

HOW NESTLÉ USED AGILE RESEARCH TO ACHIEVE A HIGHER CONCEPT SUCCESS RATE

“Every time we talked about one-pot cooking, which we thought was really clear, consumers always took it to mean using their slow cooker. At that moment we realized we had to rethink our idea. Qualitative learning helped us pivot away from an idea we felt was easily understood to the space of slow cookers which turned out to be much more broadly appealing.”

Derron Wrubel,

Innovation Consultant, Foods Division at Nestlé USA

The Challenge

New product development requires flexible decision-making and quick pivoting when necessary. In order to meet these challenges, product teams have to constantly innovate on the way they think about and approach research.

When Nestlé’s product team began brainstorming new prepared meal ideas designed for two-person eating occasions, they realized a potentially exciting area to focus on was how to get consumers more involved in the cooking process, versus just putting a frozen meal in the microwave or oven.

Armed with a promising direction, Nestlé needed to approach the research phase in a way that

- Captured consumer insights around various meal ideas early on in the product development process, and
- Allowed for fast pivots away from bad ideas so they could spend important time and resources on stronger opportunities.



The Solution

Traditionally Nestlé's product team follows a stage-gate process in which research is infrequent and completed with fully developed stimuli. But for this initiative, the team decided to use agile research to get a quick quantitative read first on some simple ideas, and then do a qualitative deep-dive on the winning ideas. During each of the research phases to follow, they continued to look for actionable insights to help them narrow down, refine, and validate meal concepts and an accompanying creative strategy, and ultimately took a successful new product to market.

The Research

The GutCheck and Nestlé teams conducted four phases of research together to identify the best meal concept(s) and the accompanying creative strategy.

Phase 1:

The Nestlé team had previously brainstormed and created meal concepts for their ideal target audience. The team then came to GutCheck to conduct further research to uncover new insights on the appeal of one-pot meals.

In the first phase, the research team paired both quantitative and qualitative research, starting with an online quantitative Concept Prioritizer™ on 30+ meal ideas based on key metrics including appeal, uniqueness, fit with brand, and value for the price.

With the winning subset of five ideas, qualitative research was conducted via an online qualitative Concept Refiner™ to get a better understanding of consumers' likes and dislikes, appeal, personal relevance, and purchase intent.



I like that there are no preservatives, that really connected with me. I like that it comes with a sauce, veggies AND spices because it sounds like it may actually taste more complex than the other things we are used to in this category. I only feel like the 'one pot' idea is unclear; is it for a crockpot or what?



From the qualitative feedback, the Nestlé team realized a deeper exploration around slow cooking was still needed, as the concept of a one-pot meal wasn't resonating fully with their target consumers. As such, the team went back to the drawing board to conduct exploratory research on attitudes and behaviors.

Quant



Concept Prioritizer is a quick quantitative test that presents a set of stimuli (concepts, ideas, images, names, varieties, etc.) to targeted consumers to rate on key metrics. Statistical testing is leveraged to identify top performers confidently.

Qual



Concept Refiner is an online qualitative study that gathers targeted feedback on concepts and identifies key areas to fine tune.

Phase 2:

In phase 2, the GutCheck research team conducted an online ethnography via an Exploratory Research Group™ to help the Nestlé team understand more about why the one-pot concepts weren't connecting with their consumers in phase 1 of the research. Here, the team wanted to understand consumers' likes and dislikes about current meal products in the market, identifying pain points to address based on how consumers talked about cooking, as well as selling points in the slow cooking category.



Qual



An Exploratory Research Group is an online qualitative study that helps people learn about a target audience's attitudes and behaviors using exploratory questions and moderated discussion boards.

Phase 3:

Using a Concept Enhancer™, GutCheck and the Nestlé team gained a better understanding around consumer language by listening to consumers describe the conveniences and challenges of slow cooking, as well as their likes and dislikes, to help Nestlé know how to enhance the functional and emotional benefits.

Qual



A Concept Enhancer is an online qualitative study that presents a set of early-stage concepts and gathers consumer feedback from discussion to identify opportunities to enhance and evolve.

Phase 4:

The Nestlé team worked with another vendor for this phase where they used a quantitative methodology for validation and conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews and in-home usage tests to further optimize the winning concepts and evaluate them for success, before turning the product over to the brand team.

Phase 5:

A final online quantitative survey was conducted via a Creative Prioritizer™ in the last phase before product launch to help with creative direction by comparing the performance of four storyboards based on key metrics like purchase intent, enjoyment, engagement, and clarity, as well as open-end analytics including initial reactions and brand and product memorability. From the survey, the team identified two storyboards to refine prior to validation testing.

Quant



Creative Prioritizer is an online quantitative test that presents a set of stimuli (campaign ideas, logos, comps, copy, etc.) to targeted consumers to rate on key metrics. Statistical testing is leveraged to identify top performers quickly and confidently.

The Results

Nestlé's product team launched Slow Cooker Meal Starters following a wealth of consumer insights and after pivoting away from weaker ideas during development.

Here's what they learned:

- Incorporating consumer feedback early and often guaranteed purposeful iterations and gave the Nestlé team greater confidence going into validation.
- Getting feedback in the consumer's language was critical for connecting with the consumer.
- The team found they didn't need large online communities to reach their consumers, that even a small sample size of 20 consumers or less could identify patterns that would be present in a much larger data set.
- Having a strategic partner who could stay flexible, adaptive, and responsive during all phases of new product development was invaluable.

Our concept success rate has improved dramatically since we started taking the time to get our insights and benefits right and in consumer language.

Derron Wrubel,

Innovation Consultant, Foods Division at Nestlé USA

GutCheck helped us quickly optimize our slow cooker TV creative which led to strong growth for the brand.

Rob Sapinkopf,

Stouffer's Frozen, Consumer & Marketplace Insights

Detailed Results



Prioritized and developed meal concepts, narrowing down to the top five; explored cooking behavior



Refined storyboard concepts to develop a creative go-to-market strategy



Refined the emotional and functional benefits of slow cooking; validated final concepts



Surprise Result: pivoted entirely away from the concept of “one-pot meals” to better capture what consumers really thought was being talked about, which was slow cooker meals; a market trend analysis opened a door for this finding by showing slow cooking is on the rise



Launched a slow cooker meal product into the market



In innovation there is a lot of failure, and I've had a lot of products I've really believed in never make it to market. We were able to take [the slow cooker meal concept] from literally the seed of an idea all the way through each phase to get to this level of success. So I couldn't be happier that our Slow Cooker Meal Starters are meeting the consumer need we identified and achieving this level of success.

Derron Wrubel,
Innovation Consultant, Foods Division at Nestlé USA

About GutCheck

At GutCheck, we invented agile market research to provide our clients with actionable answers and insights, globally, at the speed of their business. Our team of full-service agile research experts leverages our online qualitative and quantitative platform to help our clients think smarter, act faster, and gain unprecedented understanding.

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