

How to Avoid Obsolescence in the Audiology Profession

By Torryn P. Brazell

The recent news of the “death of the PC” got the ABA thinking about obsolescence and how to avoid it in the audiology profession. When you look at obsolescence and realize that in today’s fast-changing world, disruptive technologies can cause extinction; it is imperative to keep in mind that no profession is immune.

Just ask travel agents, encyclopedia salespeople, fax machine manufacturers and sellers, film camera manufacturers, and the former editor of the classified ads section for any given newspaper.

In the last few issues of *Audiology Today*, two articles touched on how the world of audiology is being affected by direct-to-consumer sales of hearing aids. In the article “Impact of Direct-to-Consumer Hearing Instrument Sales,” Luke Hinzmann, AuD, profiles two different types of audiology patients. With everything from diagnosis to insurance coverage being equal, patient A “decided not to move forward with the direct-to-consumer approach and bought premium hearing aids from me by the conclusion of the appointment. Patient B declined to pursue options that included out-of-pocket expenses beyond his insurance copay and was never seen again.”

With today’s consumer being comfortable with buying everything from complicated technology to contact lenses and prescription medications over the Internet, direct-to-consumer business will grow.

The other article that touched on the direct-to-consumer business was in the January/February 2013

issue of *Audiology Today*, and was titled “Founder’s Focus: An Interview with Dr. Jerry Northern,” one of the original founders of the American Academy of Audiology. AT Content Editor David Fabry, PhD, authored a wide-ranging discussion including Northern’s insight that “it’s a shame” that audiologists today are not




differentiating themselves from retail distributors and using their expertise for hearing aid fittings, for example. Fabry notes that “the biggest challenge is to avoid commoditization by adding value and optimizing outcome by using tools that improve performance during assessment, fitting, and rehabilitation.”

Hinzmann, Fabry, and Northern are all correct. Direct-to-consumer retail outlets for hearing aids have the potential to continue to affect greatly the audiologists’ ability to provide added value to patients. Will it cause obsolescence? Not likely, given that as the population ages and the number of people with hearing and balance issues grows, a portion of that population still will prefer the personal touch that comes with visiting a licensed audiologist for care.

One way to ensure that your practice stands out from other potential providers is through certification. By earning board or specialty certifications from the American Board of Audiology, you differentiate yourself and your practice as one with expertise in the field. The ABA is the only organization in audiology that has continuing education requirements exceeding those of state licensure in every state. By maintaining your

certification through continued educational requirements, you are keeping abreast of changes in the field and maintaining an edge in the marketplace.

While many audiologists will find the thought of maintaining a competitive edge counterintuitive to why they entered the profession, in today’s world, it is something that must be kept in mind. The consumer who thinks that buying a hearing aid online is “just the same” as visiting an audiologist may never be convinced. However, those patients who prefer to visit with a professional will care very much if their audiologist is current and up-to-date on the latest technologies and research.

Do not let your career go the way of the travel agent or encyclopedia salesperson. Get your certification from the ABA today. 

Torryn P. Brazell, MS, CAE, is the managing director of the American Board of Audiology.

Join us in extending our congratulations to the most recent class of specialty-certified audiologists as of April 6, 2013!

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