

CASE STUDY

Food Ingredient Trade Association: Measuring Public Opinion Leads to Surprising Results



CHALLENGE

Measure consumer attitudes toward a widely used food ingredient and help the trade association build business strategies based on research findings. Uncover consumer concerns about product use and the higher order attitudes, consequences and values that consumption represents. Conduct ongoing tracking studies to measure the effectiveness of the business strategies.

OUTCOME

Research showed the ingredient is not the top-of-mind concern for consumers that many in the industry believed, which has ramifications for manufacturers' marketing and product formulation decision-making. The studies identified educational opportunities and showed increased awareness of facts related to the ingredient when measuring educational campaigns over the course of the study.

METHODOLOGY

IDI Laddering & RDD Telephone Survey

In an atmosphere of controversy and misinformation propagated in the press, through online channels and via word of mouth, public opinion may not be what we perceive it to be. Such turned out to be the case with this ingredient.

SITUATION

Despite years of safe use in foods and beverages and annual sales topping \$4 billion, concern about the ingredient had bubbled up in blogs, opinion pieces and advertising. Much of the information presented to consumers on the web and in the media was inaccurate and often confusing.

The ingredient's trade organization contracted with The MSR Group for an ongoing study beginning in 2008. They wanted research that would quantify consumer perceptions and help them develop appropriate educational messages to address knowledge and image issues. As part of the ongoing tracking study, The MSR Group also measured the impact of those educational efforts.

METHODOLOGY

The MSR Group first unraveled consumer concerns through an IDI Laddering interview process talking with 50 primary grocery shopping moms across the US. These young moms (many of them Millennials) discussed their food and ingredient fears and, through the laddering technique, raised the higher order values important to them as they consider what to eat themselves and what to feed their children.

This emotional topic was clarified and refined into messaging that was communicated through television and online advertising and a B-to-B outreach campaign.

To quantify attitudes and track marketing results, the MSR Group has surveyed more than 19,000 consumers over the last six years. Participants are age 18 and older and the primary grocery shoppers in their households. This includes a representative sample of Millennials, and their unique attitudes compared to other age cohorts is one of the ongoing metrics that is monitored.

Surveys are conducted by phone, with the data weighted to represent the U.S. population in terms of age, education, race and household composition.

RESULTS

The research has consistently shown that, while there are some negative impressions regarding the ingredient, those concerns are not top-of-mind for consumers. In fact, those expressing unaided concern have always numbered in the single digits. These results are further supported when looking at sales data for products that have removed the ingredient. A move to an “ingredient-free” product has not resulted in increased market share.

Consumer label reading, diet, health and media habits are continually monitored for a holistic view of the consumer that has led to shopper segmentation for use by the food and beverage industry.

SUMMARY

The MSR Group was able to provide statistically reliable information on consumer opinions regarding a controversial product and then track changes in those measurements over time. The trade association used what they learned from the data to develop educational campaigns for multiple audiences. They created webinars, partnered with industry publications, and tailored educational messages to address needs the research uncovered.

CONCLUSIONS

Quality market research can help align product development and marketing decisions with what customers want and need. In this case, there was a gap between what many in the industry believed was consumers’ top priority and what research showed to be reality.

The research program designed by The MSR Group helped the association more clearly understand consumers’ knowledge and beliefs, develop appropriate business strategies around them, and monitor the effectiveness of ongoing educational campaigns.