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Display Producers Aid in Activating Insights

Brands say they'll take care of the upfront shopper research but look to producers for post-program analysis and help in putting shopper research to use

By Craig Shutt

As CPGs continue to focus more on gathering shopper insights, it's fair to ask whether brands are expecting more from display producers in the way of shopper research. While some display companies such as RTC and Alliance, a Rock-Tenn Co., provide these services, brands interviewed here aren't expecting display producers to fill this need.

However, where brands need assistance is on the back end — collecting post-program analysis, gathering insights on chain policies and habits, and helping to activate shopper insights into display programs.

"There's been an interesting evolution over the past five years, as the needs have moved from needing research to needing the right kinds of research to asking what can be done with the research," says Bruce Vierck, vice president of RTC, Rolling Meadows, Ill. "Most of our clients have expanded their own research efforts, either in-house or by using a broader array of research partners. There certainly are more specialized research companies available than ever before, but to move toward activation of a program, you need more than just research."

Still, the roles of product manufacturer and display manufacturer aren't changing. Brands expect to gather their own shopper insights. A beauty-products marketer, who declined to discuss the issue further, simply said: "I don't count on P-O-P vendors for this type of information."

Steve Hyland, director of retail merchandising for The Coca-Cola Co., Atlanta, says, "We provide producers with insight research as part of our briefs to them. When we ask for a design, there's no

formal research requested to justify it."

Pam Venn, manager of retail merchandising for Greenwich, Ct.-based Nestlé Waters USA, occasionally receives research. "In the romance period, when they're trying to get me as a client, they'll cite some factoids about their displays," she says. "But there hasn't been anything that swayed the way we develop our marketing plan."

To some extent, upfront market research from producers would be wasted, says one beverage marketer, who asked not to be identified. "I may be jaded, but my trust of research they could provide isn't that high. I'd be concerned about

satisfied with that, because I don't think about them doing it. But I would love to have it if we could get it."

Marketers' Needs

Marketers did express interest in receiving research from their producers, but not on the front end as part of strategic planning.

"I'd like to see producers offering insight based on in-store tests of equipment once it's in place," says Coke's Hyland. "We do the front-end research, but we need to know how shoppers are interacting with the pieces and how they work in the in-store environment."

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Jim Lucas,
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Draftfcb



what they would be willing to do to get a sale and whether that would skew the results. The few times someone has come to us with quantifiable results from a test program, we've been impressed. But I'm still skeptical of the process that was used to collect the information."

A personal-care marketer, who also asked not to be identified, agreed that market insights went beyond the producer's role. "There's not a lot of research being done by producers, but I'm not dis-

Jim Lucas, executive vice president and director of shopper marketing for Draftfcb, a marketing communications agency in Chicago, agrees that those are areas where producers can add value. "In-store is the true test," he says. His company provides message mapping, which refines messages based on their locations in the store, and message hierarchy, which determines the most important messages to communicate. "You want research on the front end to reduce

risk, but it's easier for producers to evaluate and research afterward. Everyone is on the hook for accountability and learning what worked, what didn't, and why."

Hyland points to four key areas where producers could provide more expertise:

1. Build insight into designs, by understanding what types of displays will be most beneficial to the shopper based on the product, locations and goals.
2. Provide design capabilities that can match the strategic research ideas to the ultimate creative design.
3. Look for opportunities to bring in ideas. "We want more than simple reactions to our direction."
4. Source materials based on the project's strategic needs to ensure cost effectiveness and schedule adherence.

Producers' insight research doesn't have to be expensive, notes Hyland. Surveys with store managers would provide great input. "Managers hear comments from shoppers, and they know if a display

per research of varying types. Alliance, Winston-Salem, N.C., has created a process based on messaging, targeting and execution that allows clients "to understand how to develop in-store messaging for the shopper that is different from messaging created for the consumer," explains Jon Kramer, Alliance's chief marketing officer who is based in Chicago. This research helps optimize the message and target specific locations where the messaging will reach the most receptive shoppers. "Compliance is shoddy at best, so we need to know which geographies and stores are most important for that client, so we can focus on them."

RTC performs ethnographic and observational research, studying a shopper's path to purchase in the store and in-home. It also can do videos of a shopper's path to purchase by using a head camera. RTC then uses these insights and translates them into a design vision that is activated at retail. "This research

Carrigan, president. "We approached a few clients to do surveys, but they weren't interested. They either did their own internal research or didn't want to share the cost. But CPG companies are asking for this information because they need to justify their expenditures, especially on larger orders. We were surprised the CPGs weren't interested."

Combining Forces

The recent suspension of The Nielsen Co.'s P.R.I.S.M. Project will create more need for producers to step up, says Alliance's Kramer. "Since P.R.I.S.M. will not be part of the ongoing evaluation process, marketers are going to look more to their partners to provide help in understanding the impact of their in-store media and displays."

He adds, "Not having P.R.I.S.M. will affect the ability of agencies to plan in-store media as part of a GRP [Gross Ratings Points] metric. The focus on in-store media is increasing rapidly, because its impact is so dramatic."

The basics of sales-lift data aren't enough, says United Displaycraft's Carrigan. "That's the bottom line for CPG companies, but it's only part of the equation. Brand awareness and other factors come into play, too. The benefits marketers receive from in-store programs can't always be quantified by sales numbers."

Marketers, agencies and producers all will have to focus more on gaining insights, says Curtis Munk, vice president of insights at Saatchi & Saatchi X in Springdale, Ark. "It will be incumbent on all of us to know as much about the shopper as possible and share that information with our partners. Business works much better when everyone is informed. Basing decisions on solid shopper insights is not a fad; it's now an integral part of strategic planning."

Munk continues, "It's a very good time to be in the insights business. Clients and retailers are placing a very high value on what we can bring to the table. They are recognizing the value of solid shopper marketing."

The availability of virtual software will aid future research, Kramer says. "The tools exist to address these challenges, and the research is becoming relatively inexpensive, accurate and faster." So too will RFID sensors as they become more available, says Draftfcb's Lucas. "In the next two years, I expect to see improvements in RFID analytics, but we aren't there yet." SM



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is working," he says. Coke has a difficult time determining a display's effectiveness, he notes, because the company can't track whether shoppers made their selections from a display, which was restocked, or from the shelves. "Managers know if a display improves the shopping experience and holds the shopper's attention. I would like to receive more of that."

Another marketing executive agrees that producers have a role to play. "I look to them to provide structural knowledge and innovation rather than shopper capabilities," he says. "We need to know what types of structures are most sustainable and most appealing. We need a better understanding of what's effective in the store, what impacts the shopper most, and where individual channels of trade are going."

Producers Who Have Insights

Some producers, however, do offer shop-

per research of varying types. Alliance, Winston-Salem, N.C., has created a process based on messaging, targeting and execution that allows clients "to understand how to develop in-store messaging for the shopper that is different from messaging created for the consumer," explains Jon Kramer, Alliance's chief marketing officer who is based in Chicago. This research helps optimize the message and target specific locations where the messaging will reach the most receptive shoppers. "Compliance is shoddy at best, so we need to know which geographies and stores are most important for that client, so we can focus on them."

RTC performs ethnographic and observational research, studying a shopper's path to purchase in the store and in-home. It also can do videos of a shopper's path to purchase by using a head camera. RTC then uses these insights and translates them into a design vision that is activated at retail. "This research has a major impact on what we produce," says Vierck. "It sometimes tells us what we should be doing, especially whether we should be looking at a display or an entire category approach. It definitely impacts the messaging that we use."

In his experience, Vierck says clients are asking for more research. "We're doing two things more often: We're doing the research ourselves, and we're looking at the research they've done to see if we can use it." He says RTC developed a workshop approach to activate existing brand research. "We bring in the client and our own people to help make sense of the findings and turn them into insights, and then turn those insights into concept directions." On the back end, RTC compiles evaluative research.

United Displaycraft, Des Plaines, Ill., approached Brookfield, Ill.-based Market Check to produce research projects, but it couldn't find brand partners, says Rich