



## THE THREE GOLDEN RULES OF PACKAGE TESTING

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Over the years, PTG has tested thousands of product shelves, packages and POP displays across an extensive array of categories and brands. Based upon our wide-ranging experiences and unique vantage point, we have identified a few golden rules that should be considered when planning a packaging research initiative.

### **Golden Rule #1: Context is King.**

There's no doubt that consumers make the best and most reliable decisions when they are observed in a real world environment. As such, in order to predict marketplace performance, product, packaging, and in-store research should be passive, unobtrusive and conducted in a contextually rich environment.

When designing a research study, it is also important to remove any category bias by including both test and control categories. If respondents know the category of interest, it will be reflected in their evaluation and negatively influence the accuracy of the findings.

To address these methodological concerns, PTG offers a unique alternative to traditional packaging research options. Our truShelf solution features life-sized 60" HD screens with proprietary continuous close-up product examination capabilities, with the ability to read ingredients, side panels and back-of-box instructions. We conduct our research by inviting consumers into a state of the art simulated shopping experience that replicates not only how products are presented, but also how consumers actually approach products on-shelf. This multi-dimensional interactive shopping environment also includes product pricing so all contextually relevant variables are included in the shopping experience.

To provide for a natural shopping environment, research participants are told they are going on a simulated shopping trip through a store. The store exterior and interior is selected by the client. While walking through the near-world environment, respondents are invited to spend as much or as little time on each scene, as desired. When interested, respondents have the ability to move closer to any section of the shelf, go back and forth between sections, and zoom in on any specific product for closer examination. To truly replicate the shopping experience, respondents also have the ability to rotate the product in order to examine the front, back and side packaging.

### **Golden Rule #2: Simulated Experiences Yield Superior Results.**

Based upon comparative research studies, we have identified a few important methodological distinctions between research initiatives that are conducted using a simulated shopping environment versus other less interactive approaches such as static shelf images.

First, since non-simulated methodologies lack a grocery store context, or the presence of control group categories, respondents are often tipped off to the research objectives. Our analysis has shown that the presence of this research bias falsely inflates category purchase and significantly reduces the amount of time consumers actually spend shopping.

It should also be noted that respondents participating in static shelf type scenarios approach products in an artificial manner. For instance, rather than having shoppers experience store aisles as they typically would from a side angle, most methodologies create a false construct by introducing products in a head-on manner.



Similar false constructs are created when research environments eliminate pricing information and the ability to conduct a close product examination which prevents consumers from considering cost and/or ingredient content during their evaluation.

**Golden Rule #3: Noting is Important, but Actual Product Engagement Is Needed to Tell the Complete Story.**

There are a variety of methodologies available in the marketplace promoting the ability to record eye movement and noting. However, while noting something on shelf is valuable information, it is important to note (pardon the pun), that noting alone can lead to false results if resulting consumer engagement and behavior are not taken into account as well. For instance, we found that noting increased dramatically when a key brand was removed from shelf. In the absence of additional data points, this increase would not reflect the fact that the uptick in noting was caused by consumers searching the shelf for the missing category leader, not increased interest in competing brands.

When the same scenario was tested using PTG's simulated store environment, our patented Saccadic Eye Movement Recorder measured actual consumer engagement and product approaching activity which provided a more comprehensive understanding of respondent involvement. For example, to what degree did respondents zoom in on a product, examine a section on a shelf or read ingredients on a package – line by line? This level of information not only provides the tactics and recommendations needed for improvement on the shelf and at the component level, but it also serves as the critical information needed to prove or disprove the noting data. In the example above, our simulated shopping methodology rightly concluded that something was amiss on shelf when noting was up but consumer engagement was nil.

**In Summary**

When considering research alternatives for in-store, product and packaging initiatives keep the following guidelines in mind: context, simulation, and engagement. Our experience has shown that the most informed business decisions are based upon consumer research that is collected in a highly engaging, real-world environment, that is free of respondent bias and measures actual consumer involvement, engagement and behavior.