Consilience:

The role of Market Research in New Product Development

This paper explores the role of Market Research in New Product Development. More specifically, it examines a crucial aspect of the NPD process; those areas where various interested parties – the client and the consumer, researchers and designers come together but, all too often, do not gel.

I can hear some of my friends in the creative and design departments placing bets on how long this paper is likely to last. For some people the terms market research and creativity don't sit together all that easily.

BEHAVIOUR & ATTITUDES MARKETING RESEARCH

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The American copywriter John Lyons [1] put it rather succinctly when he said that, in his view

> "Market Research is the arteriosclerosis of the creative process"

Come on John, don't sit on the fence, tell us what you really think.

Faced with that kind of criticism it is quite easy to become defensive (and equally acerbic) in response. I could try to explain matters from the perspective of a market researcher and perhaps point out some of the technical issues that a non-researcher would not understand.

That won't get us very far though. More importantly, it breaks one of the golden rules of market researchers. We are always telling our clients how important it is to step into the other man's shoes – to see things from his perspective. It's not as if John Lyons is on his own when he makes criticism of that kind. I'm sure it's quite a widely held view, in creative and design circles.

Those of us in the market research industry must accept that, if this view is so widespread, there may be a bit of truth in it. If we accept that, then there is a need to do something about it and I'm grateful for this opportunity to make my small contribution in that direction.

This distrust between creative and design people on the one hand and researchers on the other is really just a specific manifestation of a much more general phenomenon: The distrust between artists and scientists. The poet Keats criticised Isaac Newton for "unweaving the rainbow" [2], robbing it of all its beauty and poetry by reducing it to prismatic colours, in his famous experiments.

We have allowed this artificial division between the arts and sciences to permeate our belief systems, from primary school upwards. "He's good at sums – she's good at painting". Nonsense.

Does anybody seriously believe that the great scientific minds have not been capable of the most amazing leaps of the creative imagination. You could pick any number of examples from Galileo to Einstein to Feynman. I will satisfy myself with just one.

We are all familiar today with the image of the world as a globe. Let's do a little mental experiment. Come with me back in time, to the year 230 B.C. We're sitting in a bar in Alexandria in North Africa. We are listening in on a conversation at the next table where a lunatic is explaining to his mates that he has been examining the sun the moon and the planets and he is convinced that the earth is a globe – like the moon. He is trying to convince them to join him in an experiment to measure the angle of the mid-day sun in two locations, in Alexandria and Aswan. Then, by linking it to a measurement of the distance between the two cities and his knowledge of geometry, he is going to calculate the circumference of this globe – that only he and a small group of friends believe in.

The lunatic was Eratosthenes – he really did exist. He was the third librarian at Alexandria. The records of his experiment have survived. He got the circumference of the earth right to within 2%[3].

Which do you marvel at most – the scientific ingenuity of the experiment or the creative leap of the imagination that gave him the insight in the first place?

As an ironic post-script, one of the things that we do know about Eratosthenes is that he had a nickname: Beta – his colleagues considered him a second-class mind – not quite an Alpha.

The reality is that this supposed division (between science and the arts) is an artificial one, which has only become accepted as the norm in relatively recent times as people have been required to work in ever narrowing areas, to cope with a progressively more complex world.

Which do you marvel at most – the scientific ingenuity of the experiment or the creative leap of the imagination that gave him the insight in the first place?

2 | Consilience Explained

Which brings me to the title I have chosen for this piece. Consilience[4] is a word coined by Edward O. Wilson to capture his sense of the unity of all knowledge. He argues that science and the arts are two sides of the same coin. Life is complex. The arts can cope with that complexity. The closer the artist gets to the edge of complexity (without 'losing it' entirely) the better.

Science, up to relatively recently at least, has had to resort to reductionism to cope with complexity. Think of the phrase "all other things being equal". It is at the heart of the traditional sciences. It implies that we need to reduce the complexity of a problem in order to let science do what it is best at; providing irrefutable proof, using the trusted tools of observation, reason and experiment.

The difference between the arts and sciences is simply the degree of reductionism. To communicate properly, the artist and the scientist need to be conscious of this. We need to develop a common language, understood by both traditions – to coin a phrase.

I believe there is a parallel in the traditional stand off between market researchers and those of us whose job is to create challenging new ideas and designs. It is very easy, in this scenario, for the market researcher to be cast in the role of the villain – killing a beautiful dream with an ugly fact.

We market researchers must accept some of the responsibility for this typecasting. Coming from a recently developed discipline we have felt compelled to seek comfort in the safety blanket of our scientific roots. Clients have contributed to the problem, frequently to their own detriment. They (clients) want reductionism. They want clear-cut test results. They want to believe in something called a 'buy test' or a 'propensity to buy' score. Ideally they want it reduced to a single number.

It is perfectly understandable that we should want this kind of finality in a set of research results. We need to face reality, however. The fact that something is referred to as a 'propensity to buy score' does not mean that it actually measures an individual's real buying intentions or capabilities. Our desperate need to believe can deceive us terribly.

3 Facing Reality

It is time, for us to step back and make a more realistic assessment of the role of market research in new product development. The essentials of that re-assessment are, I believe:-

- Recognising the gap between the complexity of the real world and the reductionism of an artificial test
- Acknowledging that reductionism can, particularly at too early a stage in the process, kill a good idea.
- Finding a more flexible framework that helps us cope better with the complexity of the real world – the world in which our new 'products' have to survive and thrive.

Along the way we are going to have to consider some fairly fundamental questions like:

- What exactly is a new product ?
- How do we represent or explain to potential consumers, something that doesn't yet exist?
- Why do we get it wrong so often?
- Why do so many really successful new products get by, with little formal research input?

Where to begin? Maybe with a rough summary of what tends to happen at present.

"Why do we get it wrong so often?"

4 The Current Approach

In describing the current approach to new product development research I am going to exaggerate somewhat to make my point.

- Most people tend to think of new product development research as consisting of just that; work that is carried out when a new product idea is being considered.
- That is much too narrow a focus, as I will try to explain later.
- Typically, people will tend to focus on techniques – which sort of research do we need to help us make progress.

  Most new product development projects will probably involve some initial exploratory phase of qualitative research to get into the consumers mindset, understand their way of thinking, and so on.

  That is fine, up to a point. If you are only doing your exploratory research at this point in the process however, you are, in all probability, too late. By linking your exploration of consumer needs (or wants) with a specific proposed solution (your new idea), you run the risk of producing results with a heavy overlay of wish fulfilment. I will try to provide illustrations of this as I go along.
- The next likely stage of research (certainly from the end client's perspective) is some form of marketing mix test or simulated test market. Market researchers have invested a great deal of ingenuity in developing scientific models of this kind. They do have an invaluable role to play but we must appreciate their limitations. More importantly, we must see them as only one part of the innovation process. There are other important pieces in the jigsaw and if we don't assemble them properly, we run the risk of deceiving ourselves.

The problem, as I see it, is that this approach is too constraining. There are too many obvious tripwires along the way that allow bad ideas to slip through or that kill good ideas at an early stage in the process.

We need a more flexible model that takes account of the lessons we have learned over the past 20 or 30 years. To help us in that direction I propose to examine some of the pitfalls that I have encountered in this area over the years. I will then try to examine some of the opportunities: the sources of creative breakthroughs that we too often overlook or take for granted. Drawing on these case histories I will then try to outline my framework for the role of research in product development. (If you are a very alert reader you will notice that I have dropped the word "new" from my original brief: for reasons that I hope will become evident later).

5 | Seven Deadly Sins

There are probably more than seven but our time is limited and there are well established precedents for this particular number!

5.1 Failures of understanding

These are particularly likely to arise at the early stages in a new product development project where the product does not yet exist and we have to make do with stimulus material: pictures, words, descriptions etc.

The sin is to assume that when respondents in research are reacting to that stimulus material, they are reacting to the concept or the product itself. We have to take great care to check, in the research process, how well or badly the stimulus material gets across the original intention of the concept or product.

To do this, the researcher has to be very well briefed so that he or she knows exactly what the designer has in mind. The researcher then has to be sensitive enough to have research respondents play back their understanding of the concept, in order to see whether the stimulus material does justice to the concept or not.

A lack of sensitivity in this area can lead to premature death for promising ideas. The solutions are obvious – be careful in your briefing, in the preparation of your stimulus material and in your choice of researcher.

5.2 The mis-measure of significance

Market research has inherited a very valuable idea from statistics. The notion of the significance test. It has become the bane of our lives because almost all non-specialists misunderstand it.

When we do product tests nowadays, we are automatically expected to provide statistical significance test scores along with our results. People take great – too great – comfort from them. Because all they mean is that you can be pretty confident that the test results are measurably close to what you would get if you carried out the test among the population as a whole, rather than just in your small sample.

In other words, it is too easy for us to assume that simply because test results are significant (in the narrow statistical sense) that this translates into a sense of personal significance for the individual consumer. Significance in this area has a completely different meaning and one that is infinitely more important to the success or otherwise of a new product concept. Consider this example.

In 1985 I did some work to gain an understanding of why the baby food brand Milupa was cutting a swathe through the baby foods market. I am sure that the technical excellence of the product had a lot to do with it. But what sticks in my mind is how the design elements of the brand resonated with young mothers: how it gave significant competitive advantage to this brand, relative to competition, from a consumer perspective.

To understand it fully, you have to try to put yourself into the mindset of the mother of a newly born child. The newborn baby is the centre of her universe. Anyone who shares her preoccupation is an ally. All of the detailed product information on the back of the pack may be an offence to certain design sensibilities but they are proof to the young mother that this product is from somebody who really cares.

The colour coding of the various health checks (gluten free etc.) on the pack are further confirmation of this. The foil inner wrap is an added guarantee of freshness (competitors were using greaseproof paper at the time). The fact that the pouch could be removed from the pack and put into even a small handbag was a welcome convenience for mums who wanted to bring the new baby around to friends and relatives. The significance of this, for a woman who has been confined to home in the late stages of her pregnancy, are incalculable.

This is the kind of significance we should be focussing on, in our assessment of the prospects of new concepts or brands.

5.3 Getting the balance wrong

My previous example will, I hope, convince you that I have a keen appreciation of the value of design elements in a successful brand mix. My next, is an attempt to stress the importance of keeping those design elements in their proper perspective.

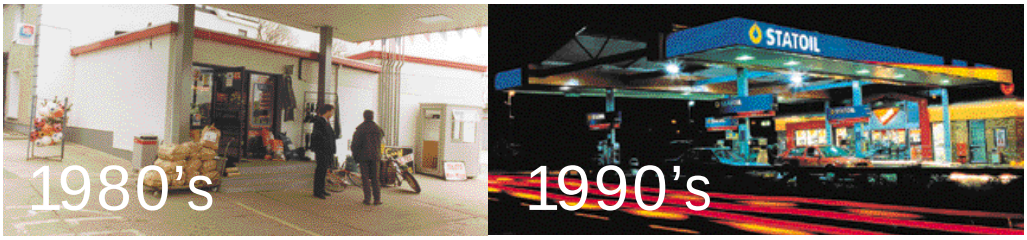
There has been a tendency in recent years for big brands to make public announcements about their marketing strategies, their new advertising campaigns or their logo changes. Somebody, somewhere believes that this is a way of magnifying the impact of the change. I have to say I don't believe this is the case.

More often than not, in my experience, this backfires. It feeds the "no logo" mentality. I don't wish to single out Aer Lingus for special mention here (it is one of my favourite brands) but I think it was a real mistake some years ago for them to publish, in a very high profile fashion, how much they were planning to spend on their new corporate livery. The term "cruisin' for a bruisin'" comes to mind. David Lewis[5] had it right when he suggested that "buzz beats hype". Young consumers, in particular, are more comfortable with communication that comes at them 'under the radar' so to speak.

5.4 Ignoring the fourth dimension

Andrew Lloyd Webber[6] suggests that "love changes everything". I don't know – I wouldn't be qualified to say. I do know one thing that changes everything – time (the fourth dimension).

I have written elsewhere[7] about the initially cool response of consumers to the original notion of mobile phones and ATM's. Most consumers (but not all – an important point we will return to later) had difficulty visualising today's world where we would be lost without these innovations.



Another example: In the early 1990's, when petrol retailers began exploring the notion of delivering a food-to-go option in their outlets they encountered considerable resistance. The idea of buying and eating food in such "smelly" surroundings didn't seem appetising.

To measure the true potential however, it was necessary to take consumers on an imaginary journey into a world where the petrol forecourt was changed utterly and where the forecourt shop would frame the consumer offering in a completely new way.

5.5 The Devil is in the detail

Some new product ideas fail because they don't go far enough. The most obvious example I can think of is the move towards more concentrated washing powders. The producers saw it as a move towards greater convenience for shoppers: smaller packs of more concentrated powders were easier for the shopper to take home from the store.

This was an example of consumers misinterpreting the intended message (as I described earlier). They worried about using too much of the concentrated powder. They were concerned about being taken in by a marketing ploy. The original concentrated powders failed miserably.

It was only when the powder manufacturers moved to a concentrated tablet format that things began to take off. The tablets were a guarantee to the consumer that she wasn't using more than the required dosage. Tablets now account for 50% of the market.

If you look at the pack design for River Rock spring water you won't notice anything particularly surprising. If you compare it with the original design for that brand however you will see an amazing change, and an example of the fact that even a company as accomplished as Coca-Cola can get things wrong when they move into a new market. Their original design was clearly modelled on the early success of Ballygowan but the market had moved on by the time they got their brand to market. They had to play "catch up" very quickly and, did so, I gather, quite successfully.

There are many examples of how small design elements can be used to leverage added value to a brand. One that has really tickled my fancy in recent times has been the use of the red and yellow "blobs" from the MasterCard symbol as avid footfall fans in their recent World Cup TV "stings". I imagine these were relatively inexpensive to produce but the banter between the characters greatly enhanced my sense of that brand being in touch (I particularly enjoyed the misrecollection of a chocolate bar from childhood – "a Cameroon bar"). The series seems to me to have given real life to a relatively standard logo element, but one that is right at the heart of the brand design (so it doesn't get confused).

5.6 Listening and not observing

It is, of course absolutely appropriate that we should listen to consumers. Sometimes however, consumers can mislead us, even when they don't mean to.

I have written elsewhere[8] about the extent to which the National Lottery would be running at a loss if it were to listen to what consumers say about Lotto and how it should be redesigned. You only get at the truth by observing what people do when prize sizes vary.

5.7 Not thinking through the consequences

My illustration of this "sin" provides another example of the importance of observation.

Some years ago, I sat in on a planning meeting in Germany. My Qualis-International colleague Udo Reuter was working on a piece of research to find out why toothpaste sales in Germany were declining. (What would this do to the image of the German people?)

The decline in sales was triggered by a change in the design of toothbrushes. We have all gotten used to the idea of using the head of the toothbrush as the unit of measurement of how much toothpaste we need. Toothbrush heads were getting shorter. You may remember those animated commercials where the person's head hinged completely at the mouth to allow them get the toothbrush behind their back teeth.

In addition, electric toothbrushes tended to have smaller heads. A reduction of even 10% in the amount put on the toothbrush can produce a 10% decline in volumes. I think I am right in saying that a number of the companies who specialise in producing toothpaste also produce toothbrushes. It is a clear example of an innovation turning around and kicking you in the teeth.

That's enough sin. Lets turn to Seven Virtues.

6 | Seven Opportunities

Anybody taking the trouble to read this is probably looking for a little checklist that will stimulate innovative new ideas. My list is not a comprehensive one but it might make a start in that direction.

6.1 Look for Conflict

There is a tendency to look to research as something that provides answers. In the area of product development, we have to force ourselves to think of research as something that also poses questions.

For a new product or idea to succeed it has to resolve some problem or conflict for consumers. The appropriate starting point therefore is to look for areas of conflict.

By way of example, there is a strong latent demand at present for a good and efficient form of under floor heating. Why? Because space is so expensive now that houses and apartments are getting smaller and smaller. Radiators on walls get in the way and they limit the use we can make of available space.

One under-utilised resource in this quest for areas of conflict is the sort of statistics that we are all surrounded by. Anybody who has been half-awake over the past fifteen years will have seen a number of related tendencies:-

- The dramatic rise in people working outside the home, particularly among women
- An even more dramatic increase in car purchases
- A doubling of the proportion of food consumed outside the home

These developments created conflicts for consumers. They created a need for toll-bridges and toll-roads, for food on the go or for Kellogg's Special K bar as a development of the original cereal brand.

This leads me to my next source of opportunity.

6.2 Open Your Eyes

We are all surrounded by examples of clever marketing innovation. Why do we miss so many lessons and opportunities?

I think there are two reasons. Firstly, we look for examples in relation to new products. We forget the fact that most innovations occur in existing products that want, or need, to reinvent themselves.

Secondly we fall victim to a more general tendency that Ed Wilson refers to in his book, whose title I have stolen so shamelessly. He describes how scientific breakthroughs go through five distinct stages in peer group evaluation. They start out as being interesting (hypotheses) and move in turn to being suggestive, persuasive, compelling and finally, obvious. We are all inclined to take these innovations for granted when they get to the point of being obvious. Let me try to illustrate.

Most of us are familiar with the two Cadbury brands, Milk Tray and Cadbury's Roses. Milk Tray has been around for longer and is rather more formal in its overall style. It is the kind of brand you would give as a gift to your mother. Somebody obviously spotted this as a problem area and went on to invent Cadbury's Roses. The semiotics of the Cadbury's Roses pack are completely different from those of Milk Tray: fun, informal, for sharing etc. The latest estimates I have seen in Checkout magazine suggest that Cadbury's Roses is twice as big a brand (in volume sales) as Milk Tray at this stage.

The interesting thing is if you unwrap the Cadbury's Roses sweets you will find that many of them are identical to the sweets in the Cadbury's Milk Tray pack. If my recollection serves me correctly, there are even more that started out life as Milk Tray items, which have transferred across to the Roses selection. (The little half barrel, for example).

The success of this Cadbury innovation sparked a response from Mars who developed their Celebration brand which is also a huge player in this market now. They extended the idea further by taking it into their ice-cream brand options.

Lo and behold, I recently spotted advertising in the Sunday Colour Supplements for a new brand – Magnum Moments – a Unilever response, based on their Magnum brand.

Ed Wilson (again) has coined a nice phrase for this pattern of connectedness

"I link therefore I am"

6.3 Re-invent Yourself

To survive in today's complex and changing world, brands constantly need to re-invent themselves.

The example with which I am most familiar is the Irish Times. If you are a regular reader you probably think that it hasn't changed much over the years. It is not that long ago that it was all produced in a single issue with no colour print. Most of their readers were against the idea of introducing colour, thinking it would turn the Times into a comic.

The Irish Times have been experiencing its own problems recently but these have been primarily in the cost and production area. Where would they be if they hadn't developed the Weekend Section, The Education and Living Section, their Property Section on Thursdays, The Ticket on Wednesdays or their colour magazine on Saturday? Think of the advertising revenues that those sections have generated.

I have deliberately kept any reference to their Sports Supplements to last because this has been such a tough nut to crack. It doesn't generate significant extra ad revenue (as far as I know) but it does, in my view, shift people's perceptions of The Irish Times and get's it in touch with changing reader interests. Tom Humphreys and his colleagues are going a long way towards changing the public face of the Irish Times.

Waterford Crystal is another example of this. Their John Rocha range has added a sense of style to their established craft credentials. It has taken Waterford Crystal out of the glass case and onto people's dining room tables (not to mention adding something like €20 million to their sales in Ireland in the past 12 months).

6.4 Break the Mould

The textbooks tell us that most new launches fail because they don't deliver anything new to the consumer. Frozen pizzas were reasonably well established in this country before Green Isle launched their Goodfellas range. It seems to me that they picked on two highly compelling points of difference in their original launch:-

- The deep-pan option, which, I suspect, was in-tune with Irish palates at the time of launch.
- They broke the mould in terms of personality by foregoing the traditional Italian mama imagery and adopting a more "hard-nosed" persona.

6.5 Invent a Heritage

In his book, "The Soul of the New Consumer"[9] – David Lewis makes a compelling argument. He points out that we, as modern consumers, are inundated with choice and we have less time than ever to make our decisions.

He argues that, in these circumstances, we are strongly attracted towards the authentic. Some product areas can capitalise on this very readily: the wine industry for example. But it is possible to invent a sense of heritage and authenticity. The Clydesdales in the Budweiser advertising (which was specifically chosen as appropriate for the Irish market) have succeeded in creating a mental image of that brand in Ireland, which is entirely different from its image in the home market. Cuisine de France is a compelling example of how even a small producer in Ireland can come up with a winning formula in this regard.

6.6 Do a Damien Duff

I am afraid I couldn't resist this particular reference. I think what makes young Mr. Duff so compelling is the way he gets in under the feet of big defenders and tortures them by doing things that they can't.

Donegal Catch is a lovely example of this. The multinationals had worked out a formula for selling frozen cod product. Their approach left an opportunity for a local manufacturer to fill the gap that the multinationals either didn't see, or found too troublesome.

6.7 Think Well Ahead

In some cases more than others it is necessary to think really far in advance. Look what's happened already to the M50.

Many years back we were asked to do some work for Aer Rianta. They were concerned that, while their Duty Free shops were doing a roaring trade, their Tax Free shops (for watches, jewellery, perfumes and so on) were not doing so well. They had done a number of research projects and didn't seem to be getting anywhere. We suggested a slightly different approach to the research.

We took our respondents to the airport and arranged to take them through check-in and into the Tax Free and Duty Free area, asking them to take notes as they went. We accompanied them on this journey.

The problem became very clear, very quickly. Dublin Airport was rather differently configured at that time. Having checked-in at your desk, you made your way towards the departure gates. The first task was to put bags through the security check. The entrance into the Tax Free area was immediately on the right after the security check. It became very clear that people get flustered in this environment. They feel uncomfortable and are worried about missing their bag or getting it confused with that of another passenger so they grab their bags and move away from the area as quickly as possible.

It was quite clear that most people were 25 or 30 yards beyond the entry point to the Tax Free shop before they even began to settle down.

Aer Rianta opened up the area completely and sales took off.

It sounds simple but our respondents wouldn't have been able to give us the solution if we had been talking to them in Jury's Hotel and relying on their recollections of what happened.

Now to the hard bit. What do all of these pointers suggest about the role of market research in product development. Here are my suggestions.

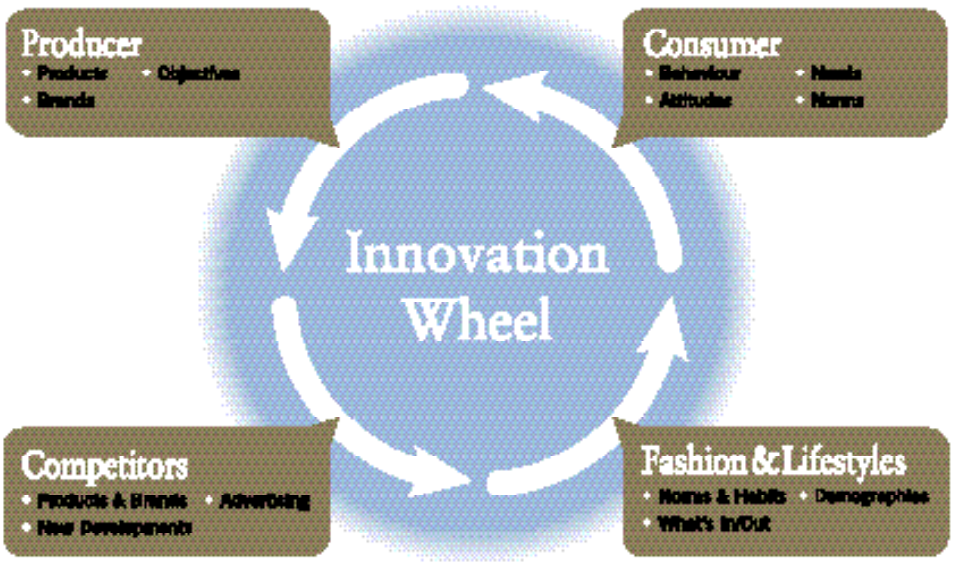
7.1 A need for a wider space

My first suggestion is that innovation takes place in a very wide space and that our research methods need to reflect that.

I referred earlier to the fact that new product development projects tend to be seen in isolation. They benefit greatly from being put into a broader perspective: one which allows us to take account of market changes which lead to consumer conflict, which, in turn, creates the need for our innovations.

Many textbooks would suggest an innovation wheel that looks something like this:

The conventional Innovation Wheel



I would argue that this wheel is, in reality, a “me-too” wheel. It is too reductionist in outlook. To achieve ‘Consilience’ it needs to be balanced by additional elements: ones that are expansionist, challenging and forward thinking.

The real innovations come from seeing things in a wider space like this:-

The Real Innovation Wheel

A great many of the opportunities exist only when we give consideration to new times and new spaces. Our research needs to take this into account. This is where we will find our new creative ideas. If one were testing, for example, the demand for food on the go some years ago, it would have been necessary to identify consumers whose lifestyles dictated that they were experiencing the kind of pressures only now evident to the broad mass of consumers.

One would also need to have taken them into a new kind of space: the sort of environment that exists today on forecourt shops rather than the kind they were familiar with in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. With modern facilities for simulation this shouldn’t be beyond our wit.

7.2 Examine things from different angles (triangulate)

In doing innovation work, it is a real mistake to focus too strongly on the innovation itself and to subject it to artificial scrutiny without taking into account the needs of the consumer and the relationship between the brand and the consumer. What I said earlier in relation to Milupa is perhaps my best example of the benefits that derive from taking the broadest possible view of matters.

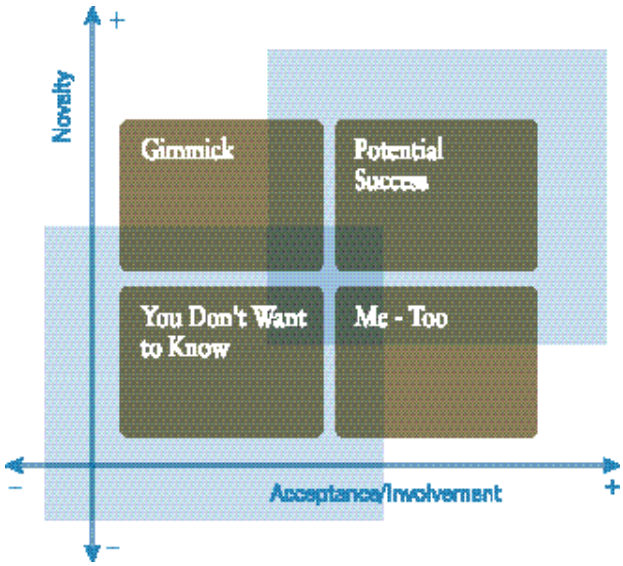
We need to examine the concept or product, the consumer and the relationship between the two.

Each part of the equation needs to be considered under three different headings:-

- Novelty
- Acceptance
- Involvement

Once we have all of our elements analysed in this way, we are in a position to start drawing our data together to reach conclusions. The following simple chart will give an illustration of what I mean here.

Where Do You Want to Be



A new concept that scores high on novelty but relatively low on acceptance or involvement is almost certainly going to end up as a short-term gimmick. One that is high on acceptance or involvement but low on novelty is likely to finish up as a me-too brand. That may be enough for some people.

The real success stories are likely to come from brands that score in terms of acceptance and involvement, and which also bring some new solution to the consumer. Even at that, one has to have some indicator of how frequently the consumer will experience problems to which our innovation offers a consumer solution.

7.3 The need for sequential recycling

One of the real dangers of product development research is in putting "all of your eggs into one basket" and going for a single piece of research that either gives the go-ahead or kills the project dead. I am a strong believer in the notion of sequential recycling in this area. It is vital, in my mind, when really new concepts are being examined.

The idea is to begin the research programme on a small scale with your initial stimulus material. You then review the results, adjust the stimulus material and go back to consumers a second time. You continue this process until you have fine-tuned things properly.

The Nobel Prize Winner – Herbert Simon had the right idea when he said the following:

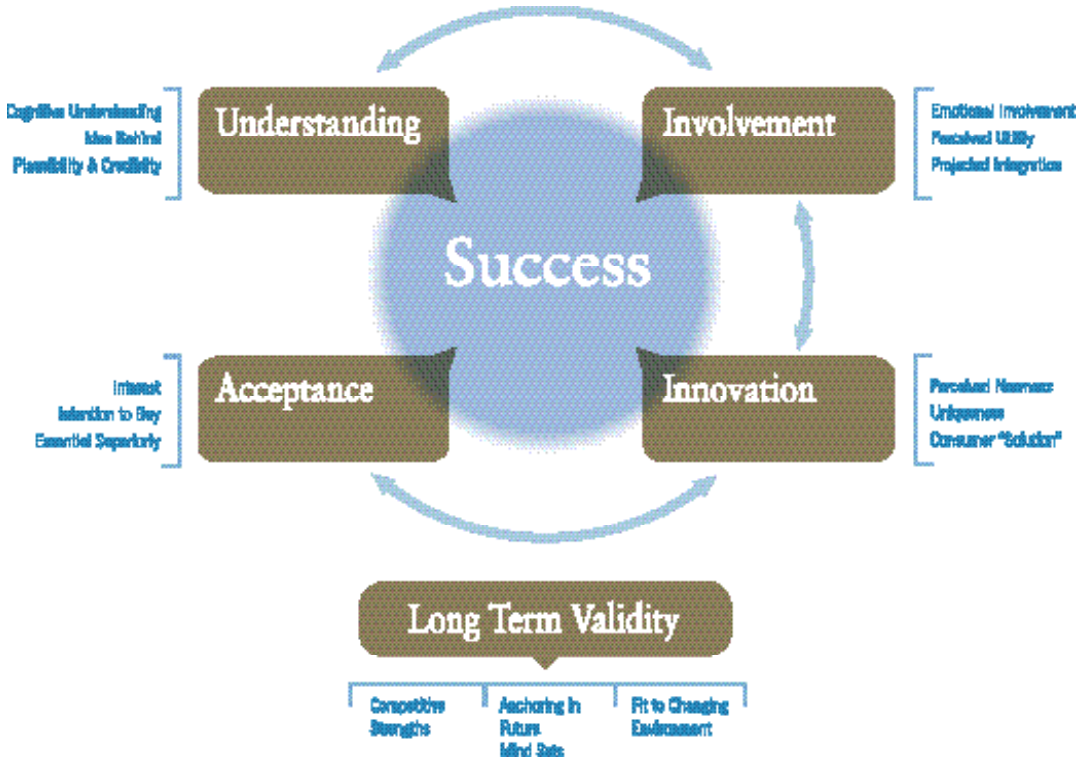
> What chiefly characterizes creative thinking from more mundane forms are
> i. Willingness to accept vaguely defined problem statements and gradually structure them,
> ii. Continuing preoccupation with problems over a considerable period of time and
> iii. Extensive background knowledge in relevant, and potentially relevant, areas

7.4 A flexible framework

In the early part of this essay I suggested that people get too hung up on research techniques when working on innovation research. Of course it is true that techniques have to be robust enough for the task we set them.

But what is much more important, from my point of view, is that the research programme should cover all the factors that are going to determine the success or failure of the venture. My final chart is an attempt to summarise what these are.

Factors of Success



The technocrats can have arguments as to which is the best research method to explore any of these elements. The key issue from the standpoint of the user of the research is to ensure that none of these elements is overlooked entirely in the planning process.

To sum up, I would say:

1. Look at the big picture
2. Choose respondents with care (people who are “living in the future”)
3. Don’t ignore the fourth dimension, time
4. Don’t confuse statistical significance with marketing significance
5. Focus on concepts, not research techniques or “products”
6. Create space (and time) to fine tune things.
7. Don’t leave the brand champion alone. Utilise all your resources. You’ll need them.

7.5 The Last Word

The case I have been trying to argue in this essay is for a less technocratic and more of a conceptual approach to product development research. I believe firmly that this approach is much more likely to facilitate innovative ideas and to ensure that the good ones see the light of day.

I am also of the view that communications between the interested parties – designer, producer and researcher will improve if we talk in a language that we all understand – one that is based on clear concepts without the interference of technical terms that can often serve to mislead (significance for example).

I am conscious however that some of my colleagues, of a more artistic leaning than myself may find the notion of any framework too limiting. They may share Emily Dickinson's view that:

> "We shall find the Cube of the Rainbow,
> Of that, there is no doubt.
> But the Arc of a Lover's conjecture
> Eludes the finding out"

They might be interested to read Christopher Vogler's book – The Writer's Journey(10). He is a man who has made lots of money assessing film scripts for Hollywood. In the book he sets out his model for successful storytelling. It, in turn, is borrowed from the ideas of Joseph Campbell(11). I suspect that if we could trace these ideas back far enough we would find their counterparts in Greek culture. We might even run into our old friend Eratosthenes.

The key element in these storytelling models is that they are expansionist rather than reductionist in nature. They don't attempt to distil things to their core essence. They add layers of detail and character to make things interesting; to bring them to life.

Marketing people need to balance their understandable reductionist tendencies (to discover what needs to be done) with a more expansionist approach to exploring the rich range of possibilities of how we can achieve our goals.

We can achieve this "Consilience" by paying as much attention to exploring the opportunities presented by new times and new places (expansionism) as to the process of reducing problems to their core essence. We have to appreciate that the core essence of a brand is only our starting point – however valuable it may be.