

Top of Mind

Perspectives and Commentary

Slow Down, Speed Up New Product Growth

EMERGING from a recession where cost cutting preserved bottom lines, marketers need topline growth—and they need it bad. Yet top marketers rated themselves only 32% effective at launching new products in a recent survey by researcher Markitecture.

What's more, an overcrowded marketplace doesn't lend itself to the simple brand extensions that characterized much of the expansion in the Eighties.

Rushing more new products more quickly through the pipeline—the conventional reaction that paid off in the past—isn't the way to better your odds in the months ahead. In fact, a number of today's most innovative, and successful marketers are taking a reverse approach: introducing fewer new products, but taking the necessary steps to ensure these "chosen few" are truly unique, better-thought-out and, above all, really do address unmet consumer needs.

Increased competition is making it both harder and more essential to find product concepts with a true and compelling point of difference. In packaged goods marketing, for example, the head of the pin has become so crowded, it's tough to find a place to stand, much less dance. Meanwhile, consumers get smarter and more demanding all the time. Consequently, new products can't be mostly right. They've got to be all right.

How do you get a new product "all right?" Begin and end development with the consumer. Consumer insights are critical not only in helping to inspire the seminal "big idea;" they also must inform all elements of the new product development mix, from product formulation to packaging to positioning, advertising and promotion. Ultimately, all these elements need to come together to create a unique, relevant and motivating consumer proposition. And that takes time. Here are some key pointers to guide you:

Take time to focus on the consumer. New product development focus groups today are under-leveraged, even woefully mis-

used. Conventional wisdom says that consumers are only good at providing judgmental, yes/no reactions to new product concepts. Our experience has been quite the opposite. Not only can consumers be true development partners in areas of opportunity for a new product or service, they can help evolve nascent ideas into fully developed and successful marketing propositions.

With Danaher (maker of Craftsman tools), we conducted almost 30 hours of focus groups before even beginning idea generation on its newest line of hand tools. The goal: Leverage consumer insights to create new collections of hand tools and better ways to merchandise current lines. Team ideation followed, then came an additional 12 hours of consumer idea-building and validation, followed by work with HMS Design in Norwalk, Conn. The result? A dozen new products with a new tool-organizing system. Danaher has already garnered six awards from Sears for its effort, and the national roll-out isn't even finished yet.

Take time to focus on ideation. The world of idea creation has moved way beyond simple brainstorming, where any idea was a good idea and a sufficient quantity of ideas would often lead to several winners. Today, group ideation sessions need to be focused on strategic areas of opportunity, using a range of customizable techniques.

To name a new flavor combination of chocolate and strawberry ice cream, Ben & Jerry's, for instance, relied on a focused ideation technique using thought-starting

words and expressions from a slang dictionary. Because Ben and Jerry's has such an endearing anti-authoritarian view (and positioning), it's one of the few companies in the world for which slang word triggers can inspire original, yet ultimately, "on-target" names. The winning name, SNAFU: Strawberries Naturally All Fudged Up, emerged within 45 minutes of brainstorming.

Take time to commit to creating winners. Unfortunately, in many of today's companies, new product development has become less about creating winners, and more about doing the process of new product development: filling the "fuzzy front end" of the funnel, stage-gating the most promising ideas, researching the newest trends, etc. In truth, creating new product winners is less about the process and more about the passion. It's about being willing to both

have, and champion, a point of view.

Dr. Glennis Orloff, a new product scientist/engineer at Schick, came out of an ideation session with the notion to combine soap with a woman's shaver to make it a one-step, one-hand process. She made a prototype by hand that night, and tried it the

next morning. Somewhat to her surprise, it worked beautifully. Orloff sought out marketing colleague Sharon DelValle to develop the idea into an integrated market proposition. Consumers were consulted as partners at every stage: language, positioning, product design, ingredients and package design, you name it.

A year and a half later, when an opening came up in the company's product launch cycle, they were ready. The Intuition razor for women launched as a fully integrated concept, and scored Schick's biggest hit in 20 years.

In the end, you can do it quick, or you can do it right.

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slang to inspire an
original name, SNAFU:
Strawberries Naturally
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