

JUNE 2019

SAMPLING AS A SALES STRATEGY:



**FIND OUT HOW IT'S
EVOLVING IN THE
MODERN AGE**

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF PRODUCT SAMPLING?

A salesperson at the state fair featuring the world's most absorbent mop? Perhaps an unboxing video on YouTube from an influencer? A candle party you attended? Or maybe a person behind a table at your local grocery store enticing you to try vegan bacon? The truth is, all of these are forms of sampling.

The marketing landscape is constantly changing. And the way consumers behave, interact, and shop is evolving at a pace faster than we've ever seen. It's vital to understand how shoppers want to interact with the products and brands they're considering, as well as those they don't know exist.

Whether you're a retailer or a brand, the goal is ultimately the same—sales. While there are many ways to achieve this goal, sampling has been battle-tested for millennia and has proven to be effective at encouraging trial and driving sales. In fact, no other promotional method puts your product into the hands of shoppers like sampling can. Additionally, research shows:

- **94% of shoppers surveyed reported that sampling influences their purchasing decisions¹**
- **85% of consumers are likely to purchase a product after participating in events and experiences²**
- **91% of consumers have more positive feelings about a brand after attending events and experiences²**

Modern day product sampling can be traced back to Babbitt Soap, one of the first brands to leverage this promotional method in the 1850s.³ Fast-forward to today and it's impossible to imagine a trip to Costco without thinking about the numerous product samples waiting for you.

So, what makes sampling so effective?

Sampling:

- Alleviates risk by allowing shoppers to experience the product without having to purchase it first
- Elicits reciprocity to purchase simply from the act of getting something for free
- Promotes positive impressions and memories of the brand and product by giving shoppers a chance to interact with it
- Encourages repeat purchases

We know sampling works and what makes it effective, but how did sampling come to matter, and why does it matter for your business?



WHY SAMPLING MATTERS

Simply put, sampling matters because it matters to today's shopper—across all generations. In fact, the proliferation of sampling we see today can be traced back to the mid-1980s. [In 1984, "34% of manufacturers used sampling and by 1985 that number had jumped to 76% according to Progressive Grocer."](#)⁴ This dramatic increase was inspired by several factors that began during this time and continue to resonate today, including dual income earning households, latchkey kids, and the introduction of "Mr. Moms." These shifts in the American family led to less time in the kitchen, more snacking, and a new crop of dads who didn't know where to start in the kitchen. Sampling had an answer for all of these by showcasing items that helped make grocery shopping easier.

In terms of technology, the '80s ushered in an era of mass consumerism and everyone was on the hunt for what was new and what was next from the Sony Walkman to Nintendo's first video game console. And department and electronics stores were more than happy to let shoppers try out the latest tech to persuade them to buy.

The '90s brought us the internet and the golden age of the Millennials. With the internet, people could now research products online before making purchasing decisions, which gave tremendous power to shoppers. This meant retailers and brands had to find ways to convince shoppers of their product's value and quality. One of the best ways to illustrate that? You guessed it—sampling.

[Millennials make up the largest generation America has seen since the Baby Boom in the 1940s.](#) In 1990 alone, "there was a population peak at 4,158,000 births."⁵ Today, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates there are 81.3 million Millennials in America.⁶ This generation was weaned on technology and access to the information superhighway and in turn has built up a general distrust of corporations. Today, we see any number of stories of how Millennials have "killed"

everything from diamonds to department stores.⁷ But they've also brought classic products back, including Polaroid instant cameras and typewriters.⁸

According to the New York Federal Reserve, Millennials have amassed over "\$1 trillion of debt."⁹ This coupled with their seemingly innate dislike of advertising means marketers have needed to work overtime to appeal to what Millennials find attractive, including convenience, budget-friendliness, and experiences.¹⁰ And sampling can help communicate all of this to your shoppers.

In the 2000s through today, we've seen the maturation of social media and eCommerce, both of which are extensions of trends that began in the '90s. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have connected us in ways we never thought imaginable. These platforms have also provided new ways for retailers and brands to engage with their shoppers—and for those shoppers, for better or worse, to engage back. As a result, authenticity and transparency are key, as the internet remembers... everything.

The rise in eCommerce is a direct output of shoppers' desire for convenience due to the ever-shrinking amount of time we have in a given day. The success of eCommerce companies has caused many doomsday prophets to warn us of the impending "retailpocalypse." Aside from a few notable retail chain closures, however, these end times have yet to transpire. And they won't. [There's no question that retail has changed, but it isn't dying—it's evolving.](#)

To reflect this evolution, sampling today can leverage social media to engage in meaningful, two-way conversations, as well as illustrate how featured products can help shoppers with their complex lives. But the changes don't stop there. There are many new forms of sampling to answer shoppers' demands for convenience and elevated experiences, both on and offline, that you can put to work for your business.



NEW FORMS OF SAMPLING

The best way to elevate a sampling experience is to engage as many senses as possible. Research shows that up to 90% of all snap buying decisions are based on sight.¹¹ And according to the Harvard Business Review, “physically holding products can create a sense of ownership, triggering ‘must-have’ purchase decisions.”¹¹ So, if it's food, appeal to sight, sound, smell, and taste with a live cooking demonstration. Promoting a beauty item? Think about having a station offering mini makeovers to involve touch, smell, and sight. And thanks to the ubiquity of smartphones, you can turn these events into live, digital experiences!

Live video is highly effective with over 80% of consumers reporting they would rather watch a live video from a brand than read a blog or a static social media post.¹² You can use live video to promote your events via Facebook or Instagram to boost attendance, reach shoppers who might not be able to attend in person, and raise awareness among shoppers who hadn't considered your product or brand before. You can also livestream demonstrations and tutorials from a studio for the sole purpose of shopper engagement. The best part is that this new form of sampling allows you to engage with shoppers—on-demand—when and where they want to connect with your brand and products.

Another new form of sampling is engaging shoppers at the point of use or point of need outside of stores. Have you ever gone to a beach resort only to find you forgot to pack sunscreen? Imagine if you could get a free sample of sunscreen at the hotel lobby. You'd likely be thankful the sample was there to serve your immediate need,

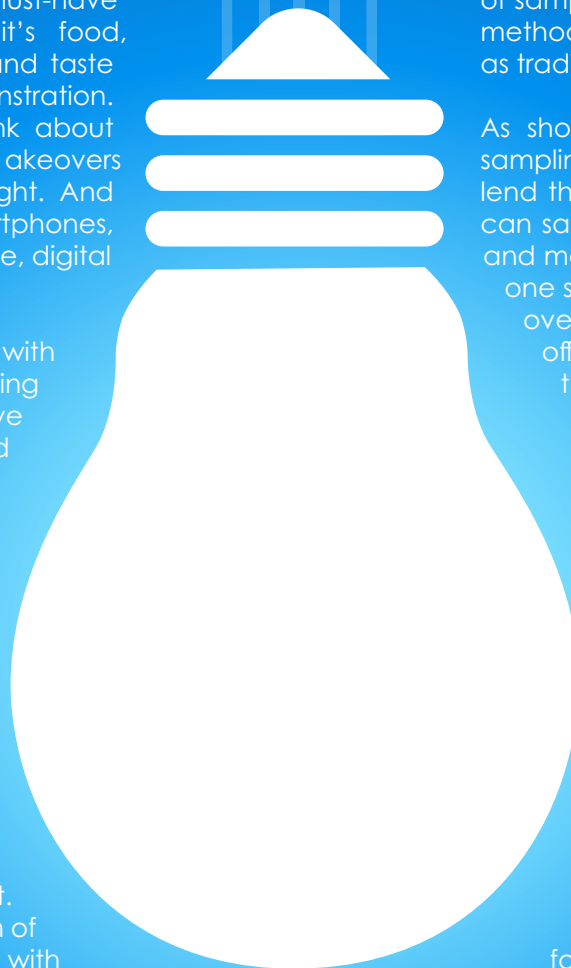
and you'd also be inclined to remember that brand the next time you're shopping for sunscreen. And you wouldn't be alone. The Advertising Specialty Institute reports that 85% of people who receive promotional samples remember the name of the brand.¹³ Additionally, with over 90% of samples used at the point of need, this method of sampling is twice as effective as traditional sampling methods!¹⁴

As shown in this example, this type of sampling is excellent for products that lend themselves to lifestyle activities. You can sample at gyms, spas, salons, hotels, and more. If you're a retailer, you can go one step further and have your samples overwrapped with literature cards and offers enticing shoppers to purchase the full product at one of your locations nearby.

Lifestyles are also reflected in the numerous subscription boxes available. Beauty, pet, baby, snacking...you name it and there's probably a subscription service for it. According to Forbes, “55% of all subscriptions are curation-based, making this category the most dominant in the 2018 subscription economy.”¹⁵

Many of these boxes contain sample-sized products. Thus, these curated boxes make it easy for retailers and brands to target shoppers specifically interested in those categories. And research shows shoppers are more than twice as likely to purchase a product as a result of receiving a sample of it in their subscription box.¹⁶

With all of these new methods of sampling, it can be confusing to navigate which makes the most sense for your brand or your stores. Having the right partner to help determine which tactics are right for your business can make all the difference.





HOW ADVANTAGE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CAN HELP

For over 15 years, Advantage Customer Experience has been a leading sampling and experiential service provider for brands and retailers across the country. Our mission is to positively impact purchase behavior through exceptional customer experiences designed to engage, educate, acquire, and retain consumers. We accomplish this mission for our partners by providing the following:

- **Sampling:** Opportunities to reach targeted customers on the go and at their convenience via:
 - In-store sampling
 - Box sampling
 - Online grocery sampling
 - Lifestyle sampling
- **Experiential:** Large-scale events, pop-ups, street teams, mobile tours, and more to build awareness and buzz
- **Premium Advisors:** Elevated brand talent in complex, high-value categories providing personalized assistance and recommendations
- **Virtual Advisors:** Instant engagement with on-demand product and brand assistance delivered via SMS (text messaging) or web
- **Virtual sampling:** Bringing products to life through a series of livestreams and promotional videos hosted by experts and influencers
- **Assisted selling:** Dedicated premium talent fully trained to act as extensions of your brand's sales team, educating customers as well as store employees on brand products
- **Consumer promotions:** Brand awareness and engagement through promotions that catch the attention of the targeted audience
- **Fulfillment:** Customized services scaled to your business requirements including order-to-cash, pick and pack, cold pack, overwrapping, and kitting



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