

Subject: Useful insights on supermarket shopping behavior

Want to sell more yogurt?

There are three types of buyers and one of them may surprise you.

American packaged goods companies are becoming increasingly aware of declining brand loyalty and the seemingly fickle way consumers often go about buying everyday items.

The old way of applying a certain amount of national advertising to produce the desired sales often doesn't work when the consumer in the supermarket aisle is confronted by the proliferation of high quality store brands as well as many new brands and brand extensions. Evidence suggests that the consumer is finding new ways to simplify product selection.

Yogurt is a great example.

In a recent study that we conducted in-store on the subject of yogurt buying behavior, 75% of the panelists observed made their brand and product selection decisions at point of purchase. Put differently, just one in four shoppers came into the store intending to buy a specific yogurt brand and actually followed through by buying it.

The study, which included placement of covert cameras and in-aisle interviewing, revealed that almost every buyer falls into one of these three categories:

1. Grab & go loyalists who always buy the same brand, flavor and size.
2. Contemplative buyers who are prone to switching and buy mainly on nutritional content or flavor variety.
3. Negotiator buyers who confer with one or more other people before selecting yogurt. This was observed most often between mother and child.

Let's look at these situations individually. First the bad news. If they don't already have an affinity for your brand, you can forget about the grab & go buyer. However, our research showed that there are big opportunities to win over those in the other two categories.

Just give me the facts.

Riding the wave of our diet-crazed society, more than half of contemplative shoppers study the back of the container seeking either the total calorie count or the number of carbohydrate grams in the serving. More yogurt can be sold to these buyers by

- Featuring carb count on "Light" versions prominently on the front label.
- Use larger icons and text to portray flavor to simplify selection.

Let the kids decide.

Another undeveloped opportunity is kids. Apart from a bit of help from mom when the little ones pick the flavor, kids pretty much get whatever they want in the yogurt case.

This is because moms see yogurt as a “safe” zone where pretty much anything is OK, as long as it will be eaten.

Based on the observed behaviors and spoken thoughts that came out of our study, yogurt companies and retailers can sell more product if they:

- Move multipaks from the reach-in bins to shelves at eye level for a typical 4 to 9 year old.
- Develop packaging in bright colors that grab kids attention easily.

As consumers increasingly migrate toward making purchase decisions at point of sale, manufacturers and retailers will have to improve their understanding of consumer behavior inside the store. Context-based research is a very effective way to gain this knowledge.

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The Caney Group is a full service market research organization with special expertise in contextual research methods such as passive observation, active observation and ethnography.

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