

COLUMNS

Sampling is a highly underrated but effective marketing tool

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The epitome of true value is delivering the right product at the right time in the right place. From Amazon's Dash buttons to **Louis Vuitton's chatbot**, companies are trying to take away any pain points associated with online ordering to create a more seamless experience. But it is not always easy to execute on this.

Let me introduce you to just-in-time sampling. It is one of the most underrated but effective marketing tools. For example, a sample of a new energy bar is significantly more attractive to someone who has just worked out than someone who just finished breakfast.

Try it out

Sampling is nothing new. Celebrities have been wooed with luxurious swag bags for years. In the 1990s Kiehl's increased foot traffic to its stores with the promise of rare giveaways.

But think about the consumer's perspective: Why should I take financial risk on your product? I have my needs fulfilled, if you want me to try your product, you need to give me a taste. Especially when it is valued at a high price point.

That is why beauty samples fill the drawers at counters and why digitally native beauty brands such as Birchbox or fashion brands including Rachel Zoe have made a business around a monthly sample surprise box. From high-end serums to perfume vials, you are putting the magic of luxury goods directly in the hand of the consumer and, if they like it, you have opened the door to a future sale.

We all have decision fatigue: people are comfortable with the status quo and are not seeking to make decisions. It is easier. You have to get to the key point in the market funnel, and that is trial. Build customer relationships from positive experience with the product and you will create brand loyalists.

Taking measure

In the past, it has been difficult to add in targeted data collection and conversion data. Companies knew sampling worked, but they did not know how to measure its ROI. The technology did not exist, until now.

As with any smart strategy, sampling is evolving and combining the increasingly high consumer demand for convenience with a product they want and the back-end to quantify its impact.

Ecommerce sampling satisfies the best of both worlds: deliver a sample of a great product to a consumer to whom you can actually email to re-market. Technology allows you to be more-data driven, effective and less wasteful.

I PREDICT THAT the massive in-store promotions industry is ultimately going to be dwarfed by out-of-store sampling because that is where customers are spending time and shopping: on the go, in the space between in-store and in-home.

Think innovative vending machines, retail technology platforms, and more. That is the true opportunity to get your luxury product into the right high-end consumer's hand at the right time and to be able to build a relationship in an authentic ways and capitalize on giving it to them again.

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