



BY ANDREW PIERCE

'QUANTILITATIVE' RESEARCH & BEYOND: NEW PLATFORMS FOR CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

ONLINE COMMUNITIES TAP SHOPPERS' MINDS

WEB 2.0 IS doing a lot more than simply facilitating exciting new ways to establish a brand's relevance with customers. On the marketing science side, it's driving an equally exciting morphing of methodologies and the ways we use them. In short, we're seeing a redefinition of the capabilities in the traditional analytics toolbox.

Call it a more integrated approach to research. Or, as Erik Long, who leads Prophet's customer research and analytics group, puts it, "quantilitative" research. Whatever you call it, it's leading to a happy marriage of the old qualitative and quantitative pieces, with new Web-based capabilities to create broad new platforms to develop customer insights. As Erik points out, it's a muscular convergence with three appeals to marketing professionals. It saves time, it saves money, and it delivers deeper insights into marketing and branding issues.

Here's how to think about it. Two major concerns of marketers on the analytic side are their ability to do both strategic customer segmentation and behavioral targeting. Traditionally, you would first undertake the segmentation part of the

puzzle, then move on to behavioral targeting to refine your focus, and finally, to qualitative concept testing.

Now, how much more value would you get out of doing them concurrently? Can it be done in a manner that not only generates innovative insights, but at the same time builds a greater sense of community around the brand? The answer is yes, as we witness the emergence of exciting new Web-enabled tools.

Numerous businesses, for example, are tapping into Watertown, Mass.-based Communispace's private, online customer communities, which offer multiple ways to establish meaningful dialogue with and among customer segments. These conversations, in turn, offer enhanced insights to marketers in real time.

Contrast that instantaneous access to your customers with focus groups, an expensive and time-consuming exercise. Frequently, after analyzing the comments made by focus group participants, you wind up raising more questions than you answer.

picked dog owners called "I Love My Dog," inviting them to help create new products, test new marketing campaigns and generally create a buzz about Del Monte offerings.

It tapped into the group for ideas on doggie treats, seeking consensus on what committed dog owners most wanted to feed their pet in the morning. The answer: something like bacon and eggs, but a treat that would be healthier. The San Francisco-based company responded with Snausages Breakfast Bites, which combined the requisite flavor with extra vitamins and minerals.

It's vital for marketing executives to broaden the lens through which they view their customers. Web 2.0 facilitates that. San Francisco-based MarketTools, for example, offers software that allows marketers in the retail space to balance what customers say (through traditional survey tools) against what they actually do in a virtual shopping experience.

Through the program, entire shelves of consumer products are arranged just the way a shopper would see them at the local super-

market. Enlisting virtual shoppers, researchers can see in real time how combinations of packaging, promotion and prices influence the purchase decision. In one instance, this approach led to the revelation that customers would be more likely to buy a new product positioned among other like, competing products—not alongside other similar products in the same brand family. That was directly counter to conventional wisdom.

In today's world, the challenge to marketers is to develop integrated tools to yield deeper, more impactful insights about the "who, what, when, where, why and how" about their customers and brands. Companies gaining those insights in a more iterative, test-and-learn manner are well on their way to realizing what marketing effectiveness is truly all about. **m**

Hallmark Cards has been a pioneer in this area, creating a customer community dubbed "Hallmark Idea Exchange (IdEx)." Working with Communispace, the Kansas City, Mo.-based company recruited a group of 200 mothers with young children at home to participate in everything from brainstorming ideas to assessing merchandising strategies to pricing.

Participating at least a half hour weekly, participants discuss their wants, needs and product preferences, giving Hallmark critical insights into its customer base. In turn, Hallmark spurs ongoing discussions by introducing strategically relevant topics and soliciting new initiatives with the simple query: "What ideas do you have for us this month?" Hallmark reports the online community generates about 10 to 15 concrete ideas every month.

Del Monte Foods followed a similar path when it was mulling the idea of a breakfast treat for dogs to join such existing products as Milk-Bone and Kibbles 'n Bits. It first built an online community of 400 hand-



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