



QRCA *IDEAS & TOOLS
FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH*

VIEWS

FALL 2010
VOLUME 9 • NUMBER 1

I HEAR YOU; I DO...

*Moderator Tips for Validating
the Voices of Customers*

READY, SET, HELP!

How to Find a Business Coach

BLOGGER FOR SALE?

***2010 QRCA Conference
PROGRAM PREVIEW...***
INNOVATION, INSTINCT, VISION!
in Philadelphia!

How Do You Tell Your Client that
**THE PRODUCT IS SO
GOOD THAT NO ONE
WANTS TO USE IT?**



QRCs may need to focus on tempering clients' exaggerated profit fantasies, even as they hear respondent after respondent express admiration for the product.

BY DYLAN JOHNSON, PH.D., AND MICHAEL FEEHAN
Observant LLC ■ Waltham, MA ■ djohnson@observant.biz

The qualitative research consultant is a special role within the marketing constellation, charged on one hand with partnering seamlessly with a client by taking on the company's interests and becoming an extension of the brand team. On the other hand, a central mission of the *external consultant* is to provide an objective point of view on product marketing through the collection and interpretation of data from customers, often referred to as representing “the voice of the customer.” In this customer-focused role, the consultant provides an important “reality check” on the grand schemes of marketers and plays a role in refining approaches to meet the needs of the ultimate product consumers. It can be challenging to keep this “objective critic” role at the forefront, as researchers are invested in building a relationship with their clients. We are all capable of getting caught up in the enthusiasm of our clients for their products, especially when respondents seem to join in and feed the optimism.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation as a qualitative research consultant where clients' *own* enthusiasm seemed to contribute to inflated hype regarding the likelihood of consumers to actually use the product? When *isn't* the customer's favorite product the best choice? In some cases, a highly attractive product may actually be too far ahead of market demand. At other times, there are real systemic or functional barriers to adopting a new product, even if it is clearly superior to the current choice.

For some consumer products, a prod-

uct innovation may be attractive, yet not urgently compelling to potential buyers. For example, a four-wheel-drive improvement on a popular family sedan could be an interesting “bonus feature” for consumers driving the current model. And in focus groups, they may think of many reasons why this would be a desirable option. However, the consumer segment that is already interested in sedans may not line up to switch to an upgraded model with this feature. At the “moment of truth” of deciding whether to purchase, they will have to weigh the actual need for this feature at that time versus the added cost and complications (such as lower miles per gallon) that it brings. It may be that the fact that they are sedan drivers rather than SUV drivers indicates less perceived need for “off-roading” associated with four-wheel drive.

Another obstacle to uptake of a superior product is when there are systemic barriers to making a change. A small business may consider upgrading its computer operating system, for instance, to the latest version of Microsoft Office, yet will find practical reasons for resisting making a change right away. Even if employees are demanding the new capabilities and ease of use, implementing a system will certainly require considerable expense, time and effort. Leadership may also feel a need to delay the upgrade to ensure compatibility with client systems. The fact that the current system seems “good enough” for the present, combined with potential complications of switching, suggests that firms may put off the transition until it becomes a necessity

(i.e., certain system requirements become essential).

A sophisticated moderator understands the idiosyncrasy of the market and starts from this perspective to help clients use qualitative research to determine how to make the most of this delicate balance between product appeal and usage or adoption. This presents an interesting moderating challenge — to uncover consumers' *evaluation* of a product, but also their *insights* into how, why and when it would be used, given the current reality. QRCs may need to focus on tempering clients' exaggerated profit fantasies, even as they hear respondent after respondent express admiration for the product.

Understanding Potential Usage of New Treatments for Life-Threatening Infections

We have become aware of a type of systemic barrier to uptake of exciting new products in our healthcare work in the antibiotic category. Particularly in a hospital environment, the stakes in treating a potentially fatal bacterial infection are high, and drug resistance is an added concern, as infections spread easily across patients. The growing prevalence of super-resistant bacteria means that physicians treating infections often *do not* reach for the most effective new medications when first treating a patient.

Most hospitals limit physicians to one or two generic first-line antibiotics, with additional drugs accessible through consultation with an infectious-disease specialist. These first-line options are considered “good enough” to handle many infections, before moving on to

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL, WHO IS THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL AND...



- HAS THE BEST RECRUITING
- HAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FACILITY
- IS THE MOST SERVICE ORIENTED
- HAS THE BEST PROJECT MANAGEMENT
- HAS THE BEST ON-SITE TECHNICAL SUPPORT
- THE MOST EXPERIENCED AND BEST TRAINED STAFF?

WOULD THE MIRROR LIE?

FLEISCHMAN —
THE BEST IN
SAN FRANCISCO



800-277-3200

WWW.FFRSF.COM

250 SUTTER STREET • SECOND FLOOR
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94108
415-398-4140

Member:  FocusVision, Video InterClipper, Active Group, MRA, AMA

stronger, last-resort choices. These ID specialists, together with pharmacy managers, actively monitor and control the agents used throughout the hospital, to avoid overuse and potential for accelerated development of resistance to newer drugs. In our in-depth interviews, it has been common for internists and surgeons to admit that patients who fail on first-line generic therapy are often referred to an infectious-disease specialist, who “takes over” the patient’s care.

In our experience, ID specialists often are as concerned about how quickly pathogens will mutate to resist new drugs as they are about the effectiveness of the new antibiotics.

Thus, from a marketing perspective, promoting a superior new agent as a “silver bullet” or “big gun” will almost guarantee that it will *not* be readily used in the hospital except for the most extreme cases, when the patient’s need outweighs the risk of possibly “weakening” the new agent by exposing it to evolving bugs. So, the real market opportunity post-launch will be much less than the patient infection rates would suggest.

Qualitative research with hospital-based physicians often elicits strong enthusiasm for these new “big gun” products. Respondents can fuel marketers’ optimistic expectations for the product by finding few flaws with a more effective agent to combat a resistant pathogen. The market research consultant is responsible in these cases for defining the actual prescribing potential, given the need to preserve the efficacy of new products.

Implications for Marketing and Qualitative Market Research Consultants

Infectious-disease specialists make it their business to be alert to agents in development, and all stages of the R&D and approval process are often attended to. Thus, first impressions of key decision-makers are being formed well before branded promotional campaigns are launched. The implication of this phenomenon is that marketing activities, including market research, may be even more important in the developmental phases of antibiotics than in other therapeutic areas. These respondents

Similar to IT decision-makers in small businesses, infectious-disease specialists ultimately influence or even make the product choice. Given all of these considerations, the opinions, priorities and objections of ID specialists and business leaders actually “count” for more in determining potential share.

have taught us a few key lessons about marketing in these waters, which also apply to other situations in which the appeal of a new product may be higher than real expected sales.

Keep messaging “on point” for expert audiences.

In the case of antibiotics, the class of medication and mode of action help physicians and other decision-makers to understand how each medication fits within their current arsenal. These attributes also benchmark the product against what they know about current agents’ efficacy and potential for resistance.

A “better mousetrap” is not always enough.

While efficacy against disease is definitely a “cost of entry” attribute in the antibiotic market, promoting an agent on the basis of superior efficacy alone will not usually be a sufficient reason for key decision-makers to add an agent to their formularies and ultimately encourage prescribing in hospitals. Beyond efficacy, improvements in convenience of dosing or reductions in the duration of treatment over current options can also resonate. Features such as fewer overall doses required before someone is cured, need for less equipment (lines), less time for nurses to administer medications and reductions in overall time a patient will occupy a hospital bed due to his or her infection will also play a role in determining the value of a new agent. This value proposition may ease concerns raised by adding an agent to the list of those to monitor.

All consumers are not equal.

Medical marketers are accustomed to the natural hierarchy of pharmaceutical

customers, whereby specialists’ expertise and recommendations can guide the thinking of primary-care physicians. This hierarchy is magnified in the hospital antibiotic market, due to gate-keeping systems where even senior specialists in their own right (e.g., surgeons) need to defer to infectious-disease specialists. ID specialists and pharmacy administrators are at least consulted on any case for which the typical first-line medications do not seem appropriate or effective.

Similar to IT decision-makers in small businesses, these specialists ultimately influence or even make the product choice. Given all of these considerations, the opinions, priorities and objections of the ID specialists and business leaders actually “count” for more in determining potential share. It is our experience that other physicians usually express more enthusiasm than do IDs about MRSA product profiles in research, and clients may have to be reminded that these physicians often cannot make the ultimate treatment decision. Similarly, employees are likely to get more excited about additional features of the next-generation computer operating system than are those who will have to take time to install and administer these new systems.

Designing and Executing Market Research Studies When Product Use May Not Match the Level of Interest

These perspectives have a direct bearing on the design and execution of qualitative market research studies that assess market potential and the success of a new product.

Product Concept Evaluations

These studies should make a point of highlighting any potential “market

niches” outside of efficacy advantages, to the point of considering the relative value of technical and functional details and what will most likely catch the attention of gatekeepers or experts, as opposed to what is of interest to general users. Infectious disease experts tend to show interest in novel mechanisms of fighting infection, as this adds to the portfolio of treatment options for patients who have tried multiple courses of other agents.

Drivers of Use

Studies exploring the relative importance of product attributes need to drill down among attributes with the power to influence broad adoption. Care should be taken to ensure a balance of attributes, perhaps testing fewer performance attributes than in other contexts and leveraging other dimensions such as the functional value-add factors. Moderators need to form an understanding of how products might fit into existing restrictions and practices, based on potential product attributes. For instance, if large companies are increasingly on board with a new computer operating system, this might drive small businesses toward the tipping point of upgrading their own systems.

Promotional Materials Testing

Expert decision-makers tend to appreciate comprehensiveness and detailed evidence over concise, stylish and “salesy” presentations. They will be willing to read through data tables or technical specs they feel are important. Market research should approximate the real-world promotional context whenever possible, field-testing pieces with trained personnel presenting the information rather than the researcher.

Pricing

A goal is to understand the drivers of a product’s overall perceived value,

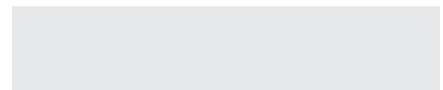
Expert decision-makers tend to appreciate comprehensiveness and detailed evidence over concise, stylish and “salesy” presentations. They will be willing to read through data tables or technical specs they feel are important.

including more practical considerations that impact the real cost of adoption. In a small business, features or services that ease a transition to a new software platform from the previous system may be even more valuable than just the cost of the system itself.

In situations where adoption of innovative new products cannot be directly

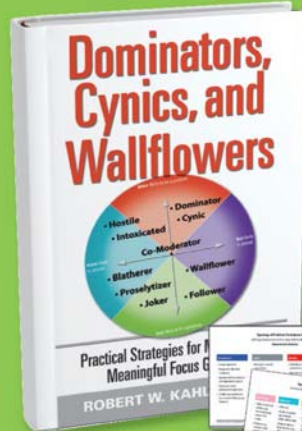
inferred based on the product’s appeal, qualitative market researchers will find a clearer path to success if they “step back” from the product’s advantages “on paper,” and explore the real-life process of making the switch from current products. If a strength taken to excess is a weakness, a promotional strategy focused on the innovation without due attention to alternative drivers

of product choice can set a campaign back. An informed moderator, however, can delve into these issues with respondents and inform marketing by layering demand predictions with an understanding of barriers to uptake. ➤



Los Angeles and Orange County, CA
www.trotta.net
310 306-6866

Get MORE Out of Your Next Focus Group



Includes six-card companion tool kit.

Don't be frustrated by runaway focus groups! **Dominators, Cynics, and Wallflowers**

—Bob Kahle's field guide to the misbehavers—can help you recognize 10 basic bad actors and give you the tools to quickly neutralize their hijinks. Look for this and PMP's other best-selling books about moderating techniques, reporting, and screening at our convenient online bookstore.



PMP

Practical books for smart professionals
Paramount Market Publishing, Inc.
www.paramountbooks.com

Call 888-787-8100 for special quantity discounts.