



Consumer-led product innovation increases revenue, margin and distribution for Olymel

Consumer insights help Olymel balance their product offerings, avoid chasing fads and increase value for retail partners

A heritage B2B brand with multiple sub-brands vying for shelf space in an increasingly competitive market place, Olymel must consistently find ways to balance their product offerings, innovate without chasing fads and add unique value to their retail partnerships. A perfect storm of challenges compounded by a reliance on rear-view data and analysis and widely available third-party research reports. The Group Meeting insight community was created to better inform strategic decision making, product innovation and marketing programs with bespoke, forward-looking, consumer-validated insight.



Insights from our Group Meeting customer insights platform have strengthened relationships with our retail partners, increased sales YoY and helped us demonstrate a level of knowledge and understanding about the grocery industry that our competition simply cannot match with secondary syndicated research tools. When we share insights at the retail brand level with our partners, you can see that they are much more attentive and receptive.



David Poirier
Innovation Director
Olymel

Expanded seven-figure retail partnerships

Prevented launching products that would have failed and cost millions

Double digit increase in sales YoY

Two new product innovation awards in 2018

Challenge

Competing for shelf space

With razor thin margins and an abundance of options for end consumers, grocery is one of the most competitive industries in the world. The battle for shelf space is won by CPG companies that deliver value to both the retailers and their end consumers; a tall order for incumbent brands like Olymel with product development times as long as 12 months or more. Olymel needed to innovate without alienating their core consumers or cannibalizing their own sales and as a B2B enterprise, add-value to their retail partners without relying on promotions and discounts.

Limited direct feedback from profiled consumers

The repeatable and predictable success of Olymel's innovation efforts were hampered by the lack of direct consumer feedback. As a result, new products were created based largely on gut-instinct, transactional data and trends identified in purchased industry reports. This created two problems for Olymel. First off, they were not innovating with a clear understanding of end-consumer preferences and purchase intent. Second, they were presenting new products to their retail partners without the consumer-validated data they needed to inspire confidence in their new product's ability to generate additional incremental revenue for the retailer.

Third-party reports don't go deep enough

While Olymel did have access to third-party market analysis reports, they were the same reports their competitors could purchase. Moreover, these reports sometimes tend to highlight "trends" which sometimes are too niche or are just fads; at a minimum, they are not always congruent with Olymel's core product offering or their consumers' long-standing expectations for the high-quality, "traditional" food they were known for. Olymel's team needed a way to engage their core consumers in the innovation process and parlay that feedback into shopper insights they could use to secure shelfspace and create marketing programs that would increase sell-through for their retailers.

Solution

A single platform for unified consumer understanding

In order to get the forward-looking insight Olymel needed to accelerate product innovation and secure shelf space, Olymel activated the Group Meating insight community run on the Sparq customer insights platform. Group Meating is made up of over 6000 primary grocery shoppers who complete an average of three studies a month. Group Meating represents three logos underneath the Olymel banner in a single platform that can address all products, needs and ideas, irrespective of product category and region.

Engagement strategy to earn the right to ask for ongoing feedback

Building a relationship with consumers who have consented to give ongoing feedback requires an engagement strategy built on being open, transparent and authentic.

Olymel doesn't have direct consumers, so they leverage a few different resources for inviting people to join Group Meating. Initial recruitment was facilitated by Olymel's existing promotional email list of "fans" from the three house brands. They also recruit from internal newsletters and their corporate website. An ongoing Facebook-based recruitment ad-campaign, allows them to keep their membership topped up.

Successful product innovation is as much about the products that don't get created as it is about the ones that do. A failed product launch can cost millions. On more than one occasion Group Meating has helped steer us away from a potential disaster and focus our resources on a winning idea.



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To enhance community engagement and deliver a more personalized experience Olymel created an avatar named Isabel who addresses members and invites them to participate. An approach that is warmer and more inclusive than a generic email invitations. They also offer members the chance to participate in unique experiences like a "behind the scenes" look at a recent television commercial.

As Olymel expands their program and looks to deepen their consumer relationships, especially in the context of longitudinal studies, they are experimenting with using the names of real people in their teams in the invites and studies. For example, "Marie-Hélène, our senior product development specialist, would like to know more about what you said last time..." Additionally, the ability to share back information and close the feedback loop through the Member Hub on Vision Critical's customer insight platform helps maintain a high-level of engagement and interest in their products and brand.

Ability to segment at the retail brand level

During the initial profiling, Olymel segments their shoppers by their grocery store preferences so they can present bespoke insight to their retailers. While their competition can share broad market level insight from secondary sources in pitches, Olymel can complement and enhance that data with relevant insight from consumers who have expressed their specific preferences and behavior in relation to grocery store brands. Retailers are especially interested in purchase intent and insights that can impact their own internal metrics, both of which are generated from Group Meating. A retailer is much more likely to buy-in to a proposition when they see what the "in addition to" purchase intent is for a new product.

Building on what is already known

Olymel can also blend the preference data collected under consent from Group Meating with brand tracking data, Nielsen data and their client's loyalty program and transactional databases. Insight from the community can be validated with transactional data to ensure the intent data matches with actual sales.

Olymel also leverages their progressively profiled member data when they want to do a deep dive on previous learnings. For example, Olymel ran a series of studies on a particular deli meat that has low consumer demand and was proving challenging to sell at a premium. Group Meating made it possible to run a series of iterative and ongoing activities that uncovered new avenues of value for the product that had been missed (or dismissed) by internal stakeholders. Direct, consumer feedback not only reduced internal debate and prevented a missed opportunity, the iterative nature of the activities allowed the team to focus and execute against the most viable tactics.

Outcome

Accelerating product innovation and de-risking decisions

The rapid setup, economies of scale and repeatable engagement model has made Group Meeting an invaluable consumer insights platform for Olymel. Because the time to insights is so fast and reliable, the team is able to include direct consumer feedback in a much higher proportion of their strategic and tactical decisions. Insights inform product and promotional activities and helps identify product claims and messaging that resonates with both their retail partners and the end consumer. The ability to deepen their consumer profiles and run longitudinal studies has completely transformed how Olymel operates. They now have the ability to constantly validate new product ideas, packaging and advertising efforts with end-consumers they know and trust. As a result, they have more confidence in their decision making and have improved the quality of their product innovation.

Consumer-led rather than fad-led innovation reduces risk of product failure

When testing innovative new product ideas, Olymel discovered their end-consumers are relatively conservative and wary of "wild" food trends. This is a critical piece of insight that is especially valuable to their retail partners who may be swayed by marketers and food innovation teams that are heavily influenced by food trends highlighted in third party market reports. While general market trends are important, data from Group Meeting helped Olymel focus their innovation and avoid products that may have been on trend, but not relevant to their core consumer. For example, trends suggested that a "cheetos-like" cheese flavored breaded chicken product would be a great addition to the line-up, but consumers told them they really preferred a much more traditional, plain version of the product, which is what they decided to launch.

Transformative impact on retail partnerships that increases revenue

Olymel has cemented relationships with their retail partners and been able to more easily sell-in new propositions because they're able to share insights about interest and purchase intent at the retail brand level. For example, one of Olymel's grocery partners were pushing for the "globally inspired" flavors of deli meat highlighted in national market reports. Olymel knew that people would likely only purchase this product on occasion or at certain times of year. In partnership with the grocery, Olymel tested a "limited time offer flavor experience" concept that could align with the store's quarterly promotions, with relevant prizes and incentives. The result is a more holistic and integrated in-store campaign for a limited-time product that was co-created with both consumers and the retail partner.

In another example, feedback from Group Meeting showed that consumers wanted more nitrate-free offerings. These targeted, consumer-validated insights resulted in a nitrate-free product line-up and a new distribution with a major grocer. The program yielded good sales and helped Olymel win two new product innovation awards in 2018.

Takeaways

Preference data collected with consent complements and enhances loyalty and transactional data to validate purchase intent

Repeatable engagement allows Olymel to become an expert in their customer's, customers

Agile insight helps innovation teams focus resources and reduces distraction of internal debates and disagreement

About Olymel

With over \$3.6 billion in revenue and 135,000 employees Olymel is one of the largest meat packing companies in North America. Its fresh meat products are available in more than 60 countries worldwide, and its processed products are sold in Canada under the names of Olymel along with Lafleur, Flamingo, Pinty's, Nostrano, Prince, Galco and La Fernandière brands, among others.

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.