

# Sampling Trends 2010

## Special Interest Articles:

- Free Sampling Planning help from Sampling Advisors
- Peel 'n Taste samples improve ROI for food & beverage brands
- The economy forces brands to take a more conservative approach to sampling – utilizing proven programs

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By Cindy Johnson, President Sampling Advisors  
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## Product Sampling in 2010

Product sampling lost some ground in 2009 as many brands experienced significant budget cuts due to the economy. Because sampling is planned so far out and has no tie to retailer plans, it's unfortunately one of the first things to go when budgets are cut. But it appears confidence has returned and brands are again investing in the *consumers most preferred method of marketing*; product sampling.

Sampling Advisors has been assisting several brands with 2010 sampling plans and has also been reviewing sampling vendor capabilities over the past several months, preparing for upcoming sampling programs.

This paper will review some of the programs that remain consistently strong, as well as some new programs which

seem to offer unique ways to reach consumers with a product sample. For more sampling tools, white papers, and other information about sampling planning, visit SEA's website at....  
[www.samplingeffectiveness.com](http://www.samplingeffectiveness.com)



## How the Economy is Impacting Product Sampling

Just a couple of years ago, more than 80% of shoppers were making brand decisions at the grocery store. But a lack of disposable income, unemployment, and other issues have caused that number to flip. Now almost 80% of consumers are making their purchase decisions at home. They are making shopping lists, they are cutting spending, and they are using coupons to make the most of their budget. Not long ago, brands tried to reach consumers with samples where they worked or

played. Shoppers spent most of their time outside the home. Few consumers utilized a shopping list or even considered their purchases at home.

But the economy is impacting product sampling strategy; In-home sampling has become more popular recently. While direct mail can sometimes be expensive, there are other ways to get the sample in-home (besides a solo mailed sample). The brand marketer should also

strive to make the product part of the consumer's next shopping trip by including a coupon. With stores stocking as many as 30,000 different items, providing the consumer with information on where to find the brand in store is helpful. The brands website can also provide helpful information; some brands have included "store finders" to aide consumers in locating the product.

## Continued Sampling Success Story



In a look back at the list of sampling suppliers who were operating businesses in 2004 when Sampling Advisors started its business, many of the companies have disappeared over the years. Sampling can be a fickle business. While it's one of the best marketing tools a Brand Manager could use, brands are in and out of programs depending on what new initiatives they have, management strategy, and budget availability.

Few vendors/ programs have stood the test of time and continue to deliver strong results. One program that continues to be a favorite is IDR's Catalog Package Sampling Program. The Brand Marketer selects a group of Cataloger's and Internet Retailers which would reach its target (i.e., Disney's catalog for "moms with small children"). The brands sample is inserted with the order consumers have placed with the

Cataloger. Because they are expecting the package, there's a 100% open rate – which results in high trial and purchase rates. Costs are relatively low because the order is going to the consumer anyway and the sample is simply riding along with it. Because this program delivers efficient, effective sampling, brands continue to use this program to reach their target consumer with samples. Not surprising - IDR is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year!




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*"Consumers going thru life changes are more apt to try new products and make changes within the category."*

## Sampling consumers at life change-points

Another type of successful sampling program is one that reaches consumers at life-change points. Target Media Solutions created a sampling program with Destination Maternity stores, targeting over 2MM expectant women per year. With controlled distribution and proof-of-delivery provided, over 90% of advertisers return. Due to the model's strong

success, TMS was hired by another leading niche retailer, David's Bridal to create a similar program – reaching over 1MM brides-to-be. In addition to the co-op and solo sampling programs, prom-dress buyers can be targeted as well. Since brands share the costs of a co-op program and duplication is controlled by

limiting the gift-bags to one per consumer – both programs offer brands an efficient and effective way of reaching consumers at these life change-points. There are some other vendors who offer brands other life entry/change point sampling opportunities; choose experienced vendors to be sure your investment is maximized.

## Overcoming Event Sampling Challenges

Many brands like the experience of sampling at an event. Not only does the consumer receive the brand sample but the excitement of the event and buzz generated by reaching so many consumers at one time intrigues many brands.

However the pitfalls of event marketing can scare off even

the most confident brand promotion agency. It's very difficult to control sample quantities and provide just one sample to each consumer under these circumstances. That was until Nu-Board Media came up with a concept which controls any risk of sample waste. They developed a "fanny pack" for the seats

consumers sit in. Each seat is branded with information from the brand and the sample is inserted in a protective cover. While it sounds expensive, costs are affordable because the staff manages all of this in advance of the event and negotiates rates directly with the venue. For more info contact Nu-Board media at [www.nuboardmedia.com](http://www.nuboardmedia.com)

## How to get FREE expert help with sampling planning!

Owner Cindy Johnson saw a great need to help brands think through their sampling objectives and put together solid sampling plans; programs which would deliver positive results and the highest ROI. That was the concept behind SEA – Sampling Effectiveness Advisors. Because marketers have so many other responsibilities, it's a



challenge to devote the amount of time necessary to the sampling plan that needs to be invested, to get optimal results.

However marketers were already having a hard time stretching their budgets to get out all the samples they needed to. Even though they needed the help, they didn't seem to think they could afford the cost. ***That's why Sampling Advisors now offers this service for free!*** Many sampling vendors had offered SEA a commission to help present their capabilities and sampling programs to brands. Needing to keep an impartial objective, SEA had

to turn down that opportunity. Instead, SEA is now presenting marketers with many different sampling options by working with vendors to obtain proposals. SEA assesses their targeting capabilities, experience, pricing, etc. then makes a recommendation to the brand. After plans are developed, SEA's small fee is passed along to the vendor(s) who is awarded the business. The brand is happy to have a 3<sup>rd</sup> party expert help them put together a solid plan (at no cost to them) and the sampling vendor is more than happy to get some business while covering SEA's small consulting fee. When starting your sampling plans, contact Cindy Johnson at SEA to utilize her 20 years experience in product sampling/ marketing.

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## New Technology provides Brands with new options

Many product categories have been limited on the types of sample delivery vehicles they could utilize in the past due to issues such as refrigeration, package limitations, weight of the sample, or legal restrictions (for alcoholic beverages).

That was until **First Flavor** came up with a patent-pending technology which replicates the flavor of a product - in a quick dissolving edible film

strip. These **Peel 'n Taste** flavor strips are distributed through individually packaged pouches. The film strip gives the consumer the same taste-experience as the actual product. Many food and beverage brands have been limited to targeting shoppers in grocery stores, via in-store demonstrators or bearing the cost of expensive (and sometimes wasteful) events. If the brand

required refrigeration, obviously mailing a sample to the brand's target consumer was not an option. The new Peel 'n Taste sample technology provides both alcohol and non-alcoholic beverages with a "bevy" of sampling options! Visit First Flavors website at [www.firstflavor.com](http://www.firstflavor.com)



Peel 'n Taste Sample



*Utilize free media by having consumers promote your new brand/product by placing a sample request icon on their Facebook page!*

## Social Media – via internet sampling

Start Sampling provides brands with an opportunity to do targeted internet (request-based) sampling.

Media is placed on the websites the brands target might visit, allowing them to request a brand sample. At the time the request is made, the consumer can also elect

to place the brand icon on their My Space, Facebook, Twitter page, etc. – where their friends will see it. It becomes a free media vehicle.

There's no additional media cost; consumers are given the tools to help promote the brand. Behind the scenes, Start Sampling manages all the

sampling requests and marketers receive the benefit of shipping efficiencies by being part of Start Sampling's larger mailing volume.

Brand Marketers can track sample requests (and mailings) in real time via Start Samplings website. For more info....  
[www.startsampling.com](http://www.startsampling.com)

## Do your sampling programs measure up?



It's amazing that some brands will spend millions of dollars to promote their new product, giving out millions of samples – yet they won't spend a couple thousand for market research to measure results! Unfortunately, not all sampling programs work and some definitely work better than others.

Without a consistent measurement strategy, and a way of comparing apples-to-apples, how will your brand ever improve trial & purchase conversion results? Without measurement of purchase, there's no way to determine ROI or compare one program to another. New ways of

fielding market research have really brought the cost down in recent years; there's no reason why a brand shouldn't spend a couple thousand to get some learning about how the program performed. Contact Cindy at SEA to find out how easy it is!

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## The Pro's & Con's of In-Store Sampling

***“In-store Demo's work best for food and beverage brands – especially those which require preparation.”***

Having researched the results of a recent in-store sampling program for a client, SEA was both disappointed and delighted with some of the findings.

On one hand, in-store demos are a great way for food and beverage brands to convince consumers to try their product. Some in-store demonstrators are better than others; a few really helped push the samples and got people to try them who normally might not have. By

the same token, forcing samples on a consumer who is not the target – who is not likely to be interested in the product – could be a waste of the brands valuable resources! If your food or beverage brand has distribution issues, sampling in a store which carries the product will avoid wasting the samples on consumers who might not normally be able to find the product. The biggest issue SEA found was the lack of accountability by the in-store demo company. The

retailer uses a 3<sup>rd</sup> party company to manage their demos. So the in-store demonstrators are not accountable to anyone at the retail level. They are able to start when they want, leave when they want – and they don't even have to make sure there's product available in the store. This lack of accountability can be disastrous for the brand. Take every precaution to make sure things go as planned. Questions? Contact Sampling Advisors.

## Should your promotion agency manage your brand's sampling plan?

Many CPG companies are delegating the product sampling plan to the promotion agencies working on the brands business. Depending on the agency, the experience of the account person, and the brands sampling strategy – there may be opportunities to improve the brands results.

One reason Sampling Advisors was started was because most brand marketers only manage the sampling plan for a year before they move onto another assignment. Unfortunately a year just doesn't give the marketer

enough experience to make the types of decisions which need to be made to get optimal results. The same issue applies to most promotion agencies; many times the account person lacks the experience or background in product sampling which is required to get the best results.

Another issue uncovered by SEA is that quite often the agency will execute the sampling program themselves rather than hire a more experienced sampling vendor. One of the most important factors in getting good results is using experienced suppliers. Established programs have historically performed much better than new sampling

programs. Each additional execution gives the vendor opportunities to improve results. (Even if the vendor has sampling experience, make sure it's in the type of program you want to do.)

How do you include the agency and still utilize the experience of a qualified sampling vendor? By having Sampling Effectiveness Advisors act as a consultant and review the plans with you. SEA will work with the agency to complete the sampling plan and ensure the best strategies are taken. Where appropriate, experienced sampling vendors will be asked to provide proposals on distributing the brands samples. SEA can provide perspective on which programs will deliver the best results. Together, the agency and SEA will complete the plan and delegate sample distribution to the most qualified vendors. (Note: SEA's fee will be paid by sampling vendors.)

## Targeting Young Professionals with Samples

Sampling Advisors doesn't usually get into the business of distributing samples; there are many qualified companies with years of experience who can usually deliver the results brands are looking for. However when it comes to testing a small idea, SEA has a lot of experience in thinking through how to isolate a target, design a test, and measure the results so that the program can later be rolled out into a national program.

One target SEA has had a lot of interest in is Young

Professionals. When owner Cindy Johnson worked at P&G, she designed a co-op program for brands who wanted to reach young professionals. While there are several ways to reach the target (i.e., fitness clubs, night clubs, etc.), few ways offer a medium designed to reach only Young Professional. So SEA developed a database of various young professional organizations across the country and can develop a custom sampling program for brands by recruiting those YP organizations that fit the brands profile.

(Some are female only, some are African-American clubs, some are focused on social networking, some are cause-related, etc.) Delivering samples at their events gives brands the opportunity to get additional word-of-mouth about the product. Market research can easily be incorporated into a sampling program to give the brand results they can use to determine how the program should be expanded. Contact Cindy Johnson at SEA for more info.

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*"Young Professionals are a key target many brands want to reach with product samples. Sampling Advisors can help build a custom program to reach the right target for your brand."*

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*Note: SEA received no compensation from any sampling vendors for mention in this Newsletter.*

## IMPROVING YOUR SAMPLING ROI... 3 easy steps!

Okay, maybe it's NOT "easy" but there are definitely 3 key ways to improve your return on investment. The first suggestion? **MINIMIZE your risk by utilizing proven programs OR testing your way to a successful execution.** Unfortunately most brands jump in head first with a

new program or new vendor, only to find out the program didn't work well. It's easy enough to do a small test and get some learning about what you should expect. Second idea? **Minimize sample waste.** You can accomplish that by insuring consumers receive just one sample.

If you sample 100,000 consumers twice, instead of sampling 200,000 consumers once – obviously that will make a big impact in your ROI. Lastly – **control both sample product costs and distribution costs.** Utilize SEA's services to make sure you are getting the best deal possible.

## Sampling beyond 2010?

SEA's advice is to be cautious and make sound investments during this time of uncertainty. Product sampling is expensive, yes – but it doesn't have to be risky. Some sampling programs have been around for

decades and work for the majority of brands who have used them.

If you do need to do something different, utilize SEA's service to test the program first and get some learning about what

worked and what didn't. This is the best way to maximize your investment and grow your brand with loyal users.

## *About Our Organization...*

Sampling Effectiveness Advisors celebrates its 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary in January 2010. (Besides the six years of working both sides of the sampling business, owner Cindy

Johnson also had a 13 year career in marketing at Procter & Gamble.)

No other company offers impartial/unbiased third party expert advice on how to improve sampling results. No other

company provides market research focused on measuring sampling effectiveness results. SEA has the most experience and also offers the lowest rates.

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