

## Video Case Incident

### Case 9 (CBC): The "Feel-Better" Bracelet

Q-Ray advertisements say that its “Serious Performance Bracelet” is designed to help people play, work, and live better.” The advertisements say that the \$200 bracelet—which supposedly makes people feel better by balancing positive and negative forces—is ionized using a special secret process.

Golfers claim that the bracelet reduces their pain, so *Marketplace* went looking for answers at the golf course. Sandra Post, a champion golfer, is a paid spokesperson for the bracelet. When Wendy Mesley of *Marketplace* interviews her, Post emphasizes the jewellery aspect of the Q-Ray, not its pain-relief qualities. Mesley also interviews golfers Frank and Sam. Frank tells her that the bracelet has reduced his arthritis pain, but Sam (who also wears one of the bracelets) thinks the pain relief is mostly in peoples’ heads.

Advertising that a product provides pain relief is a tricky business. Until 2006, people in Q-Ray ads said that the bracelet had cured their pain. But now they cannot say that because the US Federal Trade Commission ruled that such advertising is deceptive. There are no medical studies to back this claim.

Andrew Park is the man who brought the Q-Ray to North America, and his son Charles is marketing the product in Canada. Park says that 150 000 Q-Rays have been sold in Canada at a price of \$200 each. In an interview with Mesley, Park claims that the company does not make pain-relief claims for the product in its advertisements. Mesley shows Park a hidden-camera film clip where he makes a pain-relief claim during the shooting of an infomercial. Park says that he believes that the product reduces pain, and that if a person believes the bracelet will relieve pain, it will. Mesley also plays a hidden-camera clip showing retail salespeople telling customers that the Q-Ray reduces arthritic pain. Park says he cannot control what retailers tell their customers.

*Marketplace* asked Christopher Yip, an engineer at the University of Toronto, to test a Q-Ray bracelet to determine if it was ionized. Yip found that it did not hold an electrical charge and was therefore not ionized. When Park is confronted with this evidence, he says that he never claimed that the bracelet would hold an electrical charge. Rather, he simply says that the bracelet is ionized using an “exclusive ionization process.” Hidden-camera video of retail sales-people shows them explaining ionization by saying things like “it picks up the iron in your blood and speeds up circulation” and “negative ions are collected in the ends of the bracelet.” Retail salespeople say they are not sure what ionization is.

Mesley also shows Park a hidden-camera interview with the Q-Ray sales coordinator. The coordinator mentions several types of pain that Q-Ray bracelets relieve—migraine, carpal tunnel, and arthritis. Park says that he will have to meet with the sales coordinator and inform her that she cannot make these pain-relief claims.

## Questions

1. What is ethics? How is the concept relevant for the Q-ray bracelet situation?
2. List and briefly describe the four criteria that a person might use when trying to make an ethical choice. Which criterion do you think Q-ray used in the marketing of its bracelet? Which criterion do you think should be used?
3. Do you think that individuals at Q-ray are behaving in an ethical or unethical way? Use Exhibit 9-8 to analyze the situation and help you make a decision. Do you see any problems with Exhibit 9-8? Explain.
4. What is social responsibility? Is Q-ray acting in a socially responsible fashion? Defend your answer.

**Source:** “Buyer Belief,” *CBC Marketplace*, November 14, 2007.