

Putting Ethnography Science Behind Your Strategy

We're sure most of you out there have said at one time or another, "I would love to be a fly on that wall!" There's no denying our inherent desire to know what other people are really saying and thinking—without having to admit you're just dying to know things you shouldn't or couldn't. Whoever said that ignorance is bliss, might rewrite that common cliché and replace "bliss" with "blind."

Being nosey can actually be a good thing, in fact, it can be very insightful and rewarding. As strategic marketers and brand builders, the team at evok knows the more research you use to create a message, campaign or idea, the better the success rate you will have. So, how do we search for this useful information in the field? How do we conduct a detailed survey of the characteristics of a specific market segment? It's not a secret and you don't have to be incognito to benefit from this tuned-in, on the wall approach. The writing on the wall points to ethnography.

Ethnography is a qualitative research method often used in social sciences, but it has shown great value to the world of marketing. It goes beyond the normal settings of the traditional focus groups by taking research to the core where it matters most, an individual's everyday life. Ethnographers observe, interview and videotape people in their everyday lives: where they work, live, shop and play. And the reason it has such value is because it overcomes the artificial nature of surveys and their standard Q&A format, which depend on self-reporting, skewed grouped results and the researcher's frame of reference. Ultimately, ethnographic research reveals the unspoken cultural and social patterns that shape consumer behavior.

Knowing how to provoke the desired behavior is key to building a brand. It's the consumer's behavior as to whether or not they decided to choose your brand over another. What ethnography can do is provide insight into how a consumer interacts with your brand – how they feel about it, when they use it and why they chose it. These findings can lead the way to a communication strategy that can incorporate traditional and non-traditional tactics. These tactics allow the consumer to experience and embrace your product or service, when and where it is relevant to them.

Not all Ethnography marketing studies are created equal, nor are they for everyone. It's an ideal approach to use when:

- Launching/developing a new product
- Developing a brand position
- Creating up-front exploratory work (when the objective is to renovate, revive or reposition a brand)
- Trying to understand how a consumer uses a product or service in the context of his or her daily life
- Observing consumer behavior first-hand is critical versus asking for recall after-the-fact
- The audience is hard-to-reach (e.g. teenagers, moms with babies, the affluent); or as a complement to more traditional qualitative (focus groups) or quantitative (usage and attitude studies) approaches.

Still not exactly sure when or how to use ethnography? How about in the morning on an empty stomach? Here's a good example from General Mills.

When breakfast is and isn't breakfast anymore.

General Mills understood that the paradigm of the family breakfast was shifting, but didn't know where it was going or how to respond. Researchers arrived at consumers' homes at 6 a.m., armed with video cameras and the tools of ethnographic research, ready to study families during their morning rituals. "Breakfast" has become an individualized and intermittent series of snacks eaten up to 11:00 a.m. Yet, it is still perceived as the most important meal of the day, so parents struggle to find the right foods for their children.

Go-GURT portable yogurt for kids was just the answer. The product is healthy enough for moms to give to their kids any time of the day and is "cool" enough for kids to eat during their morning recess. In just two years, it captured 7% of the \$2 billion yogurt market.

Since then, the total U.S. yogurt market has ballooned to more than \$4 billion and Go-GURT has become a ubiquitous kid-food product with a slew of imitators.

Ethnography can help marketers and brands overcome all language, age and geography barriers; just ask the fly on the wall, he's scaled 'em all.