

## What Research Can Contribute to Fish Marketing

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SINCE THE WAR there have been some revolutionary developments in the field of marketing and merchandising. In industry after industry enormous strides have been made towards improving the efficiency of the intricate processes involved in getting merchandise in the hands of consumers. In all but a very few industries, the comparatively new and rapidly growing field of market research has been highly instrumental in determining the direction of development of new marketing and promotional strategies, tactics, and procedures. Perhaps the fish industry has been less affected by these developments than many others.

A contributing factor in these developments has been the ever-increasing sharpness of competitive practices, not only between brands but also between product categories. We have been progressing steadily towards an era of enlightened awareness of the ways to influence and even to control the factors which make for a greater effective consumer demand. No longer do leading producers in an industry sit on their hands and offer mutual condolences for the sad state of affairs which prevent their company or their industry from achieving its rightful place in the economic system. Instead, individually and collectively they seek positive solutions to their problems.

Progressive producers seek to determine what actions are necessary to improve the individual company and the industry, to reverse trends if this be needed, to uncover new and different uses for their produce so as to render it more acceptable to a wider range of customers, to increase its prestige in the eyes of the consumers, to render it more satisfying, rewarding and attractive to more and more customers, to alter basic attitudes and beliefs that may be unfavorable towards consumption of their produce. These are but examples of many directions in which individual producers and entire industries can and have moved to increase their prestige.

The very nature of these possibilities for improving what is good, or changing what is bad about an industry, points to the research approach as an indispensable aid. Without it, the producer and advertiser, however knowledgeable in his own field, lacks essential information necessary to reduce the guesswork surrounding his decisions. He runs great risks, in taking any potentially effective step, of having it backfire, with serious or perhaps disastrous consequences. At the very least, without research he would have disregarded modern and progressive means of increasing immeasurably the efficiency of his promotional efforts, so that a million dollars spent in this direction achieves only what might have been accomplished for half-a-million spent more wisely, with more complete and accurate knowledge of where, how and what should be promoted.

The field of research has become so broad, and indeed some of its inquiries have penetrated so deep, that it is hard to single out a few areas of inquiry as being potentially more useful than others. Indeed, in the absence of a well-conceived research program operating over a period of time, a producer or an industry could start almost anywhere and come up with information that would be extremely useful—assuming, of course, that the research is sound.

Despite the progress research has made in recent years, every once in a while it is astounding to hear of enormously important decisions being made, involving millions of dollars of investment, without the aid of highly relevant facts that research could so easily supply. This certainly does not imply that research will become a substitute for administrative judgment. It must be suggested, however, that failure to inquire into available or procurable facts before reaching any important conclusion is hard to reconcile with either a scientific or a business-like approach. Far from being a substitute for administrative judgment, research must be considered a powerful and extremely effective ally not only as a means of testing hypotheses and assumptions, but also in stimulating creative imagination in new and highly promising directions that would never have occurred to anyone otherwise.

In turning to our more specific area of inquiry here today, what research can contribute to fish merchandising and marketing, it depends of course upon what you already know and what you want to achieve for the industry as a whole and for the individual producers. Granting the premise, however, that primarily you want to sell more fish at better prices, there are important services that research can render you. The need for research often cannot be ignored, for the more energetic and progressive activities of competitors may well make serious encroachments which will prove far more costly to repair.

Basically, research can discover for you genuine opportunities to increase sales. These opportunities may lie in many different directions, as, for instance, the capturing of new markets that could be induced to use particular types of fish products, ways to increase the frequency of serving fish, the ways of overcoming objections to the use of fish, ways of enhancing the attitude that fish are a major source of needed nutrients. Even more important, perhaps, research can delineate and describe the types of mental and emotional obstacles which stand in the way of greater use of fish. Thus, research can point the way towards their elimination.

All of these things, and many more, can be achieved, not as a result of a single research project, but as a long range result of a well conceived and executed program of research having many different facets relating to different products, different market groups, and different areas of inquiry.

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## **Solving Problems in National Merchandising of Seafoods**

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THERE ARE MANY PROBLEMS in merchandising seafoods. The seafood industry seems, at times, to be overly blessed in this respect. In fact, the word merchandising itself is a problem to define. What does it mean to the food technologist, the scientist, the packer, or the grocery clerk? To me it simply means leaving no stone unturned to sell more products.

The seafood industry is one of the oldest industries, with some of the oldest properties, oldest ideas, and oldest methods in the country. In spite of its age,