



tried, tested and true

Let sampling campaigns prove the power of your product.

BY BURT RHODES | ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT CARTER

Sure, good marketers are experts at explaining to consumers the many benefits and advantages of a new product or brand. But convincing those same customers to purchase isn't always as simple as broadcasting a commercial or aiming e-mails at them.

Sometimes, say experts, winning consumers to a product means letting them try it before they buy it. Sometimes, a brand has to lead by a sample.

"Product samples are a way of creating excitement," explains Rico Cipriano, a corporate marketing veteran who has spearheaded product sampling campaigns for major international beauty brands. "Sending samples is one of the best ways to reproduce a store experience in the customer's home."

Indeed, sampling continues to rank among the most effective tactics in the history of direct marketing, in part because of its ability to do what no other medium can: put a physical product in customers' hands. Moreover, the practice is finding new adherents even in the digital age.

Consequently, while some CMOs struggle to make sense of new media initiatives, many others are enjoying steady success thanks to a rediscovery of the appeal of product sampling and the power of direct mail to get these campaigns to customers.

"Sampling is growing in importance [because] consumers are bombarded with messages," says Cindy Johnson, who worked as the corporate sampling programs manager for Procter & Gamble before

A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

Consumers love getting something free — even if it's a tiny bit of something, as evidenced by recent sampling initiatives from these brands.

Texas Pete Hot Sauce

The hot sauce brand recently touted its flavor varieties by offering a limited number of product samples through the social networking site Facebook.® The company planned to distribute its 10,000 samples over a four-week period, but hit that number of requests in just six days. Each sample contained a 1.9-ounce bottle of the consumer's flavor of choice, a can koozie and a coupon that held a unique bar code to help the company track its redemption rate.

Splenda

In July, the sweetener brand used sampling to give consumers a first look at its new pocket-sized mist spray and to gather feedback before rollout. Splenda required requesters to become fans of its Facebook page, which let the company better target its key demographic — women 25 and older — through their profiles on the social networking site. More than 16,000 samples were given away in just two weeks.

Living Proof

Free samples flew off the virtual shelves when the beauty brand offered Facebook users a trial of its No Frizz hair care product. More than 15,000 samples were requested in a 48-hour period. Plus, fan numbers for the product spiked from around 1,000 to more than 7,000 during the promotion, even though consumers weren't required to become a fan to receive the sample.

NewBeauty magazine

Four times a year, the publication's beauty sampling program sends subscribers generous sample sizes of luxury beauty products along with a survey asking for their opinions on the products. More than 10,000 packages were sent within one year of the program's launch, with 96 percent of recipients saying they purchased a full-price version of a sample item.

Sephora

The retail beauty chain lets consumers throw something extra in their basket — up to three free product samples with every online order. Customers select samples during checkout and the trial offerings are mailed with their purchased products.

Cablevision Systems

Last fall, the New York-area cable operator brought interactive banner ads to television that let its nearly 3 million subscribers order product samples with a click of their TV remotes. Unilever, Gillette and Benjamin Moore were among the first advertisers to buy into the service. Conversion rates — the percentage of viewers who, after initially clicking on an ad, successfully requested the advertiser's product sample or coupon — grew from 40 percent to more than 70 percent for the most recent Colgate-Palmolive campaign.

starting her own marketing consultancy. "It's just really hard to make an impact on consumers today. But people love samples."

Certainly, sampling allows companies to extend their message. According to figures from the Promotion Marketing Association, product samples reach 70 million households each quarter. A recent PMA poll also found that 75 percent of customers say they have become aware of a product through a sample.

And consumers are acting on this awareness, with many saying that product sampling helps them choose among brands. For instance, 81 percent of consumers said they would try a product after receiving a sample, according to a poll conducted in December by Opinion Research Corp. on behalf of the United States Postal Service.® Moreover, 62 percent of those polled said that sampling a product is the most effective way to get them to try a brand.

"It is the consumer-preferred method of marketing," Johnson says. "[Consumers] are tuning out the advertising, [but] they love to try new things. That's why product sampling works."

Like Cipriano, Johnson maintains that product sampling is an ideal way to win customers' faith in a product. "Consumers feel the sample gives them the actual experience of the product," she says. "They don't have to risk any investment to be able to try it."

This is important, continues Johnson, because many consumers are still anxious about the current economy and have become much more discriminating about their purchases. "That's why sampling is even more successful right now," she says. "Because they don't want to invest dollars in new products. So they are relying on that trial experience to tell them whether they are going to like the product or not."

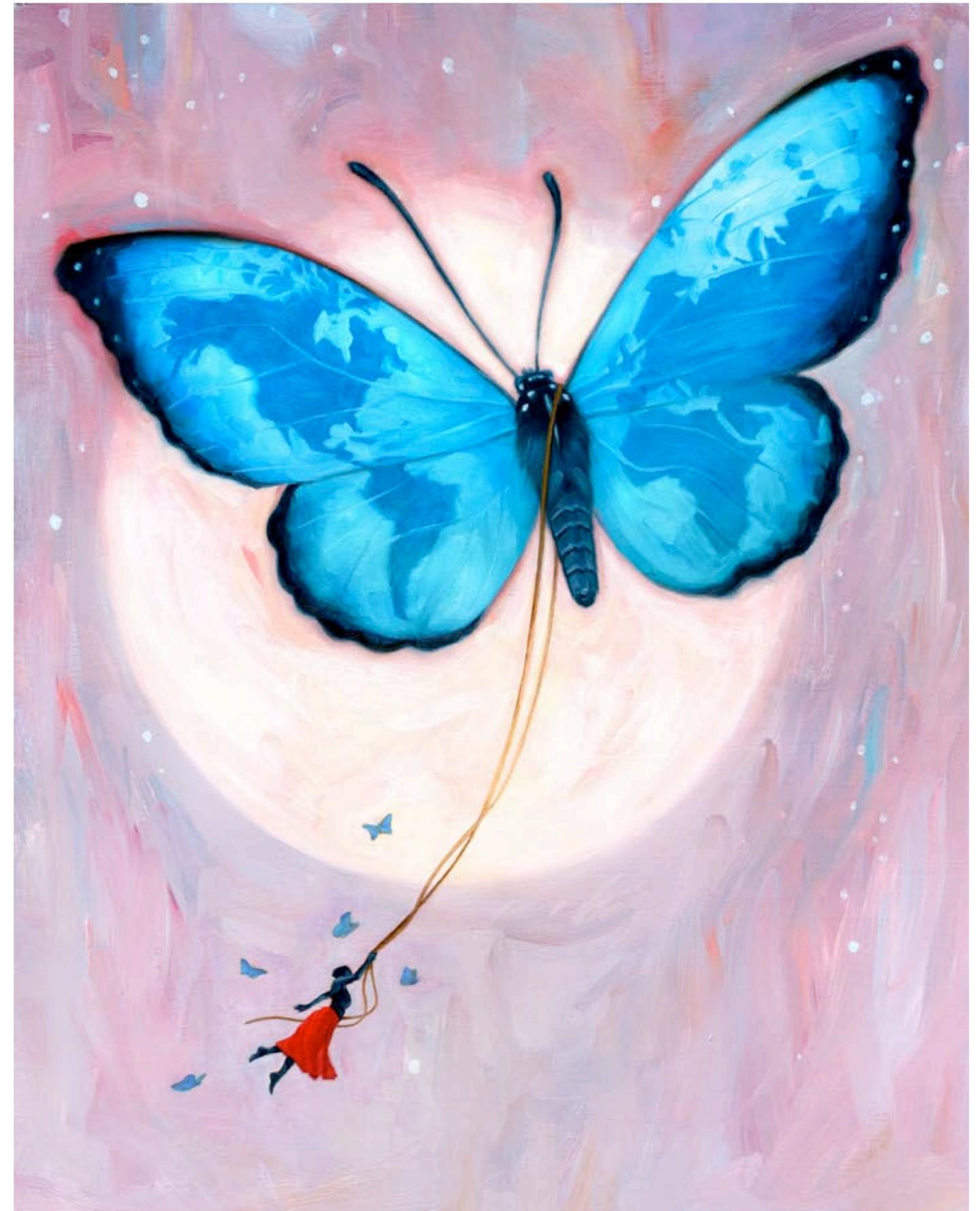
Brands can get samples to consumers through an assortment of avenues, of course, from event marketing giveaways to newspaper inserts. Direct mail efforts, though, offer one of the surest avenues to reach consumers, say marketers.

Nick Peragine, product sales manager for Georgia-based lighting manufacturer PureSpec-

trum, says his company recently used mail to send samples of a new energy-efficient light bulb to a wide assortment of B-to-B contacts. "We came to the decision to use direct mail primarily because it was the easiest way to introduce our products to a large number of potential constituents over a broad area — and to be able to get actual samples of our product in their hands."

Johnson says the precision of mail market-

ing also gives it an advantage in product sampling campaigns, although she acknowledges that targeting isn't everything when it comes to sampling. "With sampling, targeting is very important, but there are other elements that go into the return on investment. Like if you're resampling the same person: I don't care if you have the right target, if you have poor sample control there's no point in doing the program."



And while it's a natural fit with direct mail, product sampling also can be integrated into larger, multimedia campaigns. In the Opinion Research Corp. poll, 85 percent of respondents said they would be likely to log on to a Web site to receive samples if they received a post card driving them to the site.

"A lot of retailers have sites where you can request a sample," Johnson notes, pointing out how one grocery chain has blended mail and sampling with digital elements of its marketing mix. "And because consumers are thinking they get the sample through that supermarket, then that's where they go to find the product if they want to buy it. Consumers link the brand with the retailer."

Thus, the retailer enjoys the bump up in brand opinion and recognition, she says, while its sampling vendor carries the actual responsibility for distributing the products.

Johnson says these integrated programs also give marketers a chance to learn more about their

customers. "A lot of times [after sending a sample], we give them a Web site to register on," she explains. "We say, 'Here's a Web site. We're collecting information about your sample, giving away a small prize.' And they will go online and register, and provide us with the feedback that way."

Likewise, many brands are making use of social media networks in their sampling efforts. It's becoming increasingly common, for instance, for brands to mail samples of new products to a select list of targets and then watch as those recipients go to Facebook® and other sites to post rave reviews about the samples.

This suggests that product sampling also engenders consumer loyalty, much like frequent flyer programs and other initiatives, Cipriaso says. He notes how quality product samples, despite usually being distributed in small quantities, have a way of getting consumers to come back to certain brands. "After we introduce you to our products, we want to make sure we keep you forever," he says. "We also know that the best customers tend to replenish. They buy the same product over and over again because they use it every day and they love it."

And these customers also present ideal targets for sampling campaigns designed to expand a brand line, says Johnson: "Let's say you're already using a shampoo by a particular brand. If

WE SEND OUT SAMPLES TO MAKE

sure customers are familiar with our products and to introduce new products to our best customers."

— RICO CIPRIASO

that brand is expanding into the antiperspirant and moisturizer categories, usually the person who already uses another product by that brand will be more receptive to buying the product. Sometimes, giving them a sample will help make that transition happen."

But for all their enthusiasm about product sampling, Johnson and others don't hesitate to warn CMOs about taking sampling campaigns too lightly. No marketing strategy is ever easy to execute, Johnson points out, so marketers need to approach sampling as wisely as they would any other tactic. "The famous misconception is that product sampling is easy," she says. "You really do need to dot your i's and cross your t's."

In the end, though, when done right, product sampling can yield not only invaluable brand exposure, but also solid ROI, richer knowledge about customers and a stronger bond between companies and the people who buy their goods.

Put simply, says Cipriaso, "It's a business case that works."

LEAD BY A SAMPLE

Samples endure as a powerful way to win customers. In December, Opinion Research Corp. surveyed 1,000 consumers on behalf of the USPS® — all of them primarily responsible for sorting their household's mail. Here are a few findings:

81%

of those surveyed said they are more likely to try a product after they get a free sample.

62%

said an actual product sample is the most effective way for a brand to get them to try a product.

67%

said they would prefer to have samples mailed to their home.

73%

said they would prefer receiving multiple samples in a single sample box.

90%

said that an accompanying coupon would increase the value of a mailed sample box.

85%

said that they'd likely log onto a Web site and sign up to receive samples if they got a post card from the USPS driving them to the site.

A TASTE OF THINGS TO COME

A product sampling expert tells why sampling campaigns may be more effective than ever.

BY PAMELA OLDHAM

Cindy Johnson spent more than 15 years at Procter & Gamble, including her tenure as the corporate sampling programs manager. In that time, she worked with nearly all of the P&G products and developed some valuable insights into how and why sampling continues to win over customers.

Johnson, who now consults with top marketers as head of her own firm, Sampling Effectiveness Advisors, sat down with *Deliver*® recently to share those insights and explain why recent advances in mail samples could make them more formidable than ever.

DELIVER: What makes sampling effective?

CINDY JOHNSON: With over 30,000 different products on the shelf in the average grocery store and with the typical consumer receiving as many as 3,000 advertising messages a day, a sample trial is one of the few ways that guarantees a brand due consideration from its target audience.

DELIVER: Is sampling growing in importance?

JOHNSON: [Today's consumers] aren't taking as many risks on a new brand or a new product. They love to try new products, but don't want to spend \$7 or \$8 on a new shampoo to see if they like it. So they are relying on product trial experiences to tell them whether they are going to like the product or not. Coupons are nice if you're going to buy the product anyway. But if you want to reach a new consumer who has never tried your product, the best way is going to be through a sample.

DELIVER: Why are more samples being mailed today?

JOHNSON: Two or three years ago, 80 percent of all purchase decisions were made in store. People were out of the home more often, and brands had to reach people where they were — out having fun or at work, or whatever. But now, because of the economy, 70 percent of purchase decisions are made at home. [Consumers] are making lists, and they're going through their cupboards and figuring out what they need. Plus, they're just not going out as much. So brands really have to try to reach the consumer and provide samples at home, where the decisions are being made.

DELIVER: What sampling innovations excite you?

JOHNSON: There is a new technology developed by First Flavor (FirstFlavor.com) called Peel 'n Taste.® It's a film sample you put in your mouth that dissolves and gives you the same flavor experience as the product. For beverage brands especially, this will be a good way of sampling because in the past, they've really only been able to sample in store or at events [from a can or bottle] and there hasn't been a good way to reach households. It will significantly reduce the cost and complexity of sampling for them. With this technology, they can actually send a sample through the mail, in a regular letter-sized envelope. Peel 'n Taste® will open up a lot of doors for companies to send samples to consumers.



CINDY JOHNSON'S TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SAMPLING CAMPAIGN

- 1. Reach your target consumer when and where they are likely to try the sample, now most likely at home.**
- 2. Limit the program to one sample per customer.**
- 3. Use a proven program with an experienced vendor.**
- 4. Measure so you know what to do (or not do) next time. A purchase conversion measurement also lets you determine ROI.**