



Launching a Successful Product on the Consumer Market

W.A.W. CUMMINGS, Technical Director, Cadbury Typhoo Ltd.,
Franklin House Bouvinnville, PO Box 171, Birmingham, B302NA, England

ABSTRACT

Essential steps in the development of a new product are reviewed. Consideration is given to background research on the target market area and the development of the marketing concept. Emphasis is placed on the essential close relationship between the marketing department and the research and development department in matching this concept with physical products. Various techniques of using market research for concept, in-hall, and in-home tests are considered. The use of market research findings by research and development in product refinement to achieve an optimum product is discussed. The marketing strategy including market positioning, advertising and the decision between test market and national launch is reviewed. Post-launch support and maintenance of consumer interest, for example by line extensions, is examined, and the effect of competitors' activities is discussed.

LAUNCHING A SUCCESSFUL PRODUCT ON THE CONSUMER MARKET

It is not a coincidence that although I have been brought up and always worked on the technical side of my company, I am giving this paper in the marketing section of this conference. I shall try to develop what I think is the most important single reason for the success or otherwise of a new product—the successes occur where the marketing, market reasearch, and technical functions have worked together more closely.

Launching any product on to the consumer market is a hazardous business. Opinions differ as to the exact rate of success, but everyone agrees that there are many more times the number of products which are worked on than see the commercial light of day. My own guess is that only a little over 1% of the research projects ever result in a product being launched onto the consumer market. It is clearly of great importance to give oneself the best chance of success. All large companies and many small ones therefore adopt evaluation procedures to decide the areas in which they will work and these have been widely discussed at conferences in the last 20 years. For example, an evolutionary process of development was first mentioned by Booz, Allen and Hamilton in the 1960s: exploration, screening, business analysis, development, testing, and commercialization. This is only one example typical of the type of approach used. Not everyone goes through the steps in precisely that order or uses the same words, but steps of that type are necessary in the development of a new product. We were particularly concerned that we had considered all of these points when we decided to enter the vegetable protein market, and I will be referring to them during the following account of our introduction of a vegetable protein product.

Developing a new food product is probably more difficult than developing most consumer goods because the housewife both in the U.K. and elsewhere is normally much

more conservative about accepting new ideas in food than she is in other fields. Indeed, much discussion has taken place about the likelihood of success in developing any really new products because of this conservatism. Because of it, too, most researchers in the food field have become accustomed to a high rate of failure. Our task in research and development and that of our marketing colleagues is to try to minimize the possible reasons for failure and to try to ensure that a product is as likely to succeed as we can make it. This task is not easy when attempted with relatively well known food stuffs. How much more difficult must it be to introduce new protein products into the housewife's larder? I will try and answer this rhetorical question by discussing the means we adopted when introducing the Cadbury's Soya Choice product onto the U.K. market.

Fortunately, initial consideration of exploration and screening were more quickly considered than usual, because texturized vegetable protein products had been discussed within the company at various times for a number of years. For us, the first real step was business analysis of the opportunities available to us. We started from the premise that, although there was no protein deficiency in the U.K. diet, the traditional sources of protein were becoming more difficult to obtain and hence much more expensive. Our original development work started in 1973, just at the time when meat prices had started to escalate and at a time when the economy of the U.K. was in one of its periodic downturns. To us in Cadbury Schweppes, the general climate then seemed to be right for considering introduction of a new protein product, if only we could find the right type at the right price.

Although we had been interested in this area before, up to this time we had been somewhat discouraged by other companies' relative lack of commercial success in introducing protein products to the retail market. Some had been introduced in the U.S. and elsewhere, but none had had large scale success. Furthermore, because of the Cadbury Schweppes' general marketing philosophy, we wanted to have a product which would be fully compatible with our main stream foods business and would not rely upon specialist appeal to those primarily concerned about, say, nutritional aspects or cholesterol intake. What sort of product should we, therefore, work on? The only person who could help us answer this question properly was the housewife. Her attitude toward protein foods, their availability, their prices, their part in her household menu was critical. We, therefore, decided to mount a substantial market research exercise using a new technique which we call Consumer Value Analysis — CVA for short. Its main principle is to go into much more depth with consumers than other research techniques allow, probing over a long period of time the real attitudes that lie behind their apparent and often superficial conceptions. The main components of the technique are shown in Table I.

Many of these meetings were held in different parts of the country, usually in the evening and taking about three hours. During them, groups of housewives, usually about

TABLE I
CVA Technique

- Extended group discussions.
- Fifteen housewives.
- Discussion led by experienced researcher.
- Casual, friendly atmosphere.
- Constant recycling of ideas.
- Product sampling.
- Participation by members of marketing and development departments.
- Quantification of major criteria.

15-20 in each group, were encouraged to talk in a casual, friendly atmosphere about the problems they had in feeding their families and the sort of meal ideas they would be interested in seeding. These discussions were led by an experienced researcher who is adept at encouraging the housewives to speak freely, and at allowing a continuous exchange and recycling of ideas. There is a creative input from the leader, so that a concept can be developed as the researcher progresses.

The main results of the CVAs are presented in Table II. The major conclusion from all of the sessions, held in six different parts of the country, was that everywhere the problem of supplying some form of meat replacement was uppermost in the housewife's mind. Furthermore, we were surprised to find that so many of them had heard of soy as a source of protein and did not need us to prompt them. We had taken the opportunity to have ready for tasting samples of various products made up by our Home Economists' Department, showing possible uses of texturized soy protein. We had, for example, shown then traditional British dishes such as cottage pie (minced form with a potato covering), "steak" and kidney pie, and a number of other products, which all had used texturized soy protein either in minced or in chunk form so that we were able to get comments from the housewives on texturized soy protein dishes. During this stage members of both marketing and research departments took part in the discussion so that particularly research and development could find out directly the housewife's reaction to possible home uses for these dishes. We were also able to identify at this stage which physical form of "textured" soy protein "meat" the housewife would prefer: moist on a polystyrene dish from the meat section of the supermarket like the meat mince or chunks which she would usually buy; or in dried mince or chunk form; or even a canned, "ready-to-eat" dish. This was important to us because we had to find out which form the housewife was really looking for and then develop a product which would satisfy her.

Having established the major parameters, we also went a step further by showing a series of artistic impressions of possible brand names and advertising roughs for the product. One of the many benefits of this sort of research was the ability to develop creative concept illustrations during the discussion groups, improving them further as the exercise developed.

Results of this step in the research encouraged us to concentrate our attention on developing a canned product. Since two of the major canned meat products are mince and stewing steak, we decided that making the soy equivalent to these products was to be the focal point of our research. These products seemed to us to give the best chance of developing a convenient food which the housewife could use and develop into an interesting range of recipes for her family.

The biggest surprise from these results was that the housewife would prefer us to launch a product which was 100% soy, and she would prefer that we should be completely open in describing it as soy. Most previous introductions into the market place had concentrated on using

TABLE II
Results of CVAs

● Significant awareness of soy but desire to know more.	
● Great potential for a meat replacement product.	
● Should be presented in a similar form to canned mince/stewing steak – ready to serve.	
● Positioning should be an honest one – it should be called soya.	
● It should represent a good saving over canned/fresh meat.	
● Many housewives claimed they would buy it.	
● Relative preference vs. "substitutes:"	
Fresh mince	122.6
Heinz beans	91.3
Birds Eye beefburgers	83.8
Cadbury's Soya Farm (canned)	75.7
Cadbury's Bon Soyeur (canned)	70.6
Cadbury's Soya Kitchen (canned)	69.8

TABLE III
Packaging Research Results

- Consumers heavily criticized some of the packs.
- One design clearly associated the product with dog food.
- Another gave the product a Chinese flavor.
- "Winning" design clearly communicated what the product was.
- Product shots particularly well liked.
- Cadbury name proved to be of great value.
- Honesty of soy.

TABLE IV
In-hall Concept Tests

- 600 nationally representative housewives recruited.
- All canned meat users.
- All shown concept film and dummy pack in town halls.
- Half the housewives then sampled soya, half canned meat passed off as soy (to act as a control).
- Both mince and chunks samples.
- TSP comparison of soy vs. Canned Meat Brand Leader

texturized soy protein products as extenders to meat and not as a complete replacement, and few had emphasized soy on the pack, thus creating considerable suspicion about these new products.

We considered the use of soy brand names which included among others the following: Soya Garden, Soya Farm, Soya Kitchen, Bon Soyeur, Tom Soya, and Soya 80.

We had included a number of puns and "plays on words." However, all but the straightforward names were rejected by the housewife. However, she preferred those which mentioned soy to those that did not. Other general comments on packaging were as shown in Table III.

After some experimental research work and further marketing investigations during which both research and development and marketing had drawn heavily on the results of these CVA techniques, we proceeded to the next, perhaps more familiar, market research step – in-hall concept testing. The particular form this took was as shown in Table IV.

One unusual feature was that we had invited a well known television personality who specializes in popular science programs to do a short concept film for us, and this was followed by two rough TV advertising commercials. The film explored in very general terms the benefits of using vegetable protein rather than meat protein and specifically mentioned the soybean and the economics of meat production. We also showed mock ups of our original "Soya Choice" cans before proceeding to the tasting session.

In these in-hall tests, the housewives tasted either Soya Choice or a meat control, but were not told which was which. The results of these in-hall concept tests are shown in Table V. The figures we obtained on this first test were to us astonishingly high, very nearly the same as the brand leader cans which we used as control.

TABLE V
Results of In-hall Concept Tests

- Resulting scores higher than ever seen before.
- Concept as portrayed by the film very well received.
- Product lived up to expectations generated by the film.
- Price seen as very acceptable.
- Some quantified results based on a scale of 1 to 5 were:

	Soy	Canned meat brand leader
Try	4.66	4.68
Pay	4.09	4.19
Serve	4.68	4.69
Good meaty taste	32%	30%
No fat/gristle	20%	13%

TABLE VI

Packaging Development

A number of alternative designs were evaluated:

- Which was seen as being the most suitable?
- Were they appropriate for this type of product?
- Were they Cadbury packs?
- How did they compare with other canned meat packs?
- Was the name "Soya Choice" suitable?
- Were the descriptions "Savory Mince" and "Casserole Chunks" appropriate?
- Were the product shots appetizing?

By now we had developed a broad concept, and we were able to develop it by a series of tests where we checked out details of the pack design on a number of consumers as shown in Table VI.

Some aspects of the advertising roughs we had been using so far were also checked out with consumers. The results showed that "Soya" clearly communicated and there was a high propensity to try it. We were not communicating Cadbury's sufficiently strongly. It was seen to much as a "vegetable" commercial - not enough mention of soy in relation to meat. The pack design was liked, and "Soya Choice" was the name preferred. The research and development department has also been very busy carrying out further recipe developments, fine tuning the product and making sure that the inevitable snags which arise between small scale research work on a few cans and scaling up to full scale production were being eliminated.

Results of product testing showed that the original products were substantially improved due to feedback from consumer; evaluation of competitor's product showed ours to be significantly better; and specific criticisms of smell, color, and texture were corrected.

We had found that a special grade of texturized vegetable protein had to be developed to suit our particular requirements, and we worked very closely with the manufacturers. Extensive liaison, preparation of special batches of texturized vegetable protein and many experimental runs on our pilot plant facilities were taking place at this time. I must pay tribute to the suppliers of our texturized protein, and to their parent company in the United States for their help and cooperative work during this period which made possible our launch.

The next major stage of the research was to carry out a final market mix test, the purpose of which was to assess how all the revised elements fitted and worked together. This was a final and very important check before making the commitment to the expense and risk of a test market. The unknown, or perhaps uncertain is a better word, factors in our broad concept which had to be double-checked before our plans could be completely finalized included: consumer's knowledge of and reactions to soy; meat replacement or extender; product form; positioning of name; price expectation; and likelihood to purchase.

TABLE VII
Market Mix - Research Design

- 800 nationally representative housewives recruited.
- All shown launch ad and pack in halls.
- Half the housewives given samples of Soya Choice to try in home.
- The other housewives were given canned meat "dressed up" as Soya Choice to act as control.
- Up to four recalls took place on each housewife with additional samples being offered each time.

TABLE VIII

Market Mix Test Results (Basis Five Point Scale)

	Test product	Target product
Will try	3.79	3.70
Will buy	3.85	3.20
Will serve	3.86	3.50
Frequency	3.01	2.70

The results led to a decision to launch into test market.

The design of the research for market mix test was as shown in Table VII.

On this occasion we had recruited 800 housewives. All were shown the launch advertisement material, and the pack in halls, and given samples of Soya Choice to try at home. Half were given Soya Choice and the other half were given what they thought was Soya Choice, but was in fact canned meat. During the research we made four repeat calls on each housewife and additional samples were offered each time. The results showed that the concept had been researched extremely well and the product appeared to be well received by a large sample. The try, serve, pay results are shown in Table VIII.

The differences between these results and the previous tests are due to the following factors: only advertising was shown to the consumers this time, not film and advertisements; the actual selling price, higher than in some of the other tests due to inflation, was used, and clearly this affected the buy, serve and frequency expectations too. Although these results were not as good as the previous set, they were still quite acceptable.

I am conscious that so far I have seldom mentioned research and development. Nevertheless, its representatives were present at all of the market research tests described so far. In our company it is usual to have research and development department representatives at the final market mix tests; but on this project they were always closely involved with marketing, market research and home economists and were directly involved with the housewives in the CVA analysis and in the in-hall concept tests.

If I have learned one lesson from the Soya Choice launch, it is the importance of this exceptionally close liaison and research and development involvement in the discussions. The first hand knowledge of the housewife's expectations and more particularly any deficiency she found in the products she tried was invaluable in planning the further research work. I am sure that without this participation it would have taken a great deal longer to develop a satisfactory product. I need hardly add that research and development found all the normal teething troubles of new product development and quite a number we didn't expect - one sample even turned bright emerald green; not a usual meat color.

The final product was launched in December 1975. The brand name chosen was Soya Choice - selected after much checking with housewife panels. Indeed, they really selected it for us from a large number of names including the word soya. We originally launched in blue cans but have since changed to discriminate between the mince and the

chunk form. All product development is a continuous process, and since the launch we have looked at improving our product both in the light of the sales so far and in response to competitors' activity. We also launched into a more limited area two other recipes.

I have outlined the steps we went through in launching our Soya Choice product, but this is only the beginning. I know everyone would agree that the task of capturing an increasing share of the meat market by a texturized vegetable protein product will be long and fraught with difficulties. The products will need to be continuously improved and remain acceptable in taste and texture. It is also clear that pricing will be critical. We have already noticed that in times of galloping inflation, shortage of house-keeping money and particularly escalating meat prices, we have had an opportunity for much increased sales. However, when there seem to be signs of the British economy improving, the housewife appears to have felt more prosperous and sales have become sluggish.

We have proved that the housewife understands about

soy, and as long as she is reassured about its naturalness, she is prepared to buy it. We have proved that a substantial number of people are prepared to buy and regularly consume texturized vegetable protein products. There is, however, much more polarization of views than we expected. A significant number of people do not want to consume the soy product under any circumstances. There is also, however, an equally significant number of people who are quite happy with the product and make no criticism. It is for us as manufacturers to ensure that the quality and price continue to attract them.

We are confident that there is a long term future, not only for us but for other companies. We are sure the housewife will derive an increasing amount of her recipes from nutritional vegetable protein products. We will continue to need further product development to make sure we meet the housewife's requirements. I am sure that the team work of a combination of marketing, market research and research and development personnel, filled with enthusiasm and working closely together, will be the key to that success.