

Overview

The goal of this symposium publication is to facilitate discussion of approaches for the use of consumers in research guidance testing. Research guidance testing can be defined as the consumer testing that Product Development uses in designing modified, improved, or new products that consumers want and will buy when introduced. It is to the product developers what marketing research is to the marketers when trying to develop pack graphics and advertising. The consumers of a product need to be considered, in a carefully planned and systematic manner, at different stages of the product development process. What is presented in this STP will give some guidance as to how consumers can be included in the development process.

The first section, "Approaches to Research Guidance Testing," gives examples of successful development programs. The theme of these papers is involving the consumer, as the user of the product, in the evaluation of prototypes and directions for prototype improvement. This is an alternate to prototype selection by internal judgement. If the judgement prototype does not perform as expected, there will be no information on how to improve the prototype. By involving the consumers in product development, a final prototype that meets the needs and expectations of the consumer will be developed. Hlavacek and Finn use breakfast cereals and Baxter cites salad dressings as examples of products successfully developed with research guidance testing with consumers at different points in the development process. In the paper by Wolter et al., the consumer of the product (clothing labels) is industrial rather than individuals; however, many of the principles are the same.

The second section, "Processes for Research Guidance Testing," goes into more detail about different types of techniques that can be used. Carr discusses the use of designed experiments that include "response surface" to develop the optimum product. Cooper et al. discuss the concept of "ideal" points for product characteristics and how they can be used to segment the consumer population. Moskowitz and Jacobs describe the use of current products on the market as consumer benchmarks and how a new product can be designed against these benchmarks.

The final section is "Qualitative Research Guidance Testing." Over the past few years more and more product development groups are finding it useful to listen to consumers talk about their products to generate new ideas and to improve prototypes. Hayes presents a review of focus groups, including their uses and abuses, as well as what to consider in setting up a qualitative program. Younkin discusses the use of "kid peer leaders" in the development of products at American Chicle.

Overall, I believe the information presented is useful and will at least make the reader stop and think about how the product development process is carried out and how consumers can be used to make the process more successful.

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