

# TOP of MIND

## New Products From the Opposite Side

**By Phil Glowatz and Jacques Chevron**

Until the late 18th century, most travelers walked or rode on the left side of the road. Back then, soldiers usually fought with their swords in their right hand, and being on the left side of the road made it easier to engage an enemy. Soldiers demanded all travelers follow suit.

Napoleon changed this practice. To give an edge to his armies, he ordered soldiers and travelers to the right side of the roads. The resulting flow of refugees fleeing on the "wrong" side of the road during conflicts had the effect of slowing down his opponents' armies. And, when enemy patrols were met on the road, Napoleon's men capitalized on the confusion, giving them a tactical advantage.

With new product development, doing things differently can also pay big dividends. Yet, most of those in new products use the same tactics—the same development and research tools. Ergo, they get similar results, and category after category is filled

with products that lack competitive advantages. To change this, new product developers should inject creativity into the process, and use their methods and tools in different ways. For example:

*Brainstorm anonymously.* Traditional group brainstorming sessions actually inhibit ideation. Human nature being what it is, some people are shy in a group, while others are reluctant to voice what might be viewed as a "bad" idea. (The mantra of "no bad ideas" is often subverted by the group's non-verbal reactions; some ideas get built on immediately, while others evoke silence.) So consider brainstorming anonymously using an online "ideation chat room" (each participant is identified only by a code number). This enables all group members to open up and new product ideas to flow freely.

*Encourage consumers to bring the products they use to focus groups.* Show and tell works, and can provide a clearer understanding of attitudes. In developing eyewear, for example, we had consumers bring in their eyeglasses—most had several or more current pairs—and explain the usage occasions for each one. The exercise helped us realize the potential (and limitations) for premium eyewear concepts. We've done the same with a range of consumer products.

*Explore a benefit that is the opposite of what should work.* Throwing an outrageous concept into the mix can often yield unforeseen reactions. For example, in developing a new deodorant, you might explore a product idea that lets some of the body's natural odor come through. For spaghetti sauce, create a concept that promises a smooth texture with absolutely no herbs and spices. These "opposite" concepts can stimulate a focus group discussion and lead to insights that might not otherwise be uncovered.

*Observe product usage carefully.* Have the members of the new product team go into homes and watch how

consumers actually use a product. Years ago we worked on a dishwashing liquid which claimed a superior grease-cutting ability. R&D was developing formulas where even fewer drops would be needed. Yet in-home visits showed that even the most loyal users weren't heeding the "few drops" message, and were squeezing out far more liquid than they really needed. The rec-

ommendation to R & D was to focus away from making a more concentrated product.

*Do a quantitative analysis of qualitative verbatims.* Regular focus groups, properly moderated, are a powerful tool. Analyzing them with a little creativity can lead to even more golden insights. One very effective technique is a computerized method called verbatim mapping (VerMap), that analyzes discussion transcripts to show words that are juxtaposed frequently, as well as those that show negative associations (i.e., when a particular word appears, others never do). These word/concept relationships can be subjected to further analyses to uncover insights that might remain hidden.

Of course, numerous other creative twists are possible. The key lies in customizing your tools and looking at possibilities on the "other side of the road" to uncover the insights your competitors may overlook using more traditional methods. You may not conquer the world, but you will surely increase your chances of developing a product with a compelling customer benefit, and a tactical market advantage. ■

**Throw an outrageous concept into the mix—a deodorant that lets some natural odor remain—to stimulate discussion and reveal hidden insights.**

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