Home Use Testing

The benefits of moving your consumer testing from the lab to the home

Computers and the Internet have had a huge effect on changing the way we do just about everything, and sensory and consumer testing is no exception. Web-based sensory testing software allows data collection anywhere in the world with an Internet connection, which opens the door to a variety of testing scenarios outside of the typical lab, including in-store testing, mobile point-of-use testing and Home Use Tests (HUT).

Historically, Home Use Testing was a time-consuming and costly endeavour, which involved logistical nightmares and sample losses, and yielded relatively low panelist response rates (<25%).

Now, Home Use Testing has been shown to overcome multiple testing barriers. Testing with Compusense Cloud, has proven it provides excellent response rates (almost 100%) and a high level of consumer engagement. As Internet services expand, it is now feasible to conduct remote testing in developing countries.

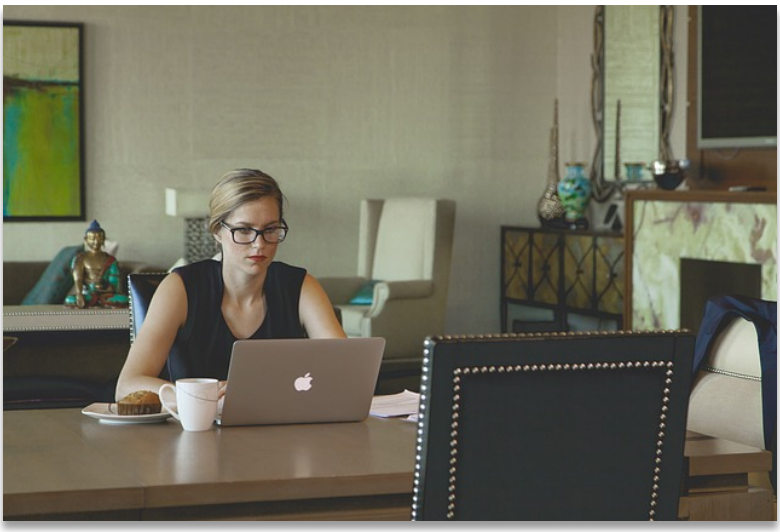
What is Home Use Testing?

Home Use Tests are product evaluations that take place in the consumers' homes, allowing them to experience and evaluate products in the way that they normally would. The product sample is usually picked up at a central location or distribution centre by the qualified consumers. If the product is suitable for package delivery, it may also be mailed directly or dropped off by a courier service.

consumers evaluate products as they would normally be consumed at home.

Representative testing environment (Ecological Validity)

Home Use Testing allows consumers to evaluate products as they would normally be consumed at home and in the way that each consumer prefers. Bacon, for example, is a product that is cooked differently by different consumers. Using Home Use Testing to evaluate products such as bacon delivers results that will better reflect the response of real



consumers as they normally would have purchased it from the grocery store and prepared it. The use of web-based HUTs also permits the data to be collected for the entire family in the same study. As noted by Montouto-Graña et al. (2012): "Food testing by consumers in their home is considered more optimal compared with laboratory testing and Central Location Testing with regard to realism while tasting and eating a product sample."

Testing high-fatigue products

In-home tests provide a robust method to gather better data on products that can deliver sensory or physiological fatigue. For example, testing five samples of coffee in one session in a CLT presents two challenges: first, the quantity consumed will be a small amount of each sample, not an entire serving; second, the first position

effect will strongly influence subsequent evaluations. If however, a consumer is sent home with five coded product samples and consumes one every day for five days, he or she will be evaluating the product under normal use, with no carry-over effect. This methodology was applied successfully to sensory profiling of chewing gums by Cindy Beeren and Sarah Lawson of Leatherhead Food Research described in a 2012 report entitled "Sensory Profiling under Non-Standard Conditions".

Quick Serve Restaurant (QSR) outlets can take advantage of drive-thru pickups for Home Use Testing. By including an invitation in or on the takeout bag, real consumers can be directed to an online test that gathers immediate reaction to the QSR product in real time. No recruitment is required; the respondent is actually the consumer and incentives may be in the form of product purchase coupons upon successful completion of the test. Home Use Testing allows consumers to evaluate products as they would normally be consumed and in the way that each consumer prefers.

Growth of non-food testing

Sensory testing of personal care products continues to be a growing trend. These products present a unique set of testing obstacles. One challenge is the need for multiple testing sessions over an extended period of time. For example, a company would like to gather consumers' feedback on the whitening effects of a toothpaste over a four-week period. In this case, multiple visits to a central location would be needed to collect the feedback. With Home Use Tests, the panelists can self-report from the comfort of their own homes. In addition, the evaluation of more personal products, like diapers, can be accomplished discretely in a consumer's own environment, making the whole experience more comfortable. From a marketing perspective, it is encouraging to know that the product is being tested in a "real world" environment.

Considerations

A history of low response rates
Product type limitations

Historically, Home Use Tests are associated with a low panelist response rate. However, non-response appears to be a declining problem. This improvement in response rates can be attributed to the convenience of web-based technology and to the ease and speed at which incentives are delivered to consumers after a study is completed.

As web-based technology continues to replace more antiquated methods of submitting responses using mail-in surveys, the issue of non-responders continues to decrease. The improvement in response rates with web-based data collection can be attributed in part to the increased market penetration of smartphones. Access to the Internet is quickly becoming ubiquitous, even in developing nations.

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(Montouto-Graña)

Improved response rates can also be credited to improved systems for managing compensation. Incentives should only be rewarded after the evaluation is fully completed. With Compusense Cloud, Home Use Tests can be tracked and non-responders removed from further tests. Compensation can be arranged through services like PayPal or e-transfers, simplifying the process for both the consumer and the researcher. In addition, the immediacy of the reward is a well-known psychological incentive.

Product type limitations

Because of the nature of Home Use Tests, certain products may not be suitable for the method. Products that are prepared in a very specific, controlled manner, such as hot quick-serve restaurant foods and beverages, are better handled in a Central Location Test. Products that require monitoring and oversight for legal and ethical reasons, such as testing that involves alcoholic beverages, should be carefully planned for Home Use Testing.

What's next for home use testing?

In future, researchers will be able to select consumers from their databases or through social media websites. They will be able to screen for usage and attitude and automatically invite consumers to participate in tests. Consumers can then complete studies at their own rate, but with appropriate monitoring to follow the process, ensuring the product is consumed as required, based upon the time of responses . Smart packaging with RFID will provide data about the handling of products and report this using the growing Internet of Things (IoT) technology. QR codes are in use already to simplify the identification of products and of consumers. The process of gathering real and relevant data will become a routine part of CPG brand management.

If you have any questions about Home Use Testing, please contact Compusense at info@compusense.com.

References

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