

Insights: Separating the signal from the noise



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How invested are consumers in the nutritional brands they buy and what new products will inspire them? Rory McDonnell, VP Insight & Analytics explains how knowing the answers to questions like these helps drive innovation in Glanbia's leading performance and lifestyle nutrition brands.

Anyone with an interest in health and wellbeing cannot fail to be impressed by the range of better-for-you snacks, drinks and powders now available. This category has evolved from a handful of products on the shelf a few years ago to now occupying whole aisles in large retailers. The consumer base is expanding too: in the US, nearly one in three of all households buy protein powders integrating these into meals and snacks throughout the day (1).

There are exciting opportunities in this category and, by focusing on the consumer and using an intelligent insights strategy to understand them better, Glanbia is making the most of them.

With well-loved brands including Optimum Nutrition, Isopure and Amazing Grass in his care, Rory McDonnell, VP Insight & Analytics, explains what Glanbia asks of insights data to drive growth.

"We use our own research to look at how well each brand resonates with consumers – the awareness at the top of the sales funnel, if you like – and we track the equity we're building," he says.

"Other data comes from multiple sources. We partner with people like Datassential, for example, who are strong on ingredient and flavour trends and Nielsen IQ who measure shopper behaviour. Pulling all the indicators together helps us take a balanced view," Rory says.

How have insights given your brands first-mover advantage?

"Now, with many more facings on the shelf than there used to be compared with six or seven years ago, we're making the most of what we can learn about insights from more mature adjacent categories," says Rory.

"We're putting the consumer at the heart of our marketing strategy. And because we've invested in the insight work and we've invested in the data, it helps give us a competitive edge" he adds.

A deeper understanding of consumer priorities

"We're very interested in what we call mental availability – how much space a brand, a product or a category takes up in your head, what associations you have with it. And consumer perception of physical availability, how visible a brand is in the retail environment.

"We measure these all the time – they are part of the KPIs for each brand," says Rory. "The other bit we measure is what we call emotional resonance – how strongly people connect with the brands. That combined with the mental and physical availability gives us an overall brand health score," he says.

With all the obvious advantages of being first to market with a new product, being able to pick up on trends fast is vital. "We're investing in AI to use social listening to pick up the latest ingredient trends. And we share that with our customers."

Social listening isn't enough on its own, however. "You're trying to get to true behaviour," says Rory. "In the past 18 months, for example we've seen specific products grow in popularity. In consumer panels data we could see early on the trend which was beginning to bubble up. That could have been a lagging indicator on social media and we wouldn't have captured it. That's why you must balance it with other data."

Insights: creating a 360-degree view

The occasions when consumers use certain products give another valuable clue to what they might be interested in next.

"We've just completed segmentation work in the US that looks at when consumers use protein in general. Previously, this would be anchored to after a workout. Now, we're seeing a spread of protein consumption across the day," Rory says. "The first occasion might be breakfast, then in between meals and obviously post workout is still a very big occasion. But this new piece of insight has implications for new product development. How do we develop innovative products that target different times of day, whether it's snacking or whether it's night-time consumption?" he explains.

The insights teams have masses of data to play with – how people browse the virtual or real-life shelf, what they're saying on social media, the platforms giving the best return on advertising spend that day, consumer sentiment about sustainability or recyclability of packaging – even who's spending what at the shops gleaned from millions of receipts. Everything is scrutinised to understand the consumer better and create a sound, future-facing house of brands.

And the difference that bringing all the pieces of the puzzle together makes? Looking at the bigger picture minimises the chances of making false assumptions based on incomplete data or missing something important in the noise.

"There is a lot of noise," says Rory. "You'd think the things that create the most buzz and have the greatest share of mind would be the big things to go after, but you must have a balanced scorecard. It's all about separating the signal from the noise."

References

1: Nielsen IQ Panel Data

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