



Sampling Effectiveness
Advisors

Integrated Marketing & Product Sampling

(-how to make both work when objectives are different)

About the Author: Cindy Johnson is a product sampling expert for CPG brands. During Cindy's career with P&G, she worked with all brands in her role as Corporate Sampling Programs Manager. She now owns a specialty marketing and research firm, Sampling Effectiveness Advisors, which focuses on helping brands improve product sampling results.

The *Integrated Marketing Strategy (IMS)* theory suggests that marketers coordinate all the tactics of their marketing plan to enhance the effects of advertising with consumers. Typically the brand will determine who their target consumer is – via a combination of psychographic, demographic, and behavioral characteristics. The marketer then determines the right way to speak to this target, what types of media channels to use, where to reach them, etc.

What happens most often is that this target is usually easier to reach through ad media than via product sample distribution. Effective product sampling requires that the brand reach the target via a delivery method that will result in trial. Sampling experts agree that there are certain times a consumer is more likely to consider product choices, which suggests there are certain times the sample should be delivered. The sample impact will be stronger among those consumers than the psychographic profile TV advertising was developed for. Therein lays the problem with using the Integrated Marketing Strategy for sample distribution. There are also other situations where a sample may be more powerful; when given by a professional or third-party expert for example. These considerations are not addressed in a media plan – which can cause problems for the Integrated Marketing Strategy. Some examples of how an IMS might conflict with a strategic sampling strategy are given below:

Example #1 - An acne-care brand had done some targeting work for their Integrated Marketing Strategy and determined that college-aged students tend to buy more acne-care product than any other consumer group. They direct media efforts at this target because this high-consumption consumer is important to the brands business. As a component of the marketing plan, the brand also establishes a college sampling program, distributing samples on college campuses.

ISSUE – Acne problems start around the age of 11 or 12. These “tweens” (and their parents) are seeking out information about the category and they try out different brands to find which one works for them. If they happen to like the first product they try, they will stick with it and will continue to buy that brand. It is much more difficult to convince a consumer to switch brands, than it is to win their loyalty in the first place. By using samples for the older target (instead of consumers entering the category), the brand has given competitors the opportunity to win the loyalty of younger consumers.

Example #2 – A new mint candy product has just been launched and the marketing team has determined that this product will have a strong appeal among young professionals. TV and print ads both speak to this target and intercept sampling is planned to provide product samples to young professionals in downtown areas during the work-week.

ISSUE - While walking several blocks during their lunch hour, many consumers received three or more samples from different samplers. To add to the problem, the street samplers were not able to control who approaches them for samples – the brand misses their target more than 50% of the time by sampling to older consumers, non-professionals, families, etc. If the brand would have approached sampling goals independent of the integrated marketing strategy, they would have chosen a better way to reach a similar target and would have put controls in place to maximize sample distribution. Even if the target were quite different, a controlled distribution of samples would result in a better ROI than a program that occasionally reaches the target – and wastes 70-80% of the brand samples. (Giving multiple samples to the same consumer does not result in increased purchase conversion.)

Because marketers usually develop media plans first (after the targeting strategy is complete), product sampling is often an after-thought with no plan to control samples, no trial goals in mind, etc. And since product sampling is the most expensive promotion on a per-consumer basis – this type of situation can have a disastrous effect on the brands ROI.

What options does a brand have to maximize their Integrated Marketing Strategy and still have a strategic product sampling plan; one that delivers high trial and purchase conversion numbers?

The IMS should provide the marketing team with a general plan to reach its target; however there is often more than one group of consumers that should be targeted based on the types of marketing tools available. Also, each marketing tool should be considered, independent of the overall plan, to make sure the investment is maximized. Marketers should define objectives, outline success criteria, and consider how the sampling program will be measured. Some marketing tools will be more impactful when used against a certain target. Who would react more strongly to a product sample than a coupon? (If your plan is to target teens for example, you wouldn't want to use coupons.) The marketing team must consider what tools are available, then determine how each of those tools can be used to the benefit of the overall marketing strategy.

Product sampling can often work on its own to convert a targeted group of consumers. If the trial experience is strong and consumers are convinced to purchase the brand, no further spending is necessary to win with that target. The marketing

budget should be maximized by using other tools to win with other groups of consumers. There's no advantage to layering marketing tactics and spending more against the same target, if trial alone convinces them to buy your brand.

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Sampling Effectiveness Advisors can help brand marketers think through the conflicting issues that an Integrated Marketing Strategy can create for a strategic product sampling plan. Being experts in this area, we can help brands determine which types of programs will best reach their target and achieve the required trial objectives. The end goal is to win over as many different consumers as possible with the available marketing budget. Ensuring good sample controls are in place will maximize the product sampling budget. Contact SEA for more information on how to maximize product sampling plans!