

This Observation Will Significantly Advance Hearing Healthcare Worldwide The Stigma-Marketing Question and Grand Solution

An Essay
By: Jeffrey Szmanda, President
Each Ear, LLC

Abstract

Observing and asking the "*Stigma-Marketing Question*" will significantly advance hearing healthcare for all of us.

The *Stigma-Marketing Question* presented itself after an apparent and consistent head-in-the-sand response from hearing aid manufacturer senior managers on a topic near and dear to me, other practitioners, and hearing aid users – making RIC-receiver insertion easier for veterans, seniors, people with physical limitations, people with challenging ear canals, and caregivers, with *Gruv Button Technology*[™].

Do hearing aid manufacturers feel as though they are stuck, in a quandary, immobilized and unable to respond to any improvement in their product if the beneficiaries of the improvement draw attention to stigmas attached to their product?

Contemplation of the *Stigma-Marketing Question* produced a compelling plan to completely overcome, eradicate and reverse the problematic stigmas associated with hearing aids. *Each Ear* presents a positive and grand contribution to all of hearing healthcare, worldwide – and this is the focus of this essay.

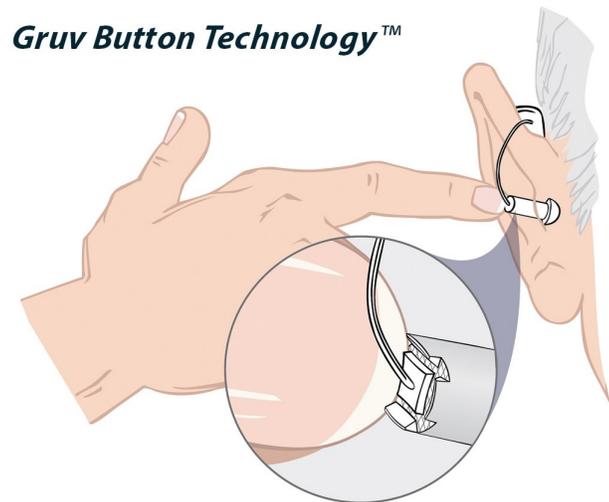
Background 1 of 3 – Hearing Aid Users and Caregivers Are Struggling with Insertion

Hearing aid users and caregivers are struggling with the insertion of RIC-receivers for three reasons:

1. The receiver. People use fingertips to insert RIC receivers. The surface of the receiver is simply inadequate for users and caregivers. The fingertip slides off and past the receiver.
2. Physical limitations. The average age of a first-time hearing aid user is 70; they may have mobility and dexterity limitations, including:
 - a) An inability to utilize or straighten some of their fingers.
 - b) An inability to move their arms, elbow and/or shoulders normally.
 - c) Stiffness, gout, diminished sensation.
 - d) Dexterity issues.
 - e) Tremor.
3. Ear canals. Many people have challenging ear canals that angle, bend, narrow, and/or are obstructed by cartilage.

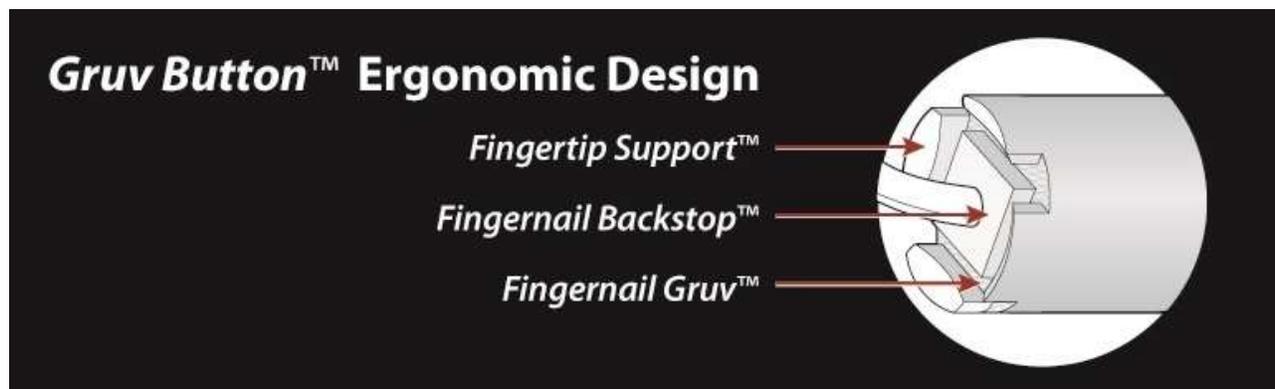
The substantial difficulty, stress, and frustration experienced, while attempting to manipulate and insert RIC receivers sufficiently deep, is real.

Background 2 of 3 – Gruv Button Technology™



Because people use fingertips to insert RIC-receivers, the receiver must accommodate the fingertip.

Jeffrey Szmanda, President of *Each Ear, LLC* invented and internationally patented *Gruv Button Technology™* for implementation by hearing aid manufacturers. See how the fingertip and fingernail fit into the *Gruv Button™* so that the user and caregiver can control, manipulate, maneuver, aim and steer the receiver past any obstructive cartilage and into the angled and bending ear canals – sufficiently deep.



This is a universal design which means it's inclusive and intuitive; everyone can use it and it comes naturally for them. In 2022, *Gruv Button Technology™* received the [2022 Today's Caregiver Friendly Award](#).

Background 3 of 3 – Entire Industry Benefits from Gruv Button Technology™

Patients Benefit:

1. Sufficiently-deep insertion results in:
 - a. Optimal hearing and understanding.
 - b. Hearing aids that are more secure (lessening fear of loss).
 - c. Reduced feedback.
 - d. Hearing aids that are less noticeable (because the cable is closer to the head).
2. Insertion-related difficulty, stress, and frustration is virtually eliminated, especially during the initial adjustment period.

Practitioners Benefit:

1. Practitioners benefit because if it's easier for the patients, it's easier for Practitioners to help their patients.
2. They can provide more efficient and effective service.
3. Happier, more successful patients result in reduced returns, increased word-of-mouth success stories, and more referrals.

Manufacturers Benefit:

1. End users experience greater success with their products.
2. An improved hearing experience will result in:
 - a. Increased word-of-mouth success stories.
 - b. Reduced returns and increased hearing aid adoption.
 - c. An enhanced reputation for RIC-style hearing aids.
 - d. An enhanced reputation for the hearing aid industry.

The benefits have been easy to see and understand by hearing aid users, practitioners and caregivers. Furthermore, retrofit-prototypes have demonstrated the efficacy and effectiveness of *Gruv Button Technology™*. Complexity of the retrofitting process made it clear that *Gruv Button Technology™* should be built into the receiver during receiver-production.

It is incumbent upon all hearing aid manufacturers to make hearing aid insertion easier for veterans, seniors, people with physical limitations, people with challenging ear canals, and caregivers by implementing *Gruv Button Technology™* from Each Ear, LLC.

The Observation

There has been very good, positive and supportive response to *Gruv Button Technology™* from various hearing aid manufacturer audiology personnel, practitioners and hearing aid users – but when *Gruv Button Technology™* is referred up to decision-making senior managers, communication terminates. Well-documented messages, announcements and promptings directly to the senior managers (in person, via direct messaging and via industry associations) have been utterly ignored. In some cases, going back three years!

Why is this? Making RIC-receiver insertion easier for veterans, seniors, people with physical limitations, people with challenging ear canals, and caregivers, with *Gruv Button Technology™* would vastly improve the hearing experience of so many of their end users – and, as detailed above, would greatly benefit the entire industry! And it's so easy to see this! I've been asking myself, "what the heck is going on?" Why, on God's green Earth, have hearing aid manufacturer senior managers – across the industry – seemingly gone out of their way to terminate optimistic discussion in its tracks – or not respond at all? It didn't make any sense to me and many others in my orbit. We just could not figure it out.

And then, finally, the lightbulb went on! Here's how it happened.

One day, while on a little getaway, I was recalling the CEO of one of the major manufacturers being interviewed by a local radio station. The discussion included the persistence of stigmas associated with hearing aids and how they are a major barrier to hearing aid adoption. As a practitioner for 12 years, I know the industry has always been – and still is – trying to figure out how to overcome this stigma-barrier (these sales objections).

Let's examine this stigma-barrier. *Healthy Hearing's* managing editor, Joy Victory, writes in her recent article, [Stigma and hearing loss](#): "When asked why they don't wear hearing aids, people with hearing loss cite a slew of stigmatizing reasons, survey [data](#) shows, such as "too embarrassed to wear," "makes you look disabled," and "people make fun of you."

Here is the survey to which she refers:

Why Not Use Hearing Aids?	
	% respondents
Do not admit hearing loss in public	35%
Noticeable	35%
Too embarrassed to wear	34%
Makes you look disabled	31%
Makes you look old	31%
Too proud to wear	29%
People make fun of you	29%
People treat you differently	28%
Makes you look weak and feeble	26%
People treat you differently	22%
Makes you look mentally slow	22%

Table 1. Reasons that adults ages 35 to 65 years old with hearing loss justify the non-adoption of hearing aids. Taken from Kochkin's MarkeTrak V (2000)⁶ and VII (2007).⁷

I was recalling the interview – with the CEO – when it hit me!

The Stigma-Marketing Question

Are the hearing aid manufacturers' decision-making senior managers apprehensive about any discussion pertaining to assistive devices or accommodations for seniors, people with physical limitations, and caregivers fearing the mere reference to these people could reinforce the stigmas – and negatively impact sales revenue? Is it, therefore, taboo to even bring up a beneficial universal design for seniors, people with physical limitations, and caregivers?

Perhaps they feel as though they are stuck, in a quandary, immobilized and unable to respond to any improvement in their product if the beneficiaries of the improvement – draw attention to stigmas related to their product. Is it; "Yes, we should implement *Gruv Button Technology*[™] for our end users, caregivers and practitioners but, well, there's this darn stigma thing and mentioning them would negatively impact our income statement." Is this it?

I ask because I don't know what is going on in the minds of hearing aid manufacturer senior management. But, if this were true, it may be construed or misconstrued as ageism and discrimination.

In any case, seniors, people with physical limitations, people with challenging ear canals, veterans, and caregivers should not be treated as invisible, underrepresented or denied access to needed assistive technology.

The contemplation of this perturbing *Stigma-Marketing Question*, however, sparked a grand solution (the focus of this essay) to this possible immobilization. A grand solution, that will significantly advance hearing healthcare, worldwide!

What Is The Grand Solution?

The solution is simple – but it's also grand in scope and effect. Here it is. If the stigma-culture is the barrier to manufacturer implementation of *Gruv Button Technology*[™] and hearing aid adoption generally – then let's shift the culture! Let's overcome the current stigma-consciousness and replace it with one that is positive.

To accomplish this, *Each Ear* is proposing and initiating *Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move*[™].

Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™

Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™ (or *Hearing Health is the Smart Move™*) is a massive public relations and marketing campaign focused on empowering people with positive thoughts about hearing health and hearing aids. *Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™* messaging will be ubiquitous, continuous, empathic, emotive, and educational. This positive campaign will eradicate and replace the current negative and disempowering stigmas.

A major component of *Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™* includes the production of a vast *Library of Video Testimonials*; 15-60 seconds in length.

- User and Family Testimonials. Testimonials will convey messages focused on why and how hearing healthcare was the smart move for them. Examples include:
 - "I'm so glad I invested in hearing aids; here's why..."
 - Improved my life.
 - Improved my family's life."
 - "We thank (family member) for getting HAs; here's why..."
 - "Improved hearing is attractive; here's why..."
 - "It's the right thing to do; here's why..."
 - "It's the smart move for me; here's why..."
 - "We are grateful to the hearing aid manufacturers for implementing *Gruv Button Technology™*; here's why..."
 - "We are grateful to (the practitioner, staff, and clinic); here's why..."
 - "I'm so glad I invested in a cochlear implant; here's why..."
 - Improved my life.
 - Improved my family's life."
- Expert Comments. Leading neuroscientists, audiologists, researchers, and representatives from *Each Ear's Coalition for Empathy and Culture Shift™* present brief, research-based, and practical messages pertaining to the various health benefits of optimal hearing and understanding of speech. Topics will include:
 - Preventing cognitive decline and dementia.
 - Reducing isolation.
 - Reducing stress and frustration.
 - Fall Prevention.
 - Safety.
- Additional detail and suggestions for implementation are found in a separate document.

Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™ publicizes:

- How clinics are promoting positive messages on hearing health and hearing aids.
- Examples of people who were resistant but became smart (from *Library of Video Testimonials*).
- Examples of feel-felt-found experiences (from *Library of Video Testimonials*).
- Examples of family and friends who are benefitting from hearing aids (from *Library of Video Testimonials*).
- Hearing aid manufacturer implementation of *Gruv Button Technology™*.

Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™ is co-founded by Each Ear, LLC and the *Coalition for Empathy and Culture Shift™* which is comprised of leading organizations representing seniors, people with physical limitations, people with challenging ear canals, caregivers, veterans, the promotion of ethical selling, and independent hearing healthcare providers.

Additional participants in *Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™* must include the hearing healthcare industry (manufacturers and associations) and may include; organizations pertaining to occupational therapy, consumer advocacy, hearing aid buying groups, insurance-related, sales, marketing, hearing foundations, social media, hearing healthcare media, consumer media, business media, and financial media.

Both the *Coalition for Empathy and Culture Shift™* and hearing aid manufacturers enjoy significant benefit from their straightforward and cooperative participation.

The timing is perfect for *Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™* because:

- Scientific evidence has been emerging that supports numerous and various health and safety-related benefits of hearing aids.
- Hearing aid manufacturers and clinics are looking to differentiate from OTC hearing amplification.
- *Gruv Button Technology™* implementation by hearing aid manufacturers is long overdue.

An industry-leading public relations agency will flesh out and manage this public relations and marketing campaign. It will create and manage an independent, professionally-designed website for the campaign with the participation of the individual hearing aid manufacturers' public relations agencies. The goal is to have 10 million people shift their attitude toward hearing aids from stigma to *smart move*. This equates to Pi (3.14%) in the United States and this is considered enough to shift the culture across the entire planet.

Conclusion

To conclude, I quote the *Hearing Industries Association's* mission as stated on their website: "Improving the hearing healthcare of Americans through medical device innovation." Let's change the hearing aid stigma-culture to *Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™*, implement *Gruv Button Technology™*, and fulfill this mission!

What You Can Do

- 1) Please comment (anonymously if you'd like): www.eachear.com/comment
- 2) Let us keep you posted on *Hearing Healthcare is the Smart Move™*:
www.hearingsmartmove.com
- 3) To learn more about participating in the *Coalition for Empathy and Culture Shift™*:
www.eachear.com/more-on-coalition
- 4) Submit any questions to Jeff@EachEar.com.

Thank you!



Jeffrey Szmanda, President
Each Ear, LLC
Jeff@EachEar.com