



Boomer Report

Does it seem like everyone wishing to sell stuff to those of us over 40 feels obliged to dust off yet more vintage pop music from the '60s as background music?

According to our proprietary survey of 2,000 Baby Boomers, this practice is more of a dull butter knife than a silver bullet. When asked how they felt about such advertising, our sample responded as follows:

- 5% "It tells me they understand me, so I enjoy them" [the ads]
- 39% "If I have to hear ads, they may as well use music I like"
- 17% "While I may like the music some, I dislike companies using it to sell me something"
- 1% "I don't care for the music, so it is a turn-off"
- 38% "I don't feel any better or worse about such ads compared to others"

And as we suspected, a whopping four percent of Boomers say they have ever owned a Volkswagen Microbus—compared to 39 percent who have owned a station wagon.

Consumer Occupations

In the same survey, we did an experiment to see how well we could capture occupations in some detail. Most research we have seen tries to mirror Census/Department of Labor buckets that have evolved over the years. If it is really important to know what kind of work survey respondents do, there is no choice but to ask them to describe their work in some detail and then have trained coders make an assignment using detailed criteria.

It is abundantly clear to anyone who has tried that you can't just offer respondents broad labels like "manager" or "blue collar."

In the Boomer study, we began with six big occupational "buckets" reflecting the current Census classification system and lots of examples. Then depending on how a person answered, he/she saw a second menu of more-detailed occupational groupings.

The Census coders make almost everyone fit. We had 17 percent who indicated that none of the six big buckets fit, and 20-40 percent within the more-detailed groups who declined to use our categories.

The moral is that if it is necessary to understand consumers' occupations, you should be prepared for a major coding operation. Shortcuts where consumers code themselves will result in a lot of noise.

Effective Online Research

We won't argue with William Lipner's list of "ten guiding principles for success in tomorrow's online research world" published and discussed in the June *Journal of Advertising Research*.

The top five are:

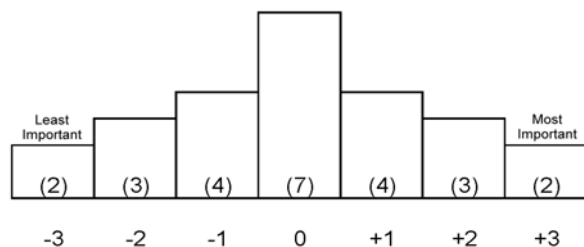
- *The first five seconds are crucial.*
- *Respondents are clients too.*
- *Professional-looking and visually appealing surveys are critical.*
- *Improperly working surveys are the kiss of death.*
- *Exploit technology to improve the survey experience.*

Q-Sort Update

Methodologist Keith Chrzan, now with Maritz Research, is a paragon of clarity and practicality. He presented a paper at this year's AMA Advanced Research Techniques Forum comparing six different direct methods of measuring attribute importance.

Perhaps the most-common practice is to ask consumers to rate each attribute. Lo and behold, most everything seems to be very important! Chrzan tested this and five other methods looking at several criteria including how long the task took and how much the data discriminated between attributes. The overall winner was the Q-sort method.

In a Q-sort (don't ask where the name came from), research participants are asked to sort the items onto a bell-shaped grid. Unlike a pure rank-ordering, some ties are permitted, but overall the consumer is forced to make choices. With, say, 25 attributes each respondent would create an implicit grid such as this:



Q-sorting is quite efficient in an online survey (we'd be glad to tell you how we do it). In central location tests, sort boards are still used. Q-sorts are rarely practical in telephone research.

We thank Keith for confirming the effectiveness of this venerable procedure. It works.

Travel Alert

Paul Riedesel will be away from the office the first week of October and not on duty. We will try to schedule your projects around this "hole", but the sooner we can talk about them, the better.

Brand Strength

The more we think about it, the more convinced we are that the overall strength of a brand comes down to the two dimensions of **familiarity** and **favorability**.

Familiarity includes but it is not limited to what we call awareness. It can be thought of as reflecting the extent of memories and associations prompted by a brand. Such memories are cognitive, and they can be laid down over the course of decades. A flashy, pricey campaign can boost simple recognition, but without much depth. Roughly put, the more consumers "know" about your brand, product and company, the better.

Favorability is explicitly affective rather than cognitive. Whether or not they can reliably explain why, consumers develop feelings about brands ranging from negative to neutral to positive. The catch is, people will be at best neutral about that which is unfamiliar.

These observations stem directly from what we know about brain functioning. Memories are scattered bits of chemical connections, and the denser the network of memories, the more conscious we are of them. And since we cannot possibly think about or store everything that comes in through our senses, those that carry a positive (or negative) charge will be remembered and used in later decision making.

A strong brand is one consumers "know" a lot about and feel good about.

Then there is the domain of brand attributes. Positioning or perceptual mapping research has an insatiable hunger for such data. Yet we see time and time again how closely correlated most attributes are, and that they seem driven by familiarity. Some distinctions do arise from mapping, but we posit that if you thoroughly understand the dimensions of familiarity and favorability of the brands in your category, you know a great deal of what is important.