



Five Tips for Creating Effective Concepts

info@safllc.com
<https://www.safllc.com>

Five Easy Tips for Creating Concepts That Work

Overview

If you're a researcher, you've no doubt heard about "concepts". Concepts are ideas that can come from many places, such as R&D, in reaction to competitive activity, or as "blue sky" what-if explorations.

Management consultant Peter Drucker was known for saying that companies have just two functions: marketing and innovation. If so, a concept is where these two functions intersect.

A marketing concept is a factual and/or emotional representation of an idea that describes features and benefits with the goal of persuading the prospect to become a buyer.

Evaluating and diagnosing concepts is a process called concept testing. Depending upon the company, this process ranges from being highly disciplined and rigorous, to somewhat loose and ad hoc.

The jury is out with respect to which approach is better; our belief is that a process with at least some standards/rigor allows marketing to determine how new ideas perform vs. those that may have been previously tested.

Please give us a call to discuss your concept testing needs. We welcome the conversation and look forward to helping you build great concepts and a great business!

Surveys & Forecasts, LLC

info@safllc.com

(203) 255-0505

Five Tips for Writing Great Concepts

#1: Stick To A Standard Format

Using a standardized format helps minimize bias caused by differences in idea presentation, letting you compare across time. A concept could be constructed to have the following format and key elements:

- A clear and concise headline that speaks to the primary end-benefit.
- A secondary sub-headline that plays off of the primary message.
- Product image – usually framed in the top ¼ of an 8"x11" page.
- More detailed copy on features, solutions, or usage occasions.
- At the bottom ¼ of the page: a tag line that reinforces the primary selling theme, available product sizes, pricing, distribution info, etc.
- The same format can be used to represent new ideas, flankers, line extensions, or the repositioning of an existing product.

#2: Avoid Subtle Differences

Our firm has conducted hundreds of concept tests and the one mistake that is continually repeated is assuming that consumers either care about or can react to subtle differences in features and benefits.

As a rule, subtle differences in concepts do not matter. Unless your concepts are technical or industrial, you are better served by concepts with just the bare facts and then varying emotional content or relevance.

Creative talent at your agency, or a product development consulting firm, can help you craft great copy that can make a meaningful difference in how concepts are interpreted. Use your best creative hat when developing concepts for consumer testing and make the presentation of your stimuli fun and engaging.

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#3: Don't Slam The Competition

Research has shown that consumers dislike brand comparisons, and especially those that attack a competitor directly. When creating a concept, it's perfectly fine to focus on the benefits and positive story that your product or service offers, but avoid negative attacks on the competition.

When going on the attack against a competitor, you are effectively insulting the current users of that brand. Chances are good that a fairly high percentage of individuals in your sample will be using the brands you are denigrating. Instead, focus on the positive story. Emphasize the unique benefits (functional or emotional) that your brand offers, and avoid the negative halo that comes with slamming the competition.

#4: Keep It Pithy

In an age of ever-increasing distraction, consumers do not have the time or interest in reading an exhaustive concept description. Particularly in an online format, and even when using a double opt-in consumer panel as your sample, biometric data consistently shows that most respondents simply scan rather than read.

While it is unfortunate that respondents are not maintaining the highest possible level of attention when reading your concept description, this is the reality all marketers now face. The implications of this are rather stark: choose language that a 5th grader can understand, and avoid complex sentence structure or linguistic devices that will most certainly get glossed over when reading and interpreting your idea.

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#5: Leverage Images

An image is an extremely powerful tool to support your concept or new product idea, and can be used for a multitude of purposes: to show product function, convey a persona, use occasions, set the tone, and emotion.

However, if we are talking about the use of images in the context of a concept testing system for a company, and there is a need for comparing ideas across time/studies (as is typical), the use of images is open for debate.

Why are images a 'problem'? Images can easily overpower the factual details of a concept, and make subsequent comparisons between concepts (i.e., improvements or iterations) more difficult.

For example, let's say that you achieved much higher purchase interest in a recent concept test versus a previously tested version. Was the improvement solely due to the fact that you included a more appealing image this time around? What conclusions can we draw about the merits of the idea?

This gets back to the fundamental purpose of concept testing, which is to help companies allocate scarce new product development resources in the most effective manner possible. While not an exact science, concept testing is the best way to evaluate the merits of an individual idea.

Ordinarily, in concept screening or early-stage concept testing, we recommend that images be avoided. Images are best left for later-stage concept development (i.e., testing for advertising and communications purposes) when marketing plans are being constructed. The inclusion of images is best left to stages that come after the core concept has been assessed.

Just One More Thing

Study Design & Key Questions

Concept tests are evaluative and diagnostic research studies (the most common designs are “monadic” and “sequential monadic”). We distinguish these from “screening designs” in which a large number of concepts are screened for the sole purpose of separating winners from losers. The difference between all of these variants is the number of questions asked.

Monadic designs show one idea per respondent. This mimics “real world” exposure (i.e., a single presentation). Sequential monadic designs expose concepts in sequence. For cost reasons, sequential monadic is the most common, and concepts in 1st position is effectively a monadic exposure.

Make sure that the survey sample is appropriate for your category (i.e., narrow enough so that concepts are relevant, but broad enough so that you can attract prospects from a broad audience).

Depending upon “state of finish”, the type and number of measures varies significantly. Most typically, measures include the following:

- Purchase interest (and/or use of a constant sum scale)
- Open-ended reasons for purchase interest, main point communication
- Overall rating (excellent to poor)
- Voluntary positives (e.g., likes) and negatives (e.g., dislikes)
- Value, uniqueness, superiority, believability, relevance
- Degree of fit with manufacturer’s image
- Anticipated purchase frequency, purchase quantity
- Usage occasions/situations would use
- Replacement vs. addition use
- Attribute ratings (e.g., 10-20 items)
- Classification and demographic questions