



## 'X' marks spot for opening blister pack



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Regular readers know what we do best in this space is whine, whining being the default mode of most newspaper columnists.

But today we offer real help - not that this is anything you should expect on a regular basis.

Today we follow up on a column from two weeks ago about the difficulty in opening blister packs, the clear plastic packaging that seems to encase just about every product these days.

In that column, I whined about having to hack these stupid blister packs open with a scissors or kitchen knife, and how you could slash your fingers and have blood spurting all over prying the jagged edges apart.

It was the usual doom-and-gloom stuff, blowing the whole problem out of proportion, railing against unseen forces conspiring against the consumer, offering no hope of a solution, and so on.

Naturally, I was very proud of it.

Then Tom Perlmutter e-mailed me.

He told me about a gizmo he patented that could help, something called the OpenX®, that sells for just \$4.95.

I'll have our rep firm in Baltimore send you one, he said. Check it out and tell me what you think.

Great, I said to myself. Another do-gooder trying to put a smiley-face on life.

Anyway, the next day, this ... thing arrived in the mail.

It turns out the OpenX® is a plastic device, about 7 inches long, with a curved, molded handle. It has a tiny piercing blade, lowered via the push of a button, used to first cut into the blister pack.

Then it has another blade, set on an angle, that's supposed to be pushed and slid along the plastic to open it.

I tried it on a couple of blister packs of different sizes. And wouldn't you know it? The damned thing worked great.

Which, of course, meant more work for me, because now I had to actually get on the phone and call Perlmutter, thank him for sending along the product, interview him for a follow-up column, write the follow-up column, etc.

In any event, I reached him at his home in Calabasas, Calif.

Perlmutter, 48, is the president and CEO of Ranchmark Inc., which makes the OpenX®.

He said that before marketing the OpenX®, he'd been in the packaging and design business for 26 years. And here's the beautiful part: Mainly what his company did was the artwork for the insert cards that went into blister packs!

"People always used to tell me I should invent something to make it easier to open them," he said. But Perlmutter didn't take that to heart until one night a few years ago when he and his wife were dining out with a friend named Robert Lewis and his wife.

It was Lewis' birthday and Perlmutter presented his friend with an elegant Mont Blanc pen as a gift.

OK. Maybe you see where this is going.

"It was in a clamshell," said Perlmutter, referring to the evil cousin of the blister pack. (Packaging 101: A blister pack is plastic adhered to cardboard. A clamshell pack is two pieces of plastic adhered to each other with a seal.)

"He couldn't get it open," Perlmutter said. "He was trying to use a knife ... I don't know if he ever got it open that night."

Perlmutter, as you might guess, was more than a little embarrassed by this turn of events.

So he and Lewis spent the rest of the dinner talking about inventing a tool people could use to open plastic packs without severing an artery in their hand.

They even drew diagrams of possible prototypes on little pieces of paper.

A year or so later, the first OpenX®s went on the market. Slowly, by word of mouth and the occasional TV, magazine and newspaper piece, news of the helpful tool began to circulate.

Now, Perlmutter said, close to a million OpenX®s have already been sold.

"People say, 'Where have you been?' " when they first hear about the OpenX®, he said. Then they regale him with horror stories about cut fingers, punctured skin, cracked teeth and other injuries they've suffered opening blister packs in the past.

Before hanging up, Perlmutter said the easiest way to purchase the OpenX® is via the company's Web site at [myopenx.com](http://myopenx.com). (*No charge for shipping and handling.*)

It'll also be sold at Advance Auto Parts stores nationwide starting in late June.

So save your fingers, save your teeth, and buy one of these babies. And don't say I never try to help.