



# Using research to improve Pet Food appeal amongst its TG

- Research Paper -

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## **Marketing Problem - The need**

The client is a leading manufacturer and marketer of pet foods. The client had been running a regular Dog panel to assess if there is absolute acceptance / rejection of each lot of their products. When the client wished to use this panel to do pet research to enhance appeal of their product, we had more questions than answers. Their TG completely rules out any diagnostic research. Therefore, in consultation with the client, it was decided to use the same panel to carry out a preference study against key competing products to get cues for improving their product offering.

Therefore, it was decided that preference test would be done for the client's product and competition 1. From that cues would be taken to improve the product and test with competition 1 again. This was to be followed by another round of improvement and a preference test with competition 2.

## **Research Objective**

Research objective was to use pet feedback to get cues for improving the client's product. Sequential recycling with 3 waves of preference testing was planned to achieve this objective.

## **Research Challenges**

Having decided to use preference data to derive product enhancement uses, the next task was to list challenges for assessing preference among dogs. The following were the main challenges:

- Can't ask the dogs – only observation method can be used
- Cannot make a dog eat anytime
- No clarity on colour preferences among the dogs. Bowl colour, shape, size could impact the preference
- No clarity on Direction orientation / preference among dogs – we were not sure if the dogs prefer the food kept on the left side or the right side. This could have a serious impact on final choice
- Another concern was that what should be the distance between the two offerings – too close could impact choice or too far may make the dogs not realize there is a choice. Too close could have caused the smell of one getting mixed with the other and in turn making the choice very confusing.
- Finally there was concern as to how long we should allow the dogs to eat. It was found that some dogs ate quickly and some took time. Further if there was choice of food, the dogs alternated before making their final choice.

## Research Methodology

The study was conducted in 3 phases as given below:

- Phase 1 - For this preference test, Competition 1 and Client's Product were both purchased from the market and given to dogs in the panel in a preference test format
- Phase 2 - Post the phase 1 results Client's Product was improved and another cycle of preference test conducted between new improved Product and competition 1 picked from the market
- Phase 3 – Post phase 2, Competition 2 was tested vis-a-vis the new improved Product in preference test scenario

To tackle the challenges mentioned in the above section, we dived into our experience of managing the panel for over a year. Based on our past understanding most aspects were reasonably resolved and the following methodology was designed for the preference test.

- The panel for the preference test was selected from the current panel of dogs who were already initiated
- More discerning dogs were selected from current panel of Dogs so that clear preferences are captured
- Dogs were given one or two meals depending on their routine – the quantity consumed was taken as the average over meals
- Two food options were kept at a distance of 75 cms away from each other and exposed to the pet simultaneously
- Both the bowls for serving food were standardized
- Position/ direction of the meals was rotated over different meals
- Pets were left to eat for 30 minutes and post that recordings were taken

## Analysis

As it was not possible to get preference on any scale, the quantity consumed for each sample of food was used as a measure of preference.

The standard analyses used for assessing preference in each wave included:

- Approach / eaten first
  - % First approached
  - % First eaten
- Preference analysis
  - Preference frequency = % of pets eating twice (100% more) as much A as B
  - Preference frequency = % of pets eating 50% more of A as B
  - Preference frequency = % of pets eating 10% more of A as B
- Overall mean preference (% eaten)
  - Mean % eaten of each product
  - Mean % eaten of each product (% Consumption ratio A:B)

- Distribution of % eaten – for both A and B
  - Mean % refusals (5%)
  - Mean % ate half more
  - Mean % ate all

In addition, in wave 2 and 3, some extra analyses was done to capture shift in preferences. These were as given below:

- % of client’s products eaten in the total food eaten - In this Quantity of Client’s product eaten was taken as a % of what the dog has eaten of both the food options given to him put together – this is presented as distribution over the two waves to see shifts
- Shift of preference. In this, each dog is classified as per his preference in Phase I vs. his preference in phase II - this is presented as movement in preference across the 2 cycles – e.g. no. of dogs who preferred competition 1 in phase I but Client’s product in phase II etc.

### Key Findings

The findings should be analyzed and interpreted keeping in mind

- In phase I client’s standard product was tested against Competition 1
- In Phase II client’s improved product was tested against Competition 1
- In phase III client’s improved product was tested against Competition 2

### 1. Approached First

|                    | All  |       |        | Big Dogs |       |        | Small Dogs |       |        |
|--------------------|------|-------|--------|----------|-------|--------|------------|-------|--------|
|                    | Ph I | Ph II | Ph III | Ph I     | Ph II | Ph III | Ph I       | Ph II | Ph III |
|                    | %    | %     | %      | %        | %     | %      | %          | %     | %      |
| <b>Client's</b>    | 25   | 27    | 50     | 24       | 21    | 51     | 25         | 33    | 49     |
| <b>Competition</b> | 75   | 73    | 50     | 76       | 79    | 49     | 75         | 67    | 51     |

- Competition 1 is approached first vis-a-vis client’s standard product as well as client’s improved products
- Big and Small dogs responded differently – Small dogs improved their preference for clients improved product vis-à-vis Competition 1 though over all preference still remain higher for Competition 1
- Client’s improved product was at par with competition 2 in phase III for both big and small dogs

### 2. Eaten First

|                    | All  |       |       | Big Dogs |       |        | Small Dogs |       |        |
|--------------------|------|-------|-------|----------|-------|--------|------------|-------|--------|
|                    | Ph I | Ph II | Ph II | Ph I     | Ph II | Ph III | Ph I       | Ph II | Ph III |
|                    | %    | %     | %     | %        | %     | %      | %          | %     | %      |
| <b>Client's</b>    | 22   | 26    | 37    | 21       | 20    | 38     | 23         | 31    | 37     |
| <b>Competition</b> | 78   | 74    | 63    | 79       | 80    | 62     | 77         | 69    | 63     |

- Similar preference as for “approached first”

### 3. Consumption Preference at 10%

|   | All  |       |        | Big Dogs |       |        | Small Dogs |       |        |
|---|------|-------|--------|----------|-------|--------|------------|-------|--------|
|   | Ph I | Ph II | Ph III | Ph I     | Ph II | Ph III | Ph I       | Ph II | Ph III |
|   | %    | %     | %      | %        | %     | %      | %          | %     | %      |
| % of pets eaten Client's at least 10% > competition | 13   | 21    | 32     | 16       | 16    | 38     | 11         | 26    | 25     |
| % pets with no preference                           | 9    | 9     | 7      | 16       | 14    | 10     | 2          | 4     | 4      |
| % of pets eaten Competition at least 10% > Client's | 77   | 70    | 61     | 68       | 70    | 52     | 87         | 70    | 71     |

- Client's product had better preference in phase II than in phase I and this growth largely coming from small dogs
- Good jump in preference for Client's improved product in phase III against competition 2
  - Better preference mainly among Big Dogs
  - Overall competition 2 still preferred over Client's improved product
- Similar analysis was done for preference at 100% and at 50% margin

### 4. Mean % Eaten

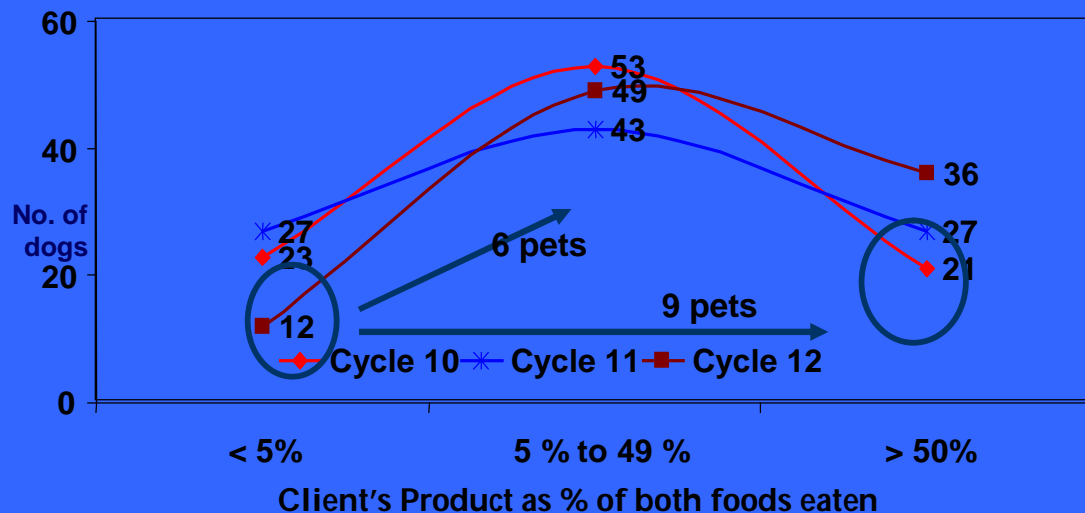
|  | All  |       |        | Big Dogs |       |        | Small Dogs |       |        |
|--|------|-------|--------|----------|-------|--------|------------|-------|--------|
|  | Ph I | Ph II | Ph III | Ph I     | Ph II | Ph III | Ph I       | Ph II | Ph III |
|  | %    | %     | %      | %        | %     | %      | %          | %     | %      |
| Mean % eaten of Client's                   | 48   | 48    | 52     | 53       | 51    | 64     | 42         | 44    | 41     |
| Mean % eaten of Competition                | 86   | 84    | 65     | 97       | 89    | 76     | 75         | 80    | 54     |
| Ratio of Mean % eaten Client : Competition | 0.56 | 0.57  | 0.8    | 0.55     | 0.57  | 0.84   | 0.56       | 0.55  | 0.76   |

- Overall higher proportion of competition product was eaten by dogs
- Client's product showed improvement in phase II and Phase III
- Mean proportion eaten of competition product actually drops in phase III
- Better performance among Big Dogs

## 5. Percentage of client's products eaten in the total food eaten

An analysis of Client's product eaten as a proportion of total food eaten shows a shift in preference for client's product

- At an overall level, significant improvement in % of Client's product eaten
- Clear drop in dogs eating Pedigree <5% of total food → shifted to higher end of spectrum, 6 pets shifted to 5% to 49% and another 9 pets shifted to >50%



## 6. Shift in preference at 10 % (phase 1 vs. 2)

| No. of dogs               |               | Food preferred in phase 1 |               |             |             |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
|                           |               | Client's                  | No Preference | Competition | Grand Total |
| Food preferred in phase 2 | Client's      | 7                         |               | 13          | 20          |
|                           | No Preference |                           | 3             | 6           | 9           |
|                           | Competition   | 6                         | 6             | 56          | 68          |
|                           | Grand Total   | 13                        | 9             | 75          | 97          |

| No. of dogs                  | All | Big | Small |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Neutral between the 2 cycles | 66  | 31  | 35    |
| Positive shift in phase 2    | 19  | 9   | 10    |
| Negative shift in phase 2    | 12  | 10  | 2     |

It was observed that in phase 2, more dogs had a positive shift, this largely coming from small dogs.

## **Summary of Findings**

Phase 1 showed that client's product had a much lower preference than competition product. The client took cues for development from the looks i.e., shape, size and design and also composition of client's product. Basis these they improved the product which showed clear improvement in preference, specifically amongst small dogs. Product developed post 2<sup>nd</sup> round of improvement, was checked in wave 3 with competition 2 and was found to perform much better than before.

Thus, the research was well used for a study among dogs. The client implemented the recommendations made basis the research and launched the new improved product. All further tests in the panel suggest that this is a significantly better product than before.

## **Research Learnings**

The study clearly demonstrated that regular research techniques can be used to conduct survey among pets. However there is a need to first understand the finer nuances and then adapt the research techniques accordingly.