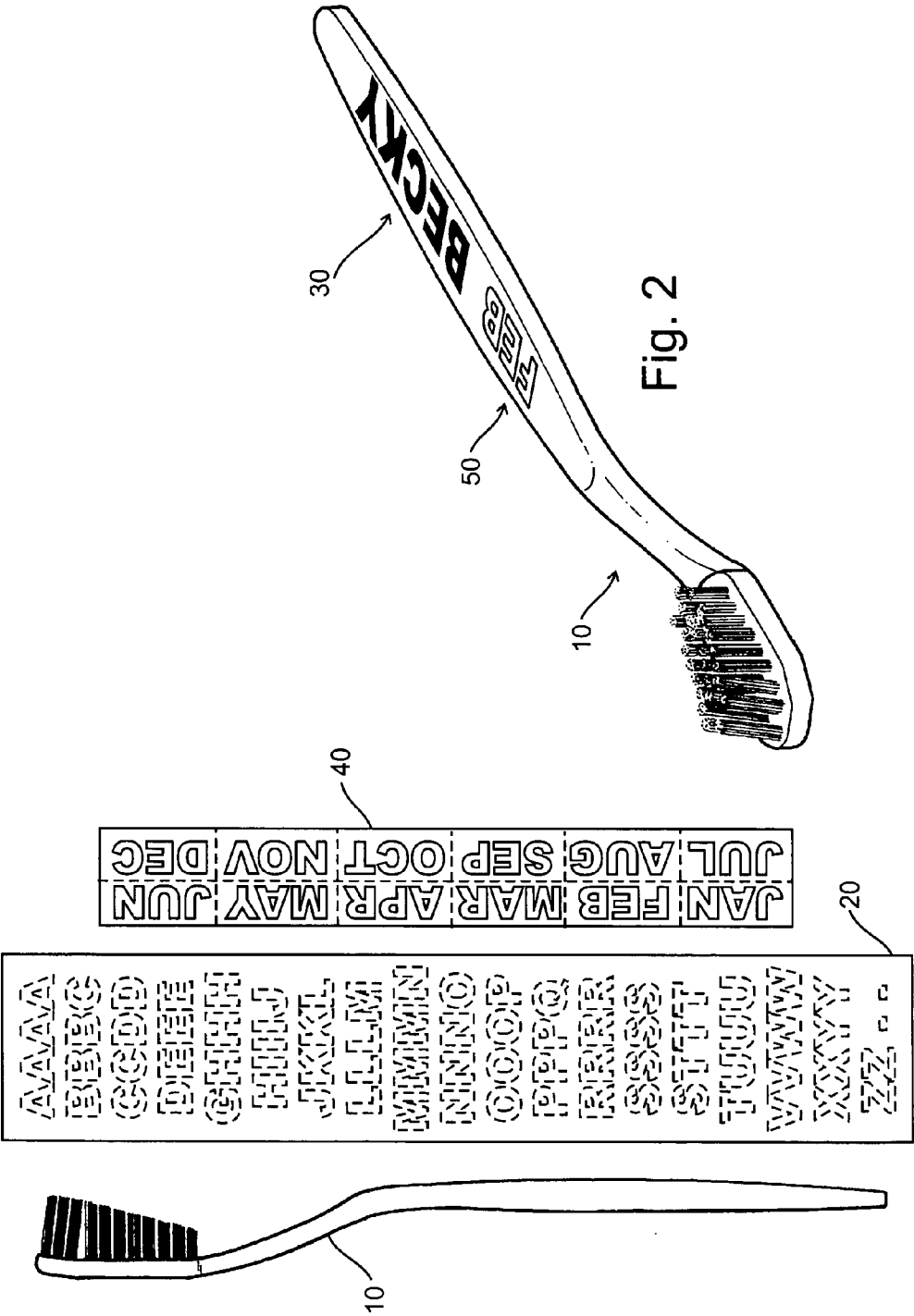
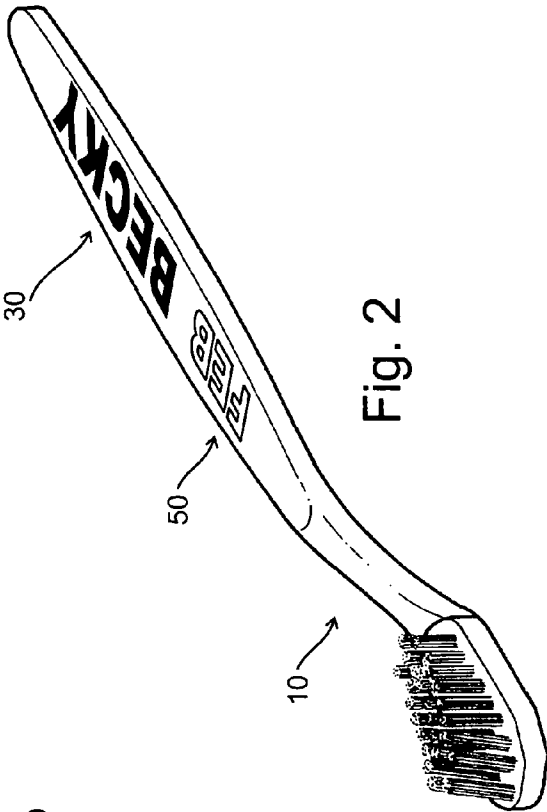


Fig. 2



METHOD FOR PERSONALIZING A TOOTHBRUSH

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates a method for personalizing toothbrushes and to a method for marketing toothbrushes in combination with lettering sets that can be used to personalize the toothbrushes.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention accordingly takes the form of a novel packaged dental hygiene product, a method for preventing the spread of disease by discouraging the sharing of toothbrushes, and a method for more effectively marketing toothbrushes.

[0003] Sharing a toothbrush can transmit numerous dangerous communicable diseases, including hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, mononucleosis, meningitis and bacterial infections that cause cavities and gum disease. Children, who don't understand these risks, and college age students in dormitory settings, are more likely to share toothbrushes and thereby transmit disease to one another. The risk can be significantly reduced by making sure that every person has their own toothbrush, that each person's toothbrush is readily recognizable, and that children are taught to use their own, and only their own, toothbrush.

[0004] The present invention combines a toothbrush and a lettering set that allows the consumer to personalize a purchased toothbrush by adding lettering that identifies the person who will use the toothbrush. The toothbrush and lettering set may be offered together as a package or may be packaged separately. The handle of the toothbrush includes a substantially smooth surface for receiving the lettering, with the handle of the toothbrush and the lettering being of contrasting colors so that the lettering is more easily readable against the background surface provided by the toothbrush handle. The lettering set preferably takes the form of a plastic sheet, precut with the outline of the individual letters. The die cut sheet that forms the letters is preferably attached to a backing substrate by a pressure sensitive adhesive that adheres to the letters when they are removed and secures the chosen letters to the toothbrush. Like the plastic letters, the adhesive is preferably water resistant so that the letters will continue to adhere to the toothbrush even when the toothbrush is wet.

[0005] The present invention thus provides a novel method for discouraging the sharing of a toothbrush which comprises the steps of offering the toothbrush for sale with a set of alphabetic letters which may be selectively applied to the toothbrush to identify the intended user of the toothbrush. By plainly identifying each toothbrush in this way, persons other than the intended user who having access to the toothbrush are discouraged from using it, and children are reminded that their toothbrushes belong only to them and should not be shared.

[0006] The need to provide every individual with their own easily recognizable toothbrush also creates a marketing opportunity for toothbrush manufacturers. Purchasers typically must choose between many toothbrushes from many different sources, with little to distinguish one from the other.

[0007] The present invention accordingly provides a novel method for marketing toothbrushes by displaying toothbrushes with compatible lettering sets, either in the same or in separate packaging. By making a lettering set available with letters of a size and color that can be affixed to a co-marketed line of toothbrushes, consumers, and particularly parents who are purchasing toothbrushes for use by their children, are given a compelling reason to select the toothbrushes which can be personalized.

[0008] These and other features and advantages of the invention may be better understood by considering the following detailed description of a preferred embodiment of the invention. In the course of this description, frequent reference will be made to the attached drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] In the detailed description which follows, frequent reference will be made to the attached drawings, in which:

[0010] **FIG. 1** is a plan view showing the combination of a toothbrush and the accompanying lettering set used to personalize the toothbrush, and

[0011] **FIG. 2** is a perspective view of the toothbrush with the lettering applied.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0012] **FIG. 1** shows a toothbrush **10** and a lettering set **20** which are preferably packaged together and sold as a unit to a consumer. **FIG. 2** shows the toothbrush **10** with the lettering applied as indicated at **30**.

[0013] The toothbrush **10** is conventional, but preferably has a handle that defines an elongated, relatively flat, smooth surface which receives the lettering, although the lettering is sufficiently flexible so that it can conform to and adhere to a smooth curved surface.

[0014] The lettering set which is preferably packaged with, or displayed with, the toothbrush preferably consists of a flexible vinyl sheet attached to a release backing by a water resistant, pressure sensitive adhesive, such as an acrylic. The lettering is typically $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " high depending on the width of surface on the toothbrush handle which is to receive the lettering. The vinyl sheet is die cut with the outline of easily readable letters of the alphabet, which may be all capitals, all lowercase letters, or both. The color chosen for the lettering should contrast with the color of the toothbrush handle; for example, if the toothbrush is a light color, the lettering should be in a contrasting dark color, and if a darker color is chosen for the toothbrush, the lettering may be a contrasting light color or a metallic gold or silver.

[0015] The sheet upon which the die cut letters are mounted is preferably an elongated rectangle as illustrated at **20** in **FIG. 1** and has approximately the same length as the toothbrush, so that it can be easily packaged with the toothbrush. Quality toothbrushes are often packaged in an elongated transparent plastic cases, and the lettering set may be readily included in the case without the need to modify either the toothbrush or the case. By providing a lettering set with the toothbrush, which adds little to the manufacturing cost of the product, the product becomes much more desirable to consumers, particularly parents who are purchasing toothbrushes for use by their children.

[0016] Lettering sets may also be packaged separately from, but displayed with, a co-marketed line of toothbrushes. When separately packaged, the size and coloring of the lettering should nonetheless be chosen to be compatible with the size and color of the separately packaged toothbrushes. The separately packaged lettering sets are preferably labeled to identify, by brand and model name, those jointly displayed and marketed toothbrushes which are sized to receive the lettering. In this way, consumers who wish to purchase the toothbrushes and the lettering separately may do so, but at the same time the availability of the lettering set for the identified line of toothbrushes helps promote the sale of the co-marketed toothbrushes.

[0017] Since an entire family may wish to have personalized toothbrushes, a "family pack" may be offered which consists of a set of toothbrushes of different colors (for example, a set of four) and a single, more numerous set of alphabetic letters. The toothbrushes may be of different colors, but should all be either a light color or a dark color, so that the handle surface on each toothbrush that receives the lettering will contrast with the provided letters. For example, a set of four toothbrushes of different, darker colors could be offered with white or metallic letters.

[0018] The toothbrushes and lettering sets embodying the invention may also be distributed by dental offices, particularly to younger patients and their parents, to discourage the dangerous practice of sharing toothbrushes. Dental offices frequently give away toothbrushes to patients to encourage dental health, and providing a toothbrush that can be personalized helps teach children safe practices that will avoid contracting communicable diseases by sharing toothbrushes.

[0019] All toothbrushes lose their effectiveness over time due to wear. For the best results from brushing, a toothbrush should be replaced every three months. Although the user may notice when the bristles begin to show wear, toothbrushes should often be replaced before they look worn. Worn and fractured bristles lose their effectiveness (a new toothbrush is 30% more effective at removing plaque). Moreover, worn and fractured bristles can be a breeding ground for germs, fungus and bacteria. Children's toothbrushes require special attention and monitoring since bristle wear occurs quickly because children often brush with uneven strokes, children sometimes chew or bite on their toothbrush bristles, and children who wear braces need to change their toothbrushes frequently because braces break down and fracture bristles.

[0020] To help insure that toothbrushes are replaced early, the lettering set used to personalize the toothbrush may also include labels, such as a set of the names of months ("JAN," "FEB," "MAR," etc.) as illustrated by the sheet 40 in FIG. 1, or labels showing the names of the seasons ("WINTER", "SPRING," "FALL," and "SUMMER"), which can be placed on the toothbrush as illustrated at 50 in FIG. 2 to remind the user when the toothbrush should be replaced.

CONCLUSION

[0021] It is to be understood that the specific products and methods which have been described above are merely illustrative applications of the principles of the invention. Numerous modifications may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the true spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. The method of marketing a toothbrush comprising offering said toothbrush for sale with a set of letters that can be affixed to the toothbrush to identify the person who will use the toothbrush.

2. The method of marketing a toothbrush as set forth in claim 1 wherein said set of letters comprises a set of pre-cut letters that are removably attached to a backing sheet by an adhesive that adheres to selected letters when removed from the backing sheet and attaches said selected letters to said toothbrush.

3. The method of marketing a toothbrush as set forth in claim 2 wherein said letters are vinyl die cut letters.

4. The method of marketing a toothbrush as set forth in claim 2 wherein said letters and at least the handle of said toothbrush have contrasting colors.

5. The method of marketing a toothbrush as set forth in claim 2 wherein said set of letters and said toothbrush are packaged in a common container for sale to consumers.

6. The method of marketing a toothbrush as set forth in claim 5 wherein said container is transparent to permit said toothbrush and said set of letters be viewed by said consumers prior to sale.

7. A method for discouraging the sharing of a toothbrush which comprises the steps of offering the toothbrush for sale with a set of letters of the alphabet which may be selectively applied to the toothbrush to identify the intended user of the toothbrush.

8. A method for discouraging the sharing of a toothbrush as set forth in claim 7 wherein said set of letters comprises a set of pre-cut letters which are removably attached to a backing sheet by an adhesive which can be used to attach selected ones of said letters to said toothbrush.

9. A method for discouraging the sharing of a toothbrush as set forth in claim 8 wherein said set of letters is packaged for sale with said toothbrush.

10. A method for discouraging the sharing of a toothbrush as set forth in claim 8 wherein said set of letters and said toothbrush are displayed together in separate packages which may be separately purchased if the customer chooses to do so.

11. A method for discouraging the sharing of a toothbrush as set forth in claim 8 wherein said letters and said toothbrush have contrasting colors.

12. A packaged dental hygiene product comprising, in combination, one or more toothbrushes and a set of letters of the alphabet, said set of letters being colored to contrast with the color of said one or more toothbrushes and being attached by a pressure sensitive adhesive to a backing sheet from which selected letters can be removed and affixed to said one or more toothbrushes to identify the intended user of each such toothbrush.

13. A packaged dental hygiene product as set forth in claim 12 wherein said letters are vinyl die cut letters.

14. A method for discouraging the sharing of a toothbrush as set forth in claim 7 wherein said set of letters includes labels that may be selectively applied to the toothbrush to indicate the time when the toothbrush should be replaced.

15. A packaged dental hygiene product as set forth in claim 12 further comprising a set of labels which can be selectively applied to said one or more toothbrushes to indicate the time when said one or more toothbrushes should be replaced.