

# FOCUS ON: Endodontics

*Clifford J. Ruddle, DDS, analyzes the reasons behind the many new file systems currently flooding the endodontic marketplace.*

**Q:** Recently, a staggering number of new file systems have appeared on the market for shaping canals. Would you explain this phenomenon?

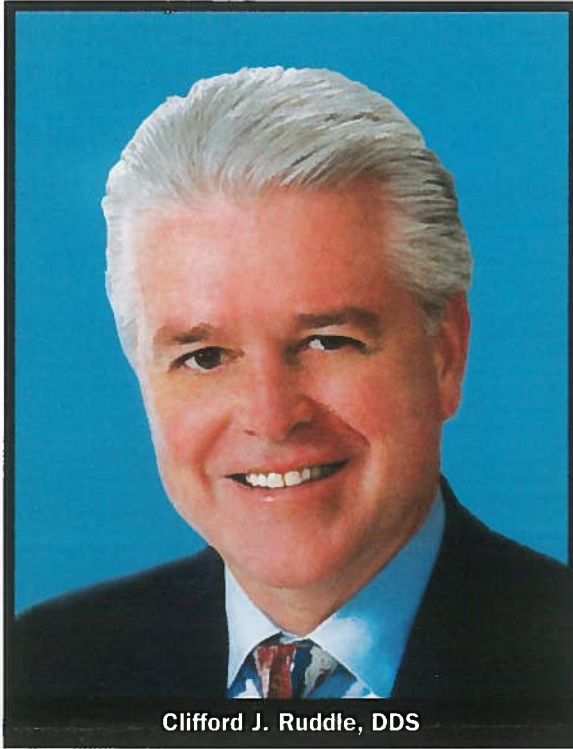
**A:** Absolutely. It is true that there has been a rather recent and relentless parade of new file systems that have appeared in the endodontic marketplace. Internationally, there are about 40 to 50 identifiable file systems currently available for preparing canals. This flood of so-called “new” file systems is causing considerable confusion for many general dentists and endodontic specialists alike. This confusion may be largely attributable to opportunistic dental companies disseminating unsubstantiated claims through frenzied marketing hype.

To better understand this surge of activity, it is important to note that many of the previously issued patents protecting the designs and manufacturing pathways for nickel-titanium files have recently expired. Previously, this body of intellectual property (IP), for better or worse, served to keep many dental companies out of the endodontic file business. As a consequence of ebbing IP, opportunistic companies have suddenly become distributors, regardless of the professional expectation that, ideally, any new file system should bring genuine innovation, enhanced performance, and improved clinical outcomes.

**Q:** It sounds as if many of these new file systems do not actually improve shaping results. What are the dangers associated with having so many file-brand choices?

**A:** One danger is related to the fact that the vast majority of all file systems sold over-simplistically instrument canals. This means many canals that are purportedly prepared are neither shaped nor cleaned, as the file brands sold utilize outdated designs and technologies popular 15 to 20 years ago. More disturbing is the fact that certain companies shamelessly copy or blatantly infringe on their competitors' IP, then low-price the most proven and popular systems utilized by international dentists. In reality, only a very few companies sell shaping files that actually fulfill the biological and mechanical objectives for shaping canals.

Certainly, one of the biggest dangers is that so many misleading marketing claims are unsupported by scientific or clinical evidence. The reality is, today, dentists are oftentimes confronted with shaping systems in which the actual tapers do not match the advertised tapers, or that are produced from substandard materials and/or manufacturing pathways. Further, dentists report files that break after a limited number of rotations, broken-off handles inside the original packaging, or instances where the handle of the file will not fit into the dental handpiece. Another real danger that seems innocent on the surface is the ongoing price wars.



Clifford J. Ruddle, DDS

**Q:** What are the dangers of price wars?

**A:** The real danger of this specific price war is not considering the real costs of buying low-priced files! It is rare to find any dentist who prefers to pay a premium price if, in fact, this dentist can buy the same quality product at a lower price. However, before making a product decision solely based on price, consider your patient. What are the consequences if a problem arises, and is the problem clinically reversible? Buying low-priced files should provoke a few questions. For example, is it true you can buy “lookalike” files at a lower price without consequences? Frequently, the files being compared are not actually comparable at all.

On the other hand, some companies apparently believe every new file system offered can be sold at a premium price. Like low-priced files, the cost of high-priced files is not sustainable and will correct downward toward what the market deems is a fair price. While these price wars ultimately give dentists choices, the danger is using inferior file brand-lines that do not provide a predictably successful shaping result for each patient. Yet, there is at least one advantage of having both low- and high-priced files; the difference between these 2 extremes has created a vacuum, attracting a third kind of price model...not too low, not too high; rather, just right.

**Q:** What are some of the cost factors that influence the actual price of a file system?

**A:** Leading endodontic companies that consistently deliver the best, most proven, and most utilized file systems sold internationally have

many costs. These costs, both seen and unseen, serve to influence the price charged to dental customers. The best endodontic companies have major costs associated with advancing business systems and structures, research and development (R&D), manufacturing, quality control, marketing, and sales. These companies invest tens of millions of dollars in R&D to ultimately produce technologies that become difference makers for dentists and patients alike. These same companies endure a demanding regulatory process and incur significant additional legal costs filing patent applications to protect their hard-fought-for IP.

Surely, one of the greatest costs best companies have is training a highly knowledgeable national sales team whose focus is limited to only endodontics. These endodontic sales rep specialists develop relationships with doctors, offer support and hands-on training, and guide doctors toward greater success. Leading companies incur significant costs supporting virtually all forms of organized dentistry. This support is critically essential for many dental schools and postgraduate endodontic programs. Further, your best endodontic companies financially underwrite virtually all the continuing education courses that benefit students, general dentists, and endodontists. Although unfair, companies that copy or sell knock-off files at artificially low prices simply avoid many of the financial burdens mentioned above.

**Q:** With the plethora of “new” file systems in the endodontic marketplace, how does a dentist actually separate the marketing misinformation from clinical reality?

**A:** Obviously, clinicians should seek out a file system that offers safety, efficiency, and an economy of files at an affordable price. To have confidence in making this decision, dentists can attend professional meetings, participate in hands-on workshops, interact in various Web-based educational platforms, watch clinical videos, and read dental journals. What I believe to be the most powerful influence on making choices is for dentists to find an endodontic educator who is highly respected and has successfully trained thousands of colleagues internationally. There is an old expression, “Model success. Success leaves clues.”

**Dr. Ruddle** is founder and director of Advanced Endodontics, an international educational source and maintains a private practice in Santa Barbara, Calif. He is an assistant professor of graduate endodontics at Loma Linda University and University of California (UC), Los Angeles; an associate clinical professor at UC, San Francisco; and an adjunct assistant professor of endodontics at University of the Pacific, School of Dentistry. As an inventor, he has designed and developed several instruments and devices that are used internationally. He can be reached at (800) 753-3636 or via the Web site at [endoruddle.com](http://endoruddle.com).