Unlocking Your Product Research Performance

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Consumer Experiences Go Beyond the Physical Product
In many organizations, products are designed and developed as siloed activities according to domain expertise, such as brand management, packaging, and R&D. Typically all these efforts do not come together in research until the validation stage when the final decision is made to take a product to market.

The problem is that consumers donâ€™t experience products in isolation. All the facets of the product interact in complex ways during a usage occasion, often changing based on the specific situation and context. It is this divergence between how we experience products (holistically) and how we have structured our businesses to develop products (siloed) that is a source of many problems.

This problem is further complicated by the fact that 85% or more of all our sensory perceptions are unconscious. Our sensory perceptions - of packaging elements or cues picked up during preparation or application of a product - elicit unconscious associations that impact our pleasures and emotions, which in turn elicit behavioral tendencies that ultimately lead to the success or failure of a product.

When we have people fill out questionnaires about their perceptions we are getting at best 15% of the story, the part that sits in their conscious mind. We need to better understand the sensory perceptions that cue the subconscious pleasure and emotional reactions to be able to design products effectively.

Need for a Paradigm Shift: A Holistic Approach to Innovation and Research Process
It is critical that we make a paradigm shift from designing products by their parts to taking a holistic approach to both the innovation and research processes.

Products must be designed and developed in an interconnected way. It is not just the physical product you put in your mouth or on your body; it is about the entire experienceâ€”including the name, the packaging, expectations and delivery.

We illustrate this using a cogs and gears metaphor (Figure 1). The interconnectedness of the cogs on the left side of Figure 1 illustrates how you can gain quality, efficiency, and speed in the development of a product by taking a more holistic approach to developing and testing how each element interacts to form the consumer experience. On the right side is the research learning process, including the relationships between study design, testing and reporting.

A paradigm shift occurs when you connect the learning and development processes, enabling a new and more efficient research program. By spinning the gears together you attain enhanced data quality, reduced research costs, more rapid development and increased success rates by making smarter decisions throughout the innovation and development process.

This shift is driven by four basic principles:
â€¢Â Holistic Research increases insights
â€¢Â Hybrid Research reduces the cost ofÂ your research
â€¢Â Adaptive Learning reduces yourÂ cycle time by 50%
â€¢Â Knowledge Building helps youÂ know what it takes for a product to be a winner

Deepen Insights Though Holistic Research Design
We will use a real-world case study for a quick-serve meal to demonstrate how you can use holistic development to shorten cycles and gain deeper consumer knowledge without increasing your costs.

In this case, the concept had been well developed and everyone was excited about itâ€”so excited that a goal was set to build and launch the product in only six months. The team needed a plan for determining the name, package, product formulation and best flavor setâ€”without cutting corners and reducing the quality of the research.

Following the holistic process we designed an initial CLT research study to look at all aspects of the product and their

interactions (Figure 2). Consumers first saw the concept, then rated several package types and articulated in what contexts they would use each package. Next, respondents experienced each of the packages with food in them, and described and rated expectations of product performance, serving size, and other key measures. Then each individual participated in a product naming exercise based on the package and context combination they thought was best. This sequence allowed the team to learn how the packaging interacted with context, product, and name.

Next, respondents tasted four versions of the lead flavor. Prototypes were based on elements of the concept: some had more of a nutritional profile, some were more quick-snack oriented, some were more focused on a complete meal premise. This provided valuable direction for the development of future flavors for the line . Finally, consumers went through a conceptual flavor filtering exercise where we captured both rating and choice behaviors to provide focus on which additional flavors to develop for the initial launch.

In this single design we were able to integrate multiple aspects of the product experience and learn about interactions between all of the pieces. The cost for this study was no different from that of a typical CLT taste test.

Reduce the Cost of Your Research with Hybrid Research Techniques
While the information we captured on interactions was highly beneficial, it only captured quantitative information from the conscious and rational part of the brain. To obtain a deeper understanding,we needed to talk to consumers face-to-face. Traditionally, focus groups are used to uncover underlying motivations and perceptions, but they take time and additional money. In this case, we applied hybrid research to augment the quantitative data with qualitative insights.

InsightsNowâ€™s key to making this hybrid research study a success was picking the right people for the right interviews. Real-time technology was applied to monitor responses from each respondent as they typed them in. The team viewed each individualâ€™s ratings and comments about the concept at the start of the study, and immediately picked key individuals who reacted positively and negatively to specific concept elements. Next we focused on packaging, selecting participants who were positive and negative to each of the package types, as well as those who had interesting comments on use context.

Other participants were selected based on their opinions about the products and the names.

The entire cross-functional team was on site for the study to conduct follow-up interviews. Experts from Packaging, Marketing and R&D talked to the hand-picked respondents individually about their feelings and motivations (Figure 3). This provided the team with the in-depth information they needed to make clear decisions about their specific area. By getting closer to the consumer, everyone on the team was able to better understand the underlying emotions and motivations for using the product. Using a hybrid method reduced the total cost of research compared to conducting multiple quantitative and qualitative studies.

Reduce Your Cycle Time by 50% Though Adaptive Learning
Real-time information can be used for more than just profiling. In this same case study we used real-time data analysis to see interim statistical differences. This allowed the team by midday to see that one of the test products was scoring significantly lower than the other three, so they adapted the interview process to eliminate it from discussions(Figure 4). The team also narrowed down the options to the top few packaging, name and flavor alternatives and even added a new name, offered by a consumer that turned out to be very compelling.

By utilizing adaptive learning, you can modify the research approach in real-time so you can focus your attention on the most likely winners.

Using real-time reporting, the team was able to conduct a debriefing at the end of the day with complete analysis and reports of all the top-line statistics for the key quantitative measures. Combined with the hybrid quant-qual interviews, this enabled the team to set an action plan for the following work day. No waiting was needed for an interpretive report to set action items; they had hard quantitative insights to go along with specific qualitative insights. This enabled deeper dialog behind why we were seeing those results. Since the entire team was there for the debrief, we were off to the races that evening, planning for the next piece of research.

The power of combining adaptive learning with holistic design was further applied to accelerate the entire innovation and development process. This is where the team was able to experience huge gains in speed. In this case study several more holistically designed sessions were conducted, each with increasing focus (Figure 5). Within a month consumers were preparing products in their packages, comparing graphic mock-ups, and responding to print ads. Product was being placed in home to study usage context more intently tying it back to the positioning and communication plans.

The process became so efficient that it enabled the team to conduct two additional product formula optimization studies,

which allowed them to create a more optimal product with greater margins than they would have typically been able to do.

This case study illustrates how the final product was delivered, fully designed, and developed in six months. The research results provided to the team indicated the product would be a clear winner.

Marketplace sales data validated the findings: it was one of the most successful product launches in the history of the company.

Using adaptive learning, cycle times are shortened, allowing you to add more iterations to your product development process and launch products faster than ever before to achieve first-mover marketplace advantage. In addition, the efficiencies gained by combining the learning and development processes increased the depth of insights, resulting in a better product going to market with higher margins.

Know what it takes for your product to be a winner: Knowledge Building
A successful launch is wonderful, but you need longevity to truly be successful. Knowledge building leverages the accessibility of your historical research data in different ways to create new learning. One powerful way is to establish flexible hurdle rates defined by the most valuable product features, consumer qualities and other research variables (such as context of use).

The key is knowing which consumer responses to measure and monitor. Researchers must be in the business of knowledge building to be able to spot when they have a winner. Knowledge building reveals what historical information best correlates with success, and uses that information to establish response criteria or hurdles to spot winners (Figure 6).

Conclusion
By applying the basic principles of holistic research design, you will create more successful products.

â€¢Â A holistic design approach willÂ increase your understanding of the interactions between all aspects of the product by allowing respondents to experience as much of the total product experience as possible, increasing the overall quality of your data.

â€¢Â Hybridizing your classic quantitative studies with qualitative consumer dialogues will enable you to get at the unconscious mind and gain a clearer understanding of the sensory perceptions that cue or signal specific emotions. Since those emotions are interlaced with behavior, you will have a line of sight to which emotions you need to trigger in order to drive product sales. Hybrid research reduces the cost of research by enhancing the efficiency of your research process.

â€¢Â Applying adaptive learning reduces your research cycle times by using real-time information to speed up the learning and iterative processes. In combining these techniques with holistic design, you take a step toward a paradigm shift in the way your team goes about creating successful products.

â€¢Â Taking the time to create a knowledge building system from your historical data increases your chances to spot winners with a higher likelihood of success.

About InsightsNow
InsightsNow is the leading product design and development research company whose unique consumer behavior frameworks, powerful technology platform, and rapid delivery of relevant insights provide a rich, integrated, and scalable research environment that accelerates the development of products for major consumer packaged goods manufacturers. Through the companyâ€™s advanced real time research and analytic solutions, such as profilesNOW and reportsNOW, InsightsNow provides faster, deeper, and more insightful results.

InsightsNowâ€™s headquarters are in Corvallis, Oregon with offices throughout the United States.

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