

Editorial

LET'S NOT BE FOOLED AGAIN



Dr. John P. O'Keefe

If a bargain looks too good to be true, it probably is. That is what many dentists across Canada who did business with Gilbert's Medical Dental Supplies have found out to their considerable cost. In recent months I have spoken to numerous colleagues that are furious with the business practices of this company, which has also traded under alternative names such as Excel-Dent and Dental Wholesalers of Canada.

CDA became actively involved in the Gilbert's file in May when a member told me of his experiences with the company. This colleague was angry and frustrated that the company billed his credit card on a number of occasions for dental materials that had not been ordered. Once he or a staff member noticed the problem, they had to make numerous frustrating attempts to contact Gilbert's and their credit card company to arrange for a reimbursement — inevitably by post-dated cheque.

My colleague told me that he knew other dentists in different parts of the

country with similar experiences. It was clear to me that CDA had to do all it could to put an end to these shady practices occurring nationwide. But we needed solid evidence before we could approach the relevant authorities that could stop Gilbert's in their tracks.

To gather evidence, we contacted all provincial dental associations to help us identify dentists who had lodged complaints about Gilbert's. We put a notice in *JCDA* describing the company's modus operandi and asked dentists who had unsatisfactory dealings with them to notify us. We also approached the Dental Industry Association of Canada for leads.

These tactics brought us into contact with approximately 50 colleagues in 8 provinces. The story in each dental office was virtually identical. Most seemed to get their money back eventually, although some practitioners told us that reimbursement cheques from Gilbert's have bounced. It became evident that these unsavoury business practices have gone on for a long time, despite clear warnings appearing in provincial dental association publications.

On the strength of these contacts with Canadian dentists, we put together a comprehensive dossier on Gilbert's, as well as information on the various Ontario numbered companies and business names that the company operated under — all registered by one individual.

Our file was submitted to Visa, MasterCard, the federal Competition Bureau, Phonebusters (a national anti-fraud organization), and the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Business Services. Interestingly, police forces behave very cautiously in civil matters that may cross the line to fraud.

We have heard encouraging news from the credit card companies indicating that Gilbert's have lost their status as a merchant in good standing with the company that processed their

credit card transactions. The heat seems to have driven Gilbert's underground — they don't seem to be answering their telephones. Because of this, I fear that some colleagues may not get reimbursed for amounts billed by Gilbert's in recent months. There is also no guarantee that Gilbert's won't surface under other business operating names in future.

We therefore have to be vigilant to ensure that we are not fooled by the likes of Gilbert's again. Please make sure that your staff does not reveal your credit card details to any company that solicits your business. Check all invoices very carefully and reconcile them with goods received. If a company bills your credit card for goods not received, always insist on reimbursement to your credit card, not by cheque.

I just cannot understand how this affair has continued for so long. One of the credit card companies speculates that the reimbursements by post-dated cheque may have prevented the claims processors from appreciating the scale of Gilbert's misdeeds. I wonder if many dentists endured the hassle of credit card over-charges, simply putting it down to lessons learned. Maybe others were ashamed of sharing with colleagues the fact they were "taken" by such a scheme.

Scammers do not like the light being shone on their schemes. If a national-level scam has an impact on Canadian dentists, CDA wants to know about it and we will do everything we can, as quickly as we can, to get such shady operators out of business. Our online members' discussion forum is an ideal way of informing colleagues and CDA if undesirable elements are affecting your business. You are not alone!

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