



Dentists Love Disposables

Dentists often complain about the stigma surrounding our profession. Imagine how you would feel if you had to tell people that you manufacture *plastic straws*, the environmental villains of 2018 that are now becoming the subject of bans. (They're not biodegradable, and have proven to be harmful to marine life.) Why we're just figuring this out now, I have no idea. I didn't like plastic grocery bags when they became standard issue in the late 1980s, either—I prefer paper grocery bags. But that's another story.

What does the recent uproar about plastic straws mean for those in the food industry? Starbucks has pledged to eliminate plastic straws globally by 2020 and McDonald's plans to test alternatives to plastic straws at select locations in the U.S. later this year. Starbucks has already previewed a new plastic lid that eliminates the need for a straw and looks something like a sippy cup. The additional plastic used to make this shape could probably be fashioned into a straw. However, straws will still be available in paper form. The implications on this additional paper consumption have not been widely discussed but, needless to say, the new straws will be biodegradable.

If you think this smells like a golden business opportunity, you are correct. Aardvark, the only paper straw maker in the U.S., grew sales by 5,000 percent last year and was recently acquired. Some estimates suggest that 500 million straws are used every day in the U.S. The evil plastic straw costs approximately 0.5 cent to manufacture, while a biodegradable paper straw costs approximately 2.5 cents. This led me to a 15-minute search online for paper straw manufacturing machines.

I had visions of becoming a straw magnate! However, I quickly realized that my new venture would soon be eclipsed by "Big Straw."

I want to be clear: I am pro-straw. While I will happily switch to a more environmentally friendly straw material, I will not surrender my right

to have a straw in my drink. When I'm at a restaurant, the last thing I want to do is put my lips on a beverage glass after staring into mouths all day. If you've ever received a drinking glass with remnants of lipstick on the rim, you know what I'm talking about. (Perhaps I need to find some better dining establishments.)

The plastic straw bans that are spreading around the globe will certainly trigger the law of unintended consequences. As some restaurants and beverage providers choose to eliminate straws altogether, more people will consume drinks directly from glasses. In the case of restaurants with poor dishwashing practices, there will be an uptick in oral diseases. In addition, the lack of a straw will encourage more people to chew the ice cubes that remain in the glass after their beverage is consumed; this increase in ice chewing may lead to more cracked teeth, which will require endodontic treatment and a crown in many cases—or for the unfortunate few, an extraction and implant. The financial implications are obvious and will be overlooked by the majority of the population. Thankfully, you will not be caught by surprise.

If you started this column wondering what it had to do with dentistry, I hope you read the entire message. If you are inclined to start a paper straw manufacturing business, please send me an email: tom@farranmedia.com. If you want to see me dance, look on Twitter: [@ddsTom](https://twitter.com/ddsTom). ■



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