

Point of View



Creating Winning Concepts



As companies move their product ideas through the innovation pipeline, their challenge is to correctly identify the potentially winning ideas among all of those under consideration as early as possible. This careful vetting of ideas allows for less money to be put toward ideas that fail, and more resources to be put toward those with the highest probability of success.

Concept testing is a critical step in identifying winning ideas, and the vast majority of consumer packaged goods companies are engaged in some form of concept testing. Unfortunately, something as simple and avoidable as a poorly written or designed concept can derail a winning idea. Through exposure to thousands of concepts, maintenance and analysis of the *Ipsos Online Concept Testing Database* (which includes nearly 7,000 concepts), and ongoing secondary research, the Consumer Products specialty research division of Ipsos has developed a perspective on concept testing that we leverage as we work with our clients to better the staggering odds of creating a successful new product.

Properly Defining a Concept

According to David Schwartz' book *Concept Testing*, a concept is a print or film representation of a product or service. It is a device to communicate the subject's benefits, strengths, and reasons for being, with minimal frills.

Schwartz is correct in saying that a concept must explain and inform clearly and realistically. However, in today's crowded marketplace that's not enough. These days a concept often serves as a proxy for what will later be included in advertising and other integrated marketing initiatives, including those in the interactive arena. It needs to attract attention, be memorable and persuasive, and ultimately, sell the product. The latest thinking is that the amount of "sell" in a concept should be directly related to the amount of "sell" you intend to give it later.

There is a fine line between researcher and marketer. On the one hand, we want a clean read on a new product concept, devoid of "children and dogs" that may artificially improve product evaluations. On the other hand, in a world of theme music and

three-dimensional graphics, showing consumers a flat, boring stimulus as representation of a product idea artificially deflates concept scores.

Writing and Producing Winning Concepts

A good idea in a poorly written concept will almost always fail. Intuitively we all know this, but we often allow business pressures to override our judgment. A strong concept must grab the consumer's attention and describe a new product or service in the form of a promise to fill some unmet need in a unique way.

Think Like Consumers Think

When writing a concept about a new product idea, we need to think about the new product idea the way consumers do. Marketers and researchers invariably spend the bulk of their time working on the body or so-called "meat" of the concept, yet this is not how consumers view concepts. Consumers begin their journey through our concepts with the **visuals** – the thing we as researchers spend the absolute least amount of time on. They then look at the headline copy, the price, the varieties and/or flavors offered, and finally, the concept statement. It's not that the concept itself isn't important; it most certainly is. But without these other elements, you may never get consumers to read through the body copy, especially for concepts aimed at children.

We should be taking our cues from the advertising industry, which takes pains to ensure an advertising message is communicated with the mute button on or with the fast-forward button pushed. If consumers sit down and actually pay attention, it's considered a bonus, not a necessity.

Include All the Essential Ingredients

A concept proposes a way to solve an unmet need in a unique way. To be successful, a concept must clearly state the consumer insight (the need), identify the point of difference (how the product idea will meet the need uniquely), provide reasons to believe (convincing proof), provide rational benefits, and convey the emotional benefits consistent with the rational benefits and the consumer insight.

Take, for example, the idea for a fictitious new ice cream product:

Concept Name: Dilly's Ice Cream with Calcium

Insight: Mothers with young children want to include calcium in their own diets and in their kids' diets in a simple way.



Point of Difference: Extra calcium in an ice cream product, a food people enjoy.

Reasons to Believe: Calcium is good for you and it helps to have more than you get in your current diet.

Rational Benefits: Healthy, tastes good, easy.

Emotional Benefit: I will feel good about myself knowing that I am taking care of my family.

The Dilly's ice cream example demonstrates all of the key elements that need to be included in a good concept.

Carefully Mix the Ingredients To Create a Compelling Message

Visuals: Most concepts should include illustrations. An illustration can be anything from a color photo to a line drawing and should be appropriate to the current product development phase. Colour photos work best, though at intermediate stages line drawings or rough visuals may be adequate. Visuals are most effective when they clearly illustrate the product and improve understanding, and can incorporate a package shot, a usage shot, or other elements needed to properly convey the product to consumers.

Headline: The headline must grab your attention and contain a clear and distinct point of difference so the reader knows how this product idea is different and wants to continue reading.

Price: Finished concepts should almost always include price. Concepts might not include price when you just want consumer reaction to an early-stage idea, when the concept is being tested among children, or when the test objective is to determine the price.

Varieties and Store Location: The text should include the varieties and/or flavors of the product when appropriate and always indicate the store location.

Concept Statement: The core idea should be articulated in a few sentences or one paragraph and the main benefit of the product communicated. Indicate whether the concept is a new product, line extension, or restage. Clearly explain who you are, what differentiates the product, and the reasons to buy the product. Secondary benefits may be included after the primary benefit has been thoroughly explained. The concept statement should end with an emotional appeal that links to what you have said.

Finishing Touches: Add the finishing touches. Use bold or italic type to make unique words stand out. Include logos in the concept anywhere your brand appears.

Length: Since we want the respondent to read the entire concept description, a good rule of thumb is to stick with a maximum count of 130 words – shorter is better, as a rule.

Standardization: It is often easier (though not required) to follow a concept blueprint, with standards in place for concept order and format, writing style, font type and size, size of illustration, colour format, and spacing. This standardized approach minimizes consumer confusion and allows for enhanced analytics and comparisons between concepts.

An Example of a Well-Written Concept

Building on the idea of creating a new ice cream with calcium, the example below demonstrates how that information can come together as a well-written concept by following the guidelines presented.

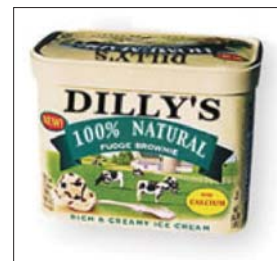
Introducing Dilly's Ice Cream with Calcium... the healthy choice for your family

Help make sure you and your family get enough calcium. Dilly's Ice Cream with Calcium is a natural way to give your family a healthy snack. It's nutritious, wholesome and 100% natural. It's a simple choice that's good for them and good for you.

Available at your grocer in the freezer section in 3 delicious flavors:

- Fudge Brownie
- Mint Chocolate Chip
- Strawberry

\$2.99 for a half gallon



Please note that this is a fictitious product used for example only



North America

Europe

Latin America

Asia-Pacific

Middle East

Concept Testing with Ipsos

For a product concept to be strong, its uniqueness must come through. It could take the form of differentiation through lower price, higher quality, or both. It could overcome current category negatives (“all the taste, half the fat”) or offer benefits that were previously unavailable (“and it lowers cholesterol”). Or, it could help consumers overcome a challenge or make their lives better (“like adding a half hour to your day”). A strong concept delivers one or all of these elements well. A weak concept delivers none or few of these well.

Through careful review prior to fielding, we can help CPG clients understand whether they have included all the necessary components to potentially have a successful concept. Ultimately it will be up to consumers to pick winning versus losing concepts, but we help our clients avoid the trap of having poorly written concepts mistakenly evaluated as bad ideas. Poorly written concepts make waste of good ideas, but clear, well-executed concepts can help ensure that the right ideas are brought to market, increasing return on investment for our clients.

About Ipsos-Reid

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