

Summer 2008

## Making Quality Real

### *Neal Heffernan: Bringing an expert perspective to shopper insights*

“In working with a client, Step 1 is building credibility and trust,” says Neal Heffernan, Senior Vice President at Knowledge Networks and head of the company’s Promotion Decisions (PDI) business unit. And for Heffernan, trust comes through applying the expertise he brings to every client engagement, and turning that into a relationship.

Many research firms claim to have expertise in the design and execution of controlled store tests, evaluation of consumer response to in-store events, consumer promotions, and in-market acceptance of new products; but Heffernan – who has been at this work for more than 16 years – is just one of a PDI team that brings unmatched knowledge and care to consumer-retail research.

Promotion Decisions specializes in shopper insights; their National Shopper Lab (NSL) is one of the most comprehensive and valuable resources, tapping the research value of frequent shopper data for understanding purchase behavior – recently adding more than 3,000,000 shoppers to NSL – and they are leaders in the complex execution of Controlled Store Testing and analytics.

### Getting the details right

A key element of Heffernan’s work – one of many that set PDI apart – is his attention to all stages of the research process: collaborating from start to finish through work sessions. “The quality of the meetings is what differentiates us,” says Heffernan. “We deliver collaboration and consultation with a team that knows CPG and retailers. We’ve got 150 years of testing experience among us, and clients partner with us to execute a flawless test, because we understand the curveballs that might come. That experience pays off from design to execution to reporting.”



Another big part of PDI's commitment to quality is the National Shopper Lab database, which includes loyalty card data from over 11 million drug and grocery store shoppers – roughly 10% of all U.S. households. PDI recently added over 3 million new shoppers to NSL and expanded its geographical footprint.

The NSL allows clients to understand the why behind the buy by creating matched test and control behavioral panels and looking at pre-post; test vs. control differences to measure the effects of tactical campaigns.

### The most thorough approach to CSTs

To understand the impact of a variety of tactical elements – from new product/line extensions and category management initiatives – the controlled store test can provide recommended actions derived from top-quality analytics; but at its heart is the need for expert execution. “Clients sometimes shortchange design,” Heffernan explains. “They may make decisions based on just four weeks of activity in two stores. They might find volume is up 20% – but do they know that the error range with such a small test is 30%? We take our responsibility to lead in this area as core to our commitment to providing quality answers for our clients.”

After establishing the right combination of markets and duration, a myriad of things can still go wrong in the execution phase. Product or signage needs to be brought into the correct stores and put out at the correct time; product must be kept on the shelves and then removed on schedule.

Bringing all of this insight and experience to projects large and small is what defines Neal's approach to working with clients. It is a powerful example of the value of bringing quality to every aspect of research.

*Neal Heffernan is Senior Vice President and General Manager of PDI/Knowledge Networks. He has more than 16 years' experience and an in-depth understanding of consumer packaged goods (CPG) industry trends and their impact on the consumer and retail industries. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Indiana University's School of Business.*

