

ESOMAR Seminar

"Fine Fragrances and Fragrances in Consumer Products — Using Research for Development and Optimisation" ESOMAR Seminar, London 13-15 November 1991.

ESOMAR is the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research, and the "research" to which the seminar's title refers to is marketing or consumer research. The seminar continued a series which had been initiated by a similar event held in Lyons in 1989. While in Lyons, the program included research both on flavors and fragrances, the London seminar focused on fragrances exclusively, not through any design on the part of the organizers, but as a result of the responses to the call for papers.

The main body of papers presented centered around questions of obtaining meaningful and valid responses from untrained respondents regarding both acceptance and qualitative perceptions. From these papers and from the discussions at the end of their presentation, a consensus emerged on several points:

- Valid measures of acceptance can be obtained only under testing conditions which take into account the realities of product use. Variables such as length of exposure (Ivor Shalovsky), fragrance positioning (Stephan Jellinek et al.) or product color (Ken Lewis) can distinctly affect perceptions and acceptance of fragrances.

- We should look for consumer descriptions based on the imagery and moods evoked rather than on ratings for discrete odor attributes such as sweetness or woodiness (Tom McGee, Williams/Whittlestone/Martin, Jellinek).

- Consumer research can provide valuable input to the perfumer regarding the creation of fragrances that are appropriate to concepts provided by marketing (Olwen Wolfe, Tom McGee, Williams/Whittlestone/Martin), but the research involved is elaborate and involves close collaboration between the marketer and the fragrance house.

- Two- or three-dimensional mappings showing the relationships of fragrances to each other and to concept or imagery elements can be useful tools in the dialogue between the marketer and the perfumer. Such mappings may be

obtained by techniques such as correspondence analysis (Shalovsky, Jellinek et al.), principal component analysis or surface response modelling (Williams/Whittlestone/Martin).

- The appropriate selection of respondents and of research design depends on the nature of the project, particularly on whether or not the fragrance should represent an "innovative leap" (McGee, Wolfe/Busch).

- A mode of operation whereby the marketer obtains a limited number of submissions from a small number of suppliers and whereby refinement of selected submissions and final selection are guided by sophisticated research is greatly preferable over a mode involving a large number of submissions and selection of the most suitable by superficial tests. This is true particularly for fine fragrances.

The remainder of the papers presented dealt with widely different aspects of fragrance research. Michel-Francois de Dehn described the seminars which he has conducted to introduce marketing and technical staff of finished goods houses as well as lay consumers to perfumes, in a paper rich in original and insightful comments. Liz Dewson and Hervé Grémont presented Voice Pitch Analysis (VOPAN) as a technique to determine the degree of commitment involved in intention-to-buy responses, thus improving both discrimination and validity. Hans-Willi Schroiff demonstrated by a posteriori reanalysis of home-use test data that fragrance played a crucial role in establishing overall preference in such diverse product categories as hair care products, detergents and all-purpose cleaners.

Hans-Otto Schmidt presented findings from a large-scale multi-national consumer study on men's fragrances which indicated that the fragrance type preferred by individuals could be related to two personality traits, i.e. introversion vs. extraversion and tradition vs. avant-garde. Juanita Byrne-Quinn reviewed, in a humorous paper which marked the close of both this seminar and her own rich career in marketing research, the lessons she had learned in directing the design, execution and analy-

sis of two large-scale studies on consumer expectations and attitudes regarding fragrance.

All in all, it was a seminar marked by excellent organization and strong involvement of all participants. No major breakthroughs or astounding new insights were presented, but it is unlikely that anyone had come expecting these. Rather, the seminar provided a good overview of the current state of the art. Above all, its value lay in forging a sense of community among the participants and a climate of sharing experiences and of learning from each other in spite of the fact that most of the studies conducted in this field are of necessity confidential.

The small number of participants, some 75 in all, certainly favored discussion and informal exchanges. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that future seminars of this kind will attract a larger and more varied audience. Both at Lyons 1989 and London 1991, the great majority of participants came from marketing research agencies and from the marketing and market research functions of fragrance suppliers. The next time around, perfumers and marketing professionals from finished goods houses including fine fragrance houses and from advertising agencies should attend as well.

One of the good features of the seminar was that a booklet with the complete text of most of the papers presented was provided. This booklet, "Fine Fragrances and Fragrances in Consumer Products" ISBN 92-831-1177-X, may be ordered from the ESOMAR secretariate, J.J. Viottastraat 29, 1071 JP Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Professor Egon P. Köster, University of Utrecht, Netherlands, delivering the opening address at the ESOMAR Seminar on fragrances and flavors