



Increasing revenue, defending shelf space and refining marketing strategy with a deep understanding of consumer preferences

How Cabot Creamery uses insight collected with consent to inform marketing, sales and product decisions.

Even with an engaged and loyal consumer base, Cabot Creamery did not have a scalable and repeatable way of engaging with them to uncover the insight they needed to make truly consumer-centric marketing decisions. As a result, major marketing and product decisions were made with limited consumer-validated feedback. Traditional research, while valuable, was too slow and expensive to conduct in an ongoing way. The Cabot Insiders were introduced to boost the quantity, quality, depth, flexibility, and pace of insights gathering. The Insiders, run on Vision Critical's customer insights platform, represents tremendous value to the business. With Insider insights, Cabot Creamery has protected revenue by defending shelf space, shattered assumptions and refined marketing strategy by identifying multiple products as unique destination brands and path to purchase entry points that have, and can now involve the consumer in their product development process.



By utilizing our Cabot Insiders insight community we were able to maintain shelf space in the highly competitive yogurt category in one of our key retailers. The speed of results along with the direct communication to consumers and their affinity to the Cabot brand helped make our case and save our shelf space. There are many opportunities to help drive our business forward with this agile insight.



Kurt Weber
SVP Sales
Cabot Creamery

⋮ **Saved large amount of overall yogurt sales**

⋮ **Protected butter sales in New England**

⋮ **Increased research activities by 5x**

Challenge

Introducing consumer insights at scale

Cabot Creamery has an engaged and loyal consumer base. They know their end consumers select specific retailers if they carry "destination products" - marquee items like cheddar cheese for example. However, as sales numbers shift and products do not perform as expected, they did not have a viable, repeatable way to engage consumers directly to uncover answers to the why. As a result, Cabot Creamery made major marketing and product decisions and compete for shelf space with proposals based on POS data, and in some cases the opinions of small focus groups. The traditional methods of feedback were slow and prohibitively expensive which meant they could only conduct a few research projects a year. Cabot Creamery needed a better way to quickly gather consumer validated insight at scale to improve their products, increase sales by defending and growing shelf space, and introduce the voice of consumer across the business.

Solution

The Cabot Creamery Insiders is made up of close to 5000 end consumers who have given their explicit consent to participate in ongoing insight gathering activities. With an average response rate of 40% or more, and typically two studies a month, Cabot is able to involve their consumers in more decisions across the business. Originally introduced to help guide their marketing efforts, feedback from the Insiders now influences product innovation, sales presentations and strategy sessions.

Prior to introducing the community, Cabot Creamery conducted about four larger research studies a year with external vendors. These projects often took upwards of three months to execute from start to finish. Moreover, each study was "one and done" with no opportunity to ask follow-up questions or dig deeper on a particular subject of interest. Adding to the complexity was the need to recruit separately each time using a different panel depending on the vendor they used for the study. Additionally, they would conduct in-person focus groups and shop-alongs - which were valuable, but extremely time intensive, cost sensitive and impossible to scale. Now they've increased research activities by 5 times by working with the Insiders.

Adding value to existing data, feedback and metrics

Cabot Creamery relies on insight from the Insiders in all parts of the marketing process. When developing their marketing strategy, the insight team provides consent-based data that complements and augments the market and shop-along data they already have. Consumer understanding that enables them to refine their offerings and messaging and helps them ensure they do not inadvertently alienate their existing consumer base with any changes.

In addition to guiding the marketing strategy and direction, the Insiders are also used for rapid, tactical projects. For example, they test final concepts in their activities and moderate forums to ensure they have considered all angles. The unique mix of qualitative and quantitative feedback the Insiders delivers within very tight timelines has increased the confidence they have in decisions - and in turn, stakeholders in the business have more faith in the consumer insights team.



The ability to quickly turn around insights and share the results with multiple departments and key decision makers at Cabot has made engaging the insiders an integral part of new product planning and marketing strategy decisions.



Amy Levine
Director of Marketing
Cabot Creamery

Additionally, the ability to progressively profile consumers over time enables Cabot to look at how consumer preferences differ across regions, age ranges, favorite retailers, and a variety of other profile variables like shopping and product preferences. In short, they take retail and syndicated which is widely available and use the Insiders to reframe the feedback and dig into the most important issues and questions.

Enhancing internal collaboration and teamwork

Having the pulse of the consumer at their fingertips has opened up dialogue between different departments and has increased collaboration internally. Internal stakeholders are now aware of the power of insights from the Insiders to drive measurable business results. This is especially true for internal stakeholders including senior management, who ask about what consumers think before a decision is made. While Cabot's insight team has always been a valuable business partner to internal teams, the rapid turnaround time of the Insiders coupled with the ability to repeatedly engage the community to deliver iterative and ongoing insight has elevated their work internally. They are now a great resource for any consumer centric questions that need answering, or myths that need to be dispelled.

Outcome

Iterative and ongoing product improvements

A great example of iterative learning involves a new product Cabot released for a specific retailer. After analyzing broader market trends and research, Cabot determined that a Cracker Cut (pre-cut cheese) multi-pack would be something consumers would be interested in buying. Upon release of the new product, sales were slower than anticipated so they engaged the Insiders to determine why by digging into the root causes of sales metrics. Cabot carefully segmented consumers, sent them samples and then engaged them in the Forum function of the platform to collect immediate feedback. The ability to get the product in the hands of known consumers was key. In this example, Cabot explored a variety of potential hypotheses from package sizing and design to configuration and contents. It was ultimately determined that the multi-packs should include a variety of cheeses and that consumers used the slices in many other ways beyond on crackers. As a result, they also changed some of the messaging and packaging to reflect the results of the use-testing. The study was conclusive and it helped drive the decision forward with teams that may have been a bit hesitant about changing the product because of concerns about operational limitations and cost considerations.

Leveraging progressive profiling to secure shelf space and increase retail partner value

One of the most important profile variables Cabot maintains for the Insiders is a record of the top two stores where people purchase dairy products. With this information, they have been able to defend their shelf space in several key retailers with empirical proof that it would be a mistake to discontinue their products. In one instance, a buyer from a major retail customer was considering pulling Cabot's Greek yogurt off the shelf - a decision that would impact Cabot's sales volume in that category. When Cabot received the news, they were able to go back to the retailer with very compelling findings about the perception of the Cabot brand and the importance of yogurt to their consumers. The detailed member profiles



Quite simply, there isn't another way that we could do what we are doing now without the Insiders. They represent tremendous value for our business. When you look at the cost (both time & money) of coordinating research with an external vendor, the community represents tremendous cost savings and major benefits. Not to mention the increased sales revenue we can attribute directly to the Insiders.



Kathy Petruzzelli
Senior Manager,
Market Research
& Sales Services
Cabot Creamery

and access to previous surveys enabled them to provide retailer specific findings within days which ultimately saved a large portion of their yogurt sales.

This same formula has been repeated several times with other retailers. In another example, a New England retailer had decided to discontinue Cabot's butter. Using the POS data and the Insiders, they were able to prove that Cabot butter is a destination brand. In other words, a brand that consumers seek out. The implication being, that if the retailer discontinued selling Cabot's butter, they would lose a large number of shoppers who visit that store because they sell Cabot Creamery butter. The retailer reinstated Cabot's products and in turn saved a significant amount of the revenue they get from butter sales in New England. New found knowledge about the importance of being a destination brand with products in multiple categories has also influenced in-store, cross-promotional opportunities.

Takeaways

Providing retailer specific insights saved potential lost revenue in two product categories

Early success in marketing accelerated the move to truly consumer-centric decisions across the enterpriset

Leveraging POS and Insiders data helped Cabot position themselves as a provider of "destination" products and identified a new market entry point

About Cabot Creamery

The Cabot Creamery Cooperative is an American dairy agricultural cooperative, owned by 800 farm families throughout New York and New England. A "Certified B Corporation" that meets the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency and legal accountability, Cabot manages four plants in three states, employing over 1,000 people. They are best known for their award-winning cheeses made with love and pride in Cabot and Middlebury, Vermont and Chateaugay, NY.

About Vision Critical

[Vision Critical](#) builds customer trust and creates new business value through the collection and application of consent data. With its unique, relationship-based approach, Vision Critical's Sparq platform lets brands directly interact with insight communities of opted-in customers. Unlike traditional voice of customer methods, Vision Critical unlocks the real-time feedback that companies need to build better products, deliver better services, and achieve better business outcomes hand in hand with their own highly engaged, well-profiled customers.

Hundreds of high-performing organizations across multiple industries benefit from Vision Critical's technology and guidance. To learn more about Vision Critical, follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#), or visit us at www.visioncritical.com.