Year after year, dental companies spend millions on the research and development of new products. Nobel Biocare, which is one of the biggest spenders in the dental industry, uses about 4 to 5 percent of its annual turnover for R&D.

However, there are thousands of ideas developed by individual dentists that will never be implemented because their inventors lack the funds or expertise to market their ideas or are downsized by shrinking R&D budgets in difficult economic times.

For such ideas, there are usually incubators. Introduced in the late 1950s as physical buildings that housed many small businesses, incubators have become a significant tool in the business world for assisting early-stage companies. Their main goal is to accelerate the successful development of entrepreneurial companies through support resources and services such as finding attorneys, funding prototypes and finding distribution channels.

In fact, a study by the University of Michigan found that almost 90 percent of start-up companies stay in business for the long term with the help of incubating programs.

Worldwide there are an estimated 5,000 of these incubator networks, with 1,400 operating in the United States alone. In dentistry, there was no such network until Dentcubator was founded at the Greater New York Dental Meeting (GNYDM) last year.

Originating in Massachusetts from a loose network of renowned dental specialists around the globe, the program has evaluated 48 submissions thus far and aims to support as many as 80 over the course of the next five years.

Panels of dentistry experts — such as Steve Buchanan, Sonia Levy, John McSpadden, Lorne Lavine, Jörg Strub, Ron Jackson, Ken Alimenti and Tom McCarty — evaluate new ideas on a regular basis.

Dentcubator is a virtual entity, which means that its members meet by phone, e-mail or through Webinars. Once an idea is submitted through one of the committees, it undergoes a four-week screening process to evaluate its marketing potential. Special emphasis is placed on the ability to re-design a product for emerging markets such as Asia or Latin America.

"By testing each submission for its applicability to emerging market countries, we have the opportunity to offer the products and techniques associated with outstanding oral health care to a broader audience than the typical markets of Western Europe, Japan or the United States," a Dentcubator representative said during this year’s GNYDM.

Once the idea has been approved for funding, the network provides its services with compensation taken in equity in the ownership of the idea. The process typically takes up to three months to be completed. After Dentcubator becomes an equity partner, develops and protects the idea, discussions are initiated with the directors of acquisition or R&D departments at global dental companies.

Dentcubator sees itself as a complement to traditional R&D and as an alternative source for funding, development and access to market resources.

"We are under no circumstances in the business of replacing R&D budgets," the Dentcubator representative said. "We are the nursery that takes the small seed of an idea, grows it and then brings it to market.

Thanks to the generosity of Trident chewing gum, the National Children's Oral Health Foundation: America's Toothfairy (NCOHF) recently awarded grants totaling $100,000 to four not-for-profit universities and community-based dental programs.

"For over 40 years, Trident has been an innovator and leader in oral care advancements, beginning with the introduction of Trident in 1964 as the first cavity-fighting, sugar-free gum," said Lesya Lysyj of Cadbury North America, manufacturer of Trident.

"Our partnership with NCOHF enables us to continue our commitment to promote good corporate citizenship in the communities we touch by helping to raise awareness and funds to fight oral disease among thousands of children in need," Lysyj said.

The Trident Toothfairy Grants, which fund critical early childhood oral health treatment and educational training programs, were awarded to:

• Howard University in Washington, D.C.;
• the University of California at San Francisco;
• the University of Illinois at Chicago and
• the Arkansas Oral Health Coalition.

Each institution received $25,000 to help reach thousands of young children and caregivers in their communities.

The facilities are members of the NCOHF’s national affiliate network and are dedicated to delivering comprehensive oral health treatment and preventive educational programs to millions of underserved children and their families.

"Effective oral health practices must be established during a child’s early years, and NCOHF is fortunate that Trident understands the key to eliminating pediatric dental disease lies in comprehensive preventive therapies and educational programs,” said NCOHF President and CEO Fern Ingber.

"These generous grants allow NCOHF affiliates to establish programs that provide vital services and smile-saving oral health care basics for our nation’s youngest generation," Ingber said.

Visit NCOHF.org

The NCOHF is composed of dental professionals, industry leaders, philanthropic individuals and concerned non-profit agencies.

It is the only independent non-profit national children’s health organization exclusively focused on supporting delivery of comprehensive oral health care for economically disadvantaged children.

By Fred Michmershuizen, Online Editor

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