

EXPERT PERSPECTIVES: THE SAMPLING LEADERBOARD

CONVERSATIONS AND DIALOGS WITH SOME OF THE EVENT INDUSTRY'S SAMPLING SUPERSTARS

Industry experiential departments are already working on their late 2019 and early 2020 sampling programs. From local to national, in-store to on-the-street, food to beverage to tech services to credit cards and everything in between, sampling remains the ultimate key that opens the door to trial. Get somebody to try... and you'll get somebody to buy.

We reached out to some of the top sampling partners for conversations about generating trial, the changing realm of sampling and where it's all going as we start to turn the 2019 corner into 2020. The conversations feature:



Elite Marketing Group
Brad Horowitz
Chief Executive Officer



Mosaic
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The Sampling Agency
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Sampling Leaders Q&A



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Is generating trial as critical as ever?

Consumers are inundated with digital, social and mobile ads. The online review system has proven unreliable and consumers are more educated than ever. We are seeing a “showroom” model where consumers are yearning to interact with brands prior to online purchase.

Tell us about your sampling capabilities.

Elite Marketing Group is a full-service experiential agency. From concept through execution, we manage the entire sampling experience. As leaders in on-site customer acquisition and field sales, we love to apply drive-to components and sales to our campaigns to deliver greater ROI. Our digital team makes this possible as it integrates event technology solutions and our creative team develops experiential concepts to layer over our campaigns.

How is sampling evolving?

Sampling is constantly evolving with advancing technologies. Sampling programs are using upfront data collection for more customized trial experiences and incorporating AR/VR for deeper engagements. Agencies are better able to measure the success of programs through data collection and surveying.

What's trending in sampling?

Field Sales. Selling on-site helps subsidize campaigns and hook consumers earlier in the cycle. We can sell physical inventory on-site or through digital means.

What type of sampling is hot for 2020?

Mobile Marketing Tours are making a comeback! We love tours due to their flexibility, quality control and platform for experiential activations. The additional driving impressions are a bonus!

Tell us a few clients that you execute sampling campaigns for.

Danone North America, Organic Valley and Sahale.

Your sampling campaigns are so successful for clients because.....?

We are focused on our clients KPIs and objectives. Our staff (employees) are closely managed and recruited for their brand knowledge and relevancy.

How do you get consumers to sample better or longer or more often?

Targeting the right consumer at the right time and place. Great staff that engage in conversations with consumers. Providing an engaging and exciting sampling experience that showcases real use of the product or service to deliver a more meaningful and memorable interaction.

Is there a client category that speak sampling better than others...and why?

Packaged foods, snacks and beverages because they can be consumed on the spot, allowing our ambassadors to answer questions and gather feedback immediately.

What investments are you making into your sampling offerings?

We are investing in staff and technology. We've seen a great benefit from turning our sampling staff from Brand Ambassadors to Brand Experts and have enhanced staff protocols. Additionally, Elite has an IT lab where we are constantly advancing event technologies. This includes applications for staff to track program metrics, data collection technology incorporating vast security measures and enhancements like AR, VR and interactive vending machines.

Top three sampling mistakes you see other sampling programs commonly making

1) Commoditizing sampling programs and executing simply based on cost. 2) Sampling from a basic table or bags. 3) Just sampling. We see the biggest success in working with clients to extend sampling campaigns through experiential concepts, social media, drive to store and PR.

What's one great sampling tip?

Sample your product or service with a complimentary product or service to compound impact and subsidize costs. For example, sample milk with cookies!

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How is sampling evolving?

The knock on traditional sampling is steeped in the “spray & pray” heritage. Take grocery sampling – a brand is stuck with the obligation to serve the same sample to all customers that come to the demo with their hand out – regardless of prequalification compared to the target. Targeted sampling, whether a roaming brand ambassador in the retail environment pre-selecting or tours executed in strategic locations are worthy investments. The biggest coup in recent years though is paid sample boxes. I may be showing my age, but the thought of consumers paying for samples was unfathomable, but companies like Birch Box are telling great stories and have turned traditional sampling on its ear.

Is generating trial as critical as ever?

It's more important today than ever before. Perennial brands are fighting for relevancy. Line and brand extensions, partnerships and even licensing are all approaches that challenge the core equity and cause consumers to pause before purchasing. In addition, new brands have a shorter path to market than ever before. Both scenarios are fighting for consideration and the brands that choose to truly engage through trial or deeper experience win.

How do you get consumers to sample better or longer or more often?

Understanding our target consumer deeply is key to developing the right strategy to drive trial for a brand. Where do they spend their time online? Where do they shop, and find out about new products? What influences them most? What lifestyle interests do they have? When we understand the consumer's routine, habits, likes and dislikes, we can build an integrated approach that will allow us to engage with our consumer in the community, online, and instore.

Having multiple touchpoints across each of these channels is crucial to building a relationship with our consumer, showing them how our brand/product fits into their lives, and making it simple for them to buy. With a fragmented, non-linear path to purchase, it's important to ensure clear, consistent, and actionable communication across all channels that is trackable and ultimately drives the business objective of trial and sales.

Your sampling campaigns are so successful for clients because.....?

Sampling campaigns are an effective way to drive trial for our client's brands, but we never want to start or stop there. Instead, we always start by ensuring we have clear and quantifiable objectives that we are working against, and then we work backwards to design a program that is built to meet or exceed those goals. Sometimes that means a high velocity approach is the way to go where we reach as many consumers as possible with a quality trial experience and low depth of engagement. Other times that could mean creating an immersive brand experience with sampling at its core, where the primary objective is to drive preference and favorability through rich shareable engagements. Regardless of the approach, we need to understand the role that sampling plays in the broader consumer journey, build in a connectivity to purchase wherever possible, and ensure we have clear KPI targets that are measurable.

About Mosaic

We believe in better. Because better doesn't live in silos and never stops evolving. Because better knows that best is only temporary. **We exist to make the world a better experience.** No other agency combines the same divergent skill sets and services that work together to create your brand's big picture. We develop integrated experiences that make your brand more valuable. Our expertise spans **live experiences** (sampling, field marketing, pop-ups, mobile tours, stunts events), **retail** (assisted sales, training, shopper marketing) and **content** (social media, production, channel planning, influencer, media).

Sampling Leaders Q&A



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**The Sampling
Agency**

Is generating trial as critical as ever?

Considering most marketers rely on the north star of “authenticity” to lead consumers through the ever-widening hurricane of media, sampling is an ideal tactic. Trying a product directly doesn’t get any more authentic or naked. Sampling strips a product down to its core experience, while slowing down consumers in a one-on-one engagement. If done well, it even anchors the experience in a positive activity or environment people will forever associate with the brand.

How is sampling evolving?

I hope it’s getting smarter. Sampling is traditionally driven by salespeople who just want “liquid to lips” as if the taste is enough. The more marketing folks get involved, the brand story comes out, and we find ways to add personal meaning to the experience. For example, we recently pitched a bone broth client to sample at ski resorts. After a cold-weather workout, what better replacement for hot chocolate than bone broth, rich in collagen, to warm the belly and heal sore knees.

What’s trending in sampling?

What’s trending in sampling, is what’s trending in innovation – in food, beverage, alcohol, cosmetics, telecoms. Hot categories & trends that spark consumer interest tend to get a lot of marketing activity to accelerate growth. It’s exciting to see and push the innovations, bringing them to market.

Tell us about your sampling capabilities.

Clients typically care about a few things: who will represent their brand, how they’ll be trained & managed, and what information will be reported back. To that end, we’ve focused on building a national database of proven staff, internal processes to run programs well, and software systems including a Client Portal to view rolling reports, maps, photos, sales results and other details.

Your sampling campaigns are so successful for clients because.....?

We have a sales-driven approach. Staff learn tricks & techniques to sell product, not just give it away for free. We even incentivize staff with bonus pay when they surpass client-set sales targets at POS events, and we include bounce-backs for all field events.

How is technology helping sampling?

Better visibility, verification & reporting. Staff check in to job sites with a geolocated app, file remote reports that go to admin portal to client portal to accounting. Everything is very streamlined. And the feedback helps clients make actionable decisions on where to invest sampling dollars.

Is there a client category that speak sampling better than others...and why?

Beverage brands sample heavily - their price point & consumption pattern of habitual purchase / velocity means the ROI from sampling can easily be positive. Meanwhile stores expect beverage distribution will be supported by sampling. Lower ticket, lower velocity items sample less.

What investments are you making into your sampling offerings?

We invest the most in our project managers & our software systems. People & processes are the heart of it.

Top three sampling mistakes you see other sampling programs commonly making?

1. Not setting up a try-to-buy atmosphere. We invite consumers to sample a “flight” of flavors, with the implied conclusion they will select one to take home (plus a BOGO!). If it’s not sales driven, what’s the point?
2. Wasting money of full-size samples. The worst thing at a field event is to see half-tried samples piled up in waste bins at the periphery. Best to have a specific sample size; this can encourage trial of different flavors as well.
3. Forgetting to coordinate with the sales team. If the product isn’t ordered and available in the area you’re promoting, one won’t see a sales lift.

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Tell us a little bit about yourselves.

Switch has successfully executed field sampling campaigns for over 30 years. Our success is due to making every program a brand-specific experience, whether it's through retail sampling, an influencer program, or a nationwide mobile tour. Our goal is to always engage consumers right at the point of need with a fun, yet compelling, brand-specific story.

What are your field sampling capabilities?

Switch is your go-to agency to handle everything: hiring brand managers, handling payroll, customizing vehicle wraps, and producing one-of-a-kind displays. From creative to fabrication to operations & logistics, Switch has the in-house resources to handle any size sampling program.

Is there a client category that speaks sampling better than others... and why?

Since our inception, we have created award-winning programs for numerous industries, including healthcare, construction, beverage, snacks, energy, automotive, CPG, sports, agriculture, and entertainment. All clients need consumer engagement – face-to-face, one-on-one.

How is sampling evolving?

Now, more than ever before, consumers want to know *WHY* they should choose a brand and not simply *WHAT* the brand is offering. With so many products on the market, consumers want to feel more connected to a brand and understand what the brand stands for.

How do you communicate the “WHY” to consumers?

Storytelling is key, and that is one of our strengths at Switch. Developing a sampling campaign around a specific message, idea, or feeling, is just as important as the quality of a product. Our capabilities and experience in the field help us identify what story consumers want to hear and how to best tell it. It's our mission to find a way to bring a product to life and explain why it's beneficial to consumers.

How do you make sure your sampling campaigns are successful?

We find dedicated, outgoing people who embody the attributes of the brand and then train, train, train. True Brand Ambassadors ultimately become an extension of the brand and can easily communicate its lifestyle and product benefits. An authentic message results in a better sampling experience for the consumer – one that is longer and more informed.

How do you track ROI in sampling outside of purchase in-store?

We use our own proprietary event management tool to collect, measure, and visualize data from our clients' programs. Our team of experts analyzes this data to provide comparative benchmarks and actionable insights against our clients' KPIs.

What are the top three sampling mistakes you see other sampling programs commonly make?

1. Hiring the wrong people to represent the brand. 2. Improper training – If you don't spend the time to train to tell the right story, the message is lost. 3. Not investing in the overall experience.

Why invest in the overall experience?

In field marketing, impressions matter. How you look and feel to a consumer is key and finding that “place” in the consumer brain space is equally as important. Once the brand sticks there, consumers will remember you, and then you'll know you did your job.

Tell us about one of your sampling cases from the last 12 months.

We can't play favorites, can we? Check us out at switch.us/favorites.