

Online Qualitative, Time-Extended™: Achieving Deeper Insights After Quantitative Research

Case History

Category: *Casual Dining*

Methods: *Casual Dining Positioning, Menu Evaluation, Qualitative, Depth Interviews, Time-Extended™ Online Research*

Summary

With dinner being a key strategic opportunity for a major casual-dining restaurant, scores from quantitative data were significantly lower for the restaurant than its main competitors, and the company used online qualitative and ethnographic research to uncover current perceptions of the brand, menu choices, food, and service. Online, Time-Extended™ depth interviews were conducted to provide an intimate understanding of the consumer relationship with the brand and its current menu offerings.



Strategic Issues

A struggling domestic economy had generally driven a significant portion of diners away from casual dining to lower-priced, fast-food restaurants (as well as influencing dining frequency). The chain also believed that it had become stale as a brand and with its menu items, contributing to reduced sales.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research was to understand current perceptions of the brand in relation to other competitive brands, and to assess how well or poorly targeted dinner-menu categories and items fared. Specifically, the goals were to:

- Understand the underlying emotional linkages to the brand and reposition it accordingly.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of specific food items and make improvements.

Research Design and Methods

Online individual depth interviews were conducted using the Time-Extended™ methodology among current customers. Interview topics included the reasons for patronage and attitudes toward the brand and other competitors. Projective techniques were employed to elicit key emotional connections to the brands.

Participants were also asked to visit a local branch of the restaurant to eat one of several targeted dinner-menu items and report back on their experiences.

Each respondent participated in two consecutive days of discussion, followed by the restaurant visit, and then a final day of discussion. Using the Time-Extended™ online platform, geographically diverse respondents were allowed to respond at their own pace, which allowed ample time for deep, introspective responses.

Results

The research identified several key learnings, including why the restaurant became a destination of choice; the chain's brand position compared to competitors; which menu items (and menu categories) should be maintained, dropped, or improved; and which food items might be bundled going forward.

Based on the consumer insight, Decision Analyst recommended a stronger position as a fresh, down-to-earth, and family-friendly brand; that it capitalize more on the restaurant's core product, that it improve the food consistency across restaurants; and that it generally provide greater variety and spice to its side dishes and seafood. Subsequently, the restaurant used the recommendations to refine the menu and update marketing communication.