

SECRET OF MY SUCCESS

Wax On, Wax Off

A Communispace-built community helps Turtle Wax shine up relationships and burnish its brand

■ **Tell us about your company.** Turtle Wax is a globally recognized brand of car-care products, based just outside of Chicago. It's in more than 90 countries, but I was one-third of the marketing department. It's small, privately owned, and family-owned, and we found that consumers viewed us as the "everybody" brand, rather than a brand for auto enthusiasts or car collectors.

For some time, we had been internally focused, with 85 percent of new-product ideas developed in-house. Some of those products, though, didn't necessarily meet a consumer need. When you're a small company and you only launch a couple new products a year, you better make sure the ones you do launch are going to work.

We started to do focus groups and a few ideation sessions run by a consumer panel. We got a snapshot in time, but weren't able to expand the snapshot. Because of the nature of the focus group, we weren't able to talk to those people again. Plus we only had a budget for eight focus groups a year and one product ideation.

But how could I get instant customer feedback without going the traditional route of focus groups and ethnographies? I went to Google and searched "online research groups." I talked to a number of different companies and then found Communispace, a provider of private communities serving the needs of market research.

■ **So how did the community pan out?** We wanted input from consumers and the retailers we sell our products to, and set a goal of getting 75 percent of product ideas from outside the company. I worked internally with our consumer-insights team to put together the profile of the kind of people we wanted to communicate with on a regular basis and get their input on product, brand, promotions, and everything else.

We didn't have the expertise so we sent Communispace to go out and find people. We wanted people who fit the demographic of the Turtle Wax consumer, but we didn't necessarily want Turtle Wax advocates. We wanted brand-switchers and people who were loyal to other brands. We decided to focus on males, the dominant demographic in our category. We wanted the family guy who takes care of the car in his driveway—washes it at least eight times a year and waxes three times—and whose pride and joy is his pick-up truck.

We started with 300 people. We had great help from the Communispace facilitators and we were able to plan out a set of proj-

ects for the next 12 weeks. We launched in May 2009, as we were going through a brand restage for a couple different brands. I'm not overstating when I say it paid for itself within the first four weeks with some of the feedback that we got.

■ **How so?** We launched Turtle Wax Ice in 2006—it's become the number-one liquid wax in its category. Going into 2010, we were worried that it was a little stale so we wanted to do a packaging restage. It was neat looking and internally we heard, "Oh, yeah, it's really cool." So we were about four weeks away from the brand restage and I said this might be a good thing for our community to give feedback on.

We put the old and the new packaging images on the site to get feedback. We got a wonderfully high response rate—but people, overwhelmingly, didn't like the new package. We went into a panic—mind you, this is 25 percent of our business we were restag-

ing—but community means you don't just say, "They didn't like it," and back away. You follow up: "What didn't you like? What would you have changed? What was missing?" We got hundreds of responses. We put off the restage and went back to tell the brand agents what the consumers said was missing. In four weeks, we went back to consumers and we said, "We listened, we've put your feedback in place, what do you think now?" This time they came back with overwhelmingly *positive* reviews on the changes we had made. We probably avoided sales loss of \$2 million.

■ **How did the community react to the incorporated feedback?** They were blown away. They felt very

involved and engaged: "I can't believe my voice is actually being heard." We created long-term brand advocates. The response by retailers was great, as well. We asked the community about its shopping experiences at, say, Wal-Mart or AutoZone. We took that feedback directly to the retailer: "This is what consumers say about shopping in your area and here's how we can improve upon it." It led to major accounts and was a huge victory. It created a real sense of trust with retailers and confidence in knowing they can turn to Turtle Wax for answers.



Marc Okicich,
FORMER DIRECTOR OF
MARKETING FOR
TURTLE WAX | as told
to Lauren McKay

five fastfacts

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- **WHEN WAS THE COMMUNITY LAUNCHED?** May 2009.
- **WHO WAS INVOLVED IN THE DECISION PROCESS?** Product development, sales, insights. Also, Executive Business Team approval.
- **THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE?** Prioritizing projects. We have so much to discover sometimes we forget what's most important.
- **BIGGEST SURPRISE?** The true connection the community members feel with Turtle Wax as members of the group. It's become their company too!
- **BEST IDEA?** Not rolling out a packaging change that we were in the final steps of implementing. The community provided critical input that kept us from making a very costly mistake.