

Category: *Personal Care and Grooming*

Methods: *Time-Extended™ Online Forums, Home Usage, Online Journaling*

Summary

A multinational personal-care products manufacturer had developed a revolutionary home-grooming product. A pilot version of the product had already been successfully launched in the French market the previous year, and preliminary results were promising. Realizing the great potential of this product, the manufacturer decided to develop a newer, more sophisticated and user-friendly version of their grooming product. Decision Analyst was tasked with designing and conducting a two-phased research approach that would meet this goal. Striving to surpass the competition, the company made testing competitors' similar products the focus of the research. The learnings would then be used to produce a superior, top-of-the-line grooming product.

The first phase was conducted online and involved three steps—a home-use test, online journaling, and Time-Extended™ online forum discussions. This phase of the research focused on revealing potential improvements to the competitive products as well as helping to provide an intimate understanding of the respondents' personal healthcare attitudes and habits. In the second phase of the study, recruited respondents tested the manufacturer's product and compared it to one of three competitive products that were on the market at the time.



Strategic Issues

As one of the top players in the industry, the manufacturer is constantly under pressure to always be innovative and on top of the competition, since having a well-established brand name does not guarantee its products' immediate success. Introducing a very sophisticated, high-priced, high-involvement product in the early stages of product category development carries additional risks, but can also bring generous rewards. It was imperative that the research was thorough and that it produced insights on multiple aspects of the offering; e.g., performance, image, packaging, pricing, and complementary products also.

Research Objectives

The research design allowed Decision Analyst to start with a “clean slate” in Phase One and focus on better understanding the aspects of user experience as well as expectations of the comparable products.

The acquired knowledge would then be used to improve the current product, helping to create a more sophisticated and user-friendly grooming product.

The primary objective for Phase Two was to assess whether the existing features of the current product satisfied respondents' needs. Secondary objectives included exploring the motivation behind purchase decisions and identifying the best ways to market the product.

Research Design and Methods

In order to identify the key components for the winning proposition, Decision Analyst created a comprehensive two-stage methodology. The explorative nature of the research called for a combination of qualitative methods, and Decision Analyst's Insights and Innovation team proposed online focus groups supplemented by in-depth interviews. Respondents in France were recruited from American Consumer Opinion®, Decision Analyst's 8+ million member online panel. In order to qualify, respondents needed to be willing to try a *new* personal care product. Given the sophisticated nature of the device as well as its steep price, only respondents with a college education and incomes above €30,000 were selected. Additionally, respondents were screened for their ability to be articulate and their willingness to participate in co-creativity exercises and activities. For the in-home usage test, respondents received the manufacturer's product and one of the competitor's products. Half of the respondents received the manufacturer's product first and the other half received a competitor's product first. Respondents were asked to use each product at least twice over the course of two weeks; after two weeks they were sent the second product they were assigned to evaluate.

At the end of the trial period, the respondents were invited to participate in the Time-Extended™ online discussion group and share their opinions regarding the products' usage routine, its ease of use, specific detraction points, and possible device improvements—effectively helping “co-create” the “ideal” product.

Results

Overall, the results indicate that the client's product was well received and it obtained high marks for performance and ease of use; it came out ahead when compared to competitor products. Despite the overall positive sentiments, the study findings allowed the manufacturer to discover several unmet consumer needs. Based on those unmet consumer needs, Decision Analyst recommended some alterations in order to optimize the product, while retaining the overall look and feel of the product. The manufacturer updated their product and is currently selling its latest iteration of the gadget in several leading European markets, including the U.K., Spain, France, Germany, and Italy.