

Research groups are becoming creative

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Research: One of the catchcries of advertising agency creatives is that all the good ideas die in research.

Research or focus groups are plagued by their very inexactness—that and the fact there are people who actually earn a living by attending them (groupies). But they're often the only measure marketers have of how "real" consumers feel about an ad concept, a new product or a marketing idea.

Marketing consultant Ken Hudson is aiming to build a better mouse trap, or focus group, with a "creative consumer panel" that he has assembled.

Advertising for self-identified creative types, Hudson then narrowed down his initial applicants by their written submissions, and then further pared the list down with a "creativity quiz" he devised to test the applicants' ability to be a creative problem solver.

Questions in Hudson's quiz

include: think of at least 10 different uses for a shoe; and use the word 'spoon' to help solve an organisation's car parking problem (i.e too many cars, not enough spaces).

Hudson said the panel will be able to assist marketers with anything from a more traditional focus group situation to new product development.

The panel of 20 will cost \$5000 a time, roughly the same pricing as a focus group of about four to six people.

"You get the voice of the consumer, and it creates new stimulus for the internal brand," Hudson said.

"[If research kills advertising] why don't we get more creativity into the research process and stop whinging about it.

"I believe this process is a circuit-breaking one. For the first time some real creativity has been applied to the research and idea development process. It is important in my process to start with consumers rather than an internal brainstorming idea—in this

way the group can create new directions, possibilities that the internal group can evaluate and make the promising ideas even stronger."

Hudson said he has conducted a pilot study using this method and had some truly original breakthroughs.

"I completed a pilot study with a marketing director of a UK retailer who wanted to energise the butter category. She briefed me and a similar group came up with some wonderful ideas such as spray-on butter, butter and jam in the one package, calcium-enriched butter for pregnant women, Wiggles butter for kids, see-through packaging. The client was very pleased and gave the report to the brand leaders in this category and challenged them to explore some of the ideas."

Splash Consulting has also trialled a new research format for women. The format is hosted by TV personality Paula Duncan, involves 35 women and is conducted in the manner of a chat show.