



Why Sampling?

A whitepaper on why product sampling should be included as part of a brands marketing plans

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If product sampling is one of the more expensive ways to market to a consumer, brands may wonder if it is a worthwhile investment. However prior research indicates it is the preferred way to receive a brands' message: 94% of females running households felt sampling gave them a better idea of a new product than advertising (1). When asked "What would induce you to try a new product or brand?", 73% of consumers stated "product sample" while only 25% answered "television ad" (2). In 1995, 3 TV channels could reach 80% of women 18-49, but today it takes 97 channels to reach that same audience (3). Conversely, brands spend far more of their marketing budgets on TV advertising than they do product sampling. With over 30,000 different products on shelf in the average grocery store and with the typical consumer receiving as many as 3,000 advertising messages a day, sample trial is one of the few ways which *guarantees* a brand due consideration from its target audience (4).

Most brands will consider product sampling only if they have a new product (or line extension) which affords them the opportunity to include sampling in the marketing plan. However product sampling can deliver strong results behind a number of different objectives. **While the only reason for product sampling is to induce trial**, sampling has been shown to be successful in delivering various objectives and under many situations. (Each of the examples assumes that trial objectives are met by choosing the right program, target, etc.). Product sampling can:

Bring competitive users to the brand franchise

Brands can bring new users into their franchise by sampling competitive users especially if theirs is the superior product in their category. Or, if a brand has a better value equation than the superior brand, consumers may decide to forego superiority in favor of the better value. For example; if Brand A performs best but is at a 30% premium price, Brand B may be able to attract new users if it presents the best value equation. Since Brand B performs nearly as well as Brand A but costs substantially less, consumers may consider switching because the incremental cost of Brand A doesn't deliver performance worthy of the price difference. Obviously if a brand is both superior and price competitive, product sampling will result in convincing competitive users to switch brands.

Replenish a brands user base with new, younger consumers

Many established brands do not sample since awareness and penetration levels are high. However if the established brand does not include some level of product sampling in their marketing plan (targeting young users) to consistently bring new, younger users into the franchise, it may be faced with an aging consumer base. Also, since many younger consumers are beginning to adopt preferences in the category, product sampling can contribute to brand loyalty among these new users.

(1) Dorothy Spencer, "Sampling Measures Up"

(2) Yankelovich

(3) Willard Bishop Consulting

(4) *N/sight Magazine*, USA Today 6/19/05





Overcome an undesirable impression of the brand

Through research, a brand may find that consumers have an undesirable impression of the brand – either because of the brand name, a misconception about performance, poor advertising, etc. Product sampling may help the brand reposition itself with consumers, assuming samples are distributed through a sampling program which has high trial numbers (point-of-use, etc.) An aging brand may want to overcome an impression that it's for an older target. Sampling to younger users can help overcome this type of undesirable impression. If a food brand has strong health benefits but a not-so-desirable taste, sampling through a dietician may prove beneficial to off-setting the taste issue.

Provide a brand experience where price is a barrier to trial. There are several examples of categories where the consumer might be more receptive to trying a new brand, if price were not an issue. Consider the thousands of SKU's available in the cosmetics and fragrance categories: if a female shopper visits a store where trial samples of cosmetics or fragrance are available to her, she is far more likely to spend \$50 on just the right foundation or the “perfect” scent – than if she has nothing to base her decision on. If samples are not available in-store or have not been made available to her elsewhere, she will likely purchase what she has purchased in the past. Categories such as these are *far* too competitive to expect the consumer to make even a \$20 purchase unless she knows it is a product she's going to like. Traditional media cannot convey the brands consistency, scent, color on ones skin, etc. the way an actual product sample can. Most female shoppers have purchased a poor performing beauty-care product in the past, so are hesitant to purchase a new product without an actual brand experience to draw from.

Introduce the consumer to a “system” experience - In a highly competitive category such as the hair-care category, most major brands need to sample to stay a market-leader within the category. However it can be even more important to the brand franchise to sample a “system” – including either a sample of the conditioner or a styling product with the shampoo sample. Since it's not actually the shampoo that the consumer realizes the benefits from, but rather the products that help with styling issues, brands should consider sampling the system. The same holds true for some other categories (fabric softener with laundry detergent, etc.)

ROI impact of “trading consumers up” - Typically in determining the ROI of a sampling program, only the incremental purchases are considered as revenue. However if a premium product is sampled, a brand should also include the incremental profit realized by moving current users of the base brand to the premium-priced brand.

Increasing overall brand business by “trading consumers up” - If a brand has good penetration and is one of the larger brands in the category, it may benefit by sampling its premium product within the franchise. While most brands won't consider sampling the base brand, sampling a better performing premium brand to consumers can be important in gaining share in the category and possibly increasing loyalty (since the trial experience is better). In this situation there is less concern about wasting samples on current-users since most are likely using base product.





Another way to **increase consumption** through product sampling is to present product samples in a way which shows the consumer a new use for the product that had not been considered. For example, concentrated tart cherry juice has been shown to have more anti-oxidants than any other fruit products*. The Cherry Marketing Institute could sample a cherry juice drink at health conventions or via senior citizen centers/ functions and include a brochure on the health benefits of the product. *University of Texas, Health Science Center

Increase overall brand business by increasing consumption - A brand may be able to sample an item which will increase consumption for the brand franchise. Example: a brand may sample a new razor in order to get the consumer to buy blade refills. Another brand may sample a free dispenser in order to get consumers to buy product to refill it.

Get a professional recommendation - Most brand categories will benefit by receiving a professional recommendation. However unless samples are included as part of the overall plan, the professional program may not be as impactful. First, the professional will likely want to try it themselves and second, they will be more likely to give the recommendation if they have something to give the consumer to support it. Even an implied recommendation can be impactful to a brand: a gymnastics teacher distributing anti-perspirant or feminine care products to her students would be seen as an implied recommendation.

Attract new users as they enter life change points and consider new categories - A brand can take advantage of a consumers' quest for knowledge about their category if they provide a sample and information during this time. For example, an expecting mother will seek out information about baby care products. The time to court this consumer is when she first begins to look for this information. Change-points are also a good time to sample consumers; as consumers age and begin experiencing symptoms of gum disease, this is the time to provide them with information and product samples which can help keep gum disease at-bay. Consumers in these life change points are asking for product information; what more-better time to provide them with a brand sample?

Differentiate a brand in-store by including an on-pack or in-pack sample - Occasionally on-pack or in-pack samples may make sense for a particular brand. While it can give a brand a competitive advantage (*Buy X, get sample of Y - Free!*), this is not the purpose of sampling. It would be better used to sample a line extension or introduce a system to a brands current user. Brands may also support a relationship marketing program by including their sample in or on the partners product (i.e., Sara Lee Turkey Breast packaged inside a Glad plastic/disposable container). In-pack and on-pack sampling is often a nightmare for a brands' product supply organization however, so this type of sampling should be thoroughly explored before much planning is done.

Generate profit by selling product samples - Sometimes a consumer might be willing to pay for a brands sample! If the category is an expensive one (i.e., health care, etc.) and the consumer has wanted to try the brand, he/she will be far more likely to purchase a trial sized product than the full retail size. Consider the finicky cat (or dog): what pet-owner hasn't purchased a box of treats only to throw it the garbage? If no budget is available for product sampling, a brand may want to consider producing a sample-size package to help generate trial and grow the franchise.





Trial - The missing element?

A consumer recently conveyed an example of this to me: She was well-aware of a brand of candy which had been around for many years, but was one she had never tried. She was at a party where these candies were put in a gift box of various products and so she had her first chance to try the product. She now claims that this candy has become her favorite brand; that it is far superior to other similar candies she has tried. Despite TV, print, and other types of advertising she had been exposed to, she would never have purchased this product had she not sampled it at the party. This example shows that product sampling would work for this established brand.

Increasing trial of a brand with high awareness and/or superiority, but low penetration – If a brand has been around for many years and has high loyalty, or superiority within the category; the *missing element* may be trial. There may be some barrier to purchase that can only be overcome by including a product sampling program in the marketing plan. While a long-established brand may never consider sampling because there is no “new news” to share; if household penetration is low, product sampling will likely help grow the brand franchise (if the right sampling vehicle is used).

Deliver new news about a brand – Obviously the most likely time a brand will want to include product sampling in their marketing plan is when they have “new news” to share. Sampling even a new flavor of an existing product can help grow the franchise if trial objectives are met. Most brands will have additional marketing support to fund sampling programs, so this is when most sampling occurs. If a brand will try to include as many of the examples given above as they can in developing a sampling program, the more benefits they will get from their investment. Example: sample a new formula or flavor of toothpaste to gain trail behind the new news, but also sample to younger users or via a professional program.

Using product sampling to support other market programs

There are some other reasons to include product sampling in a marketing plan, however SEA recommends caution in this area. Because the purpose of sampling is trial, brands should avoid using product samples solely to support other marketing objectives. (Sample production capacity is usually limited, as is the brand marketing budget; so samples should be used in ways that can generate trial.) SEA can help brands think through the objectives behind their sampling programs and determine whether product sampling should be used in these instances. Other examples of when a brand might want to use product sampling:

Generate advertising impressions/support PR events – Sometimes using a small quantity of samples can help support a public relations event. Example: a skin care brand may want to give a TV audience (*The View* or *Oprah*) samples of their product to help get mention on a show about avoiding wrinkles. (However a full size product would be more impactful!)

Drive traffic to a brands website – If a new brand has good information about their product available on their website but needs a way to generate traffic, it may be helpful to include mention of “*FREE SAMPLES available via our website*” in print advertising. Because this is an expensive way to sample, SEA recommends establishing a limited amount of samples available (i.e., *Available to the first 50,000 consumers*). When samples are depleted, a coupon or brochure should be sent to other respondents to avoid disappointing consumers. NOTE: Make sure to state **ONE SAMPLE PER HOUSEHOLD** and have the fulfillment company ensure only one sample is sent regardless of how many requests are made.





Support a relationship marketing campaign – Sometimes brand samples are a “necessary-evil” in supporting a relationship marketing program. For example a brand may strongly feel a relationship with a certain company will help grow the brands market share and to make the relationship happen, the other company may want product samples to support their own marketing plan. SEA recommends limiting the number of samples available and educating its’ partner on what the trial objectives are. The brand should also review the partners’ plans and help steer them towards programs which have high trial rates, low risk of duplicate sampling, and good sample control.

Under what circumstances should brands avoid product sampling?

Poor performing product – If consumers immediately realize that a brand does not perform (or taste) as well as other brands in the category, obviously product sampling does not make sense for that brand. Sampling should be delayed until improvements can be made to the formula.

Saturated consumer base – If a brand owns the lions-share of the category, product sampling may be a risky proposition. The only instances of where sampling might work in this situation is if the brand samples consumers that are just entering the category, or can target only competitive users, or samples a line-extension to current users.

Benefits which cannot be realized by sample trial – Many products are consumed to benefit one’s health over a long period of time. For example, a consumer would not realize the benefit of one or even several vitamins received as a sample. There would be no reason to sample in this type of category *unless* there’s an immediate benefit that can be realized (i.e., a children’s chewable vitamin has an appealing flavor, etc.).

Other circumstances unique to a certain category – There are a few other examples of where certain categories should either avoid sampling, or limit sampling to a particular type of sampling program. Sampling Advisors can help brands think through the situations which are unique to a category and point out instances where sampling will or will not work. Before investing in an expensive sampling program, enlist the help of the only company with experience in helping brands with these types of decisions – **call SEA to make the most of your brand investment!**

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