In 1879 in New York, the Menlo Park Manufacturing Company was incorporated to market Polyform, a topical analgesic formulated by young Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931) (left). Though “devised originally to cure himself,” Polyform was released to the public by Edison as a “compound to cure neuralgia, rheumatism, headache and all nervous pain, by external application.” Within 5 years, the company moved to Boston and eventually reorganized. Of all of Edison’s inventions, “none will confer so much happiness upon mankind” as Polyform—or so the reorganized company promised (right). The public did not buy the promise . . . or the product, and Edison himself finally blocked further advertising. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.)

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