



Sampling Effectiveness
Advisors

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.

Looking for “New & Innovative” Ways to Sample?

Brand marketers continue to be challenged to come up with “**new & innovative**” ways to sample. But history suggests that the terms “new & innovative” for sampling, often leads brands down the path of a poor return-on-investment. Why? The term “New” suggests that there is little experience behind the program’s concept or type of execution. This totally contradicts one of the key principles of effective sampling: Established programs are normally more effective since each execution has been improved, which results in better trial and purchase conversion results for participating brands. The term “Innovative” generally implies that established or more traditional types of sampling are outdated; when in fact the reason why these programs have been around a long time is, **because they work!** Research results indicate these programs are successful at building trial and purchase conversion and that’s why brands continue to participate in them. This leads us to the old saying, “*If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!*”.

Thinking outside the box

So what is a brand marketer to do, when faced with the challenge of exceeding last year’s business results, but with a smaller promotion budget? How can a brand improve the ROI of their sampling plans without going down the path of investing in a risky, unproven program?

Answer? By utilizing the advice of sampling experts, like SEA. We can help you compare various programs and make ROI assumptions based on past results. We will assist you in looking at past proven program, to see what we can do to improve the ROI. Starting from a standpoint of your targeting, if your brand was able to successfully convert moms with kids in the past, we may be able to take a look at the data to see if you should be targeting moms with younger children, or moms with teens. We’ll help you look at all the elements of targeting to make sure you get the best possible results.

The next area of opportunity is in program fees. Brands need to work with suppliers to understand all the costs involved with a program. Brand marketers should have suppliers compete for the business where appropriate; substantial savings can often be found by comparing supplier capabilities. (Note: cheaper is not always better!)

What about other costs? If a brochure adds no value to your sample, why print it? If a coupon isn't required to get consumers to purchase your product, why offer it? Maybe you need media to support your program; maybe you don't. We can advise you in that area as well. Review every layer of cost in your program to make sure it adds value.

One of the key drivers of sampling waste is re-sampling the same consumer. While an established program might be a safe investment, have you done everything you can do to minimize sample waste? If your samples are packed 500 to a case, you can often eliminate a lot of re-sampling by -packing them in smaller case sizes (A vendor might send two cases of 500 samples to a school that only needs 800 samples, since they don't want to short them. This will result in 200 wasted samples.) Review this issue with your supplier.

Of course you can't invest in "proven programs" if you've never measured results! This is a necessary step to improving ROI. Most brands feel they can't afford to measure results. In today's economy, you can't afford **not** to! Don't use another brands data; what works for one brand (or category) may not work for another. Know if the program you participate in is driving trial and purchase conversion better than the other programs available to you. Test a small program before expanding it nationally.

In summary, it's not necessary to reinvent the wheel! There are many **established** sampling programs with proven results available to brands that need to reach their target audience with a product sample. The overhead involved with creating an established program was paid for a long time ago (by some other brand) and because of that, the distribution fees are usually quite reasonable.

In this tough economy, what Marketing Director or VP won't ask what return-on-investment was received behind the brands product sampling programs? Brand marketers need to make sure they've reviewed all the costs and made sure the program is as efficient (and effective) as possible. **Product sampling was never meant to be a risky, short-term promotion**; it's the way to continually build the brands franchise over the long-haul. The pendulum for "New & Innovative" has swung the other way; it's no longer the latest buzzword for product sampling. "Fiscally Responsible" should be the brand marketers desired result of all product sampling investments. "New, brand-loyal consumers" will be the end-result of your sampling tactics.

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