Case Study

Evolving relationships: MMR Research Worldwide and the Sensory Science Centre

Key Facts

- MMR Research Worldwide Ltd is a global leader in consumer and sensory research for food, drink and other consumer packaged goods. MMR specialises in quantitative and qualitative research.
- Sensory evaluation is an essential tool for optimising consumer acceptance of food products and is vital in gaining understanding of how we perceive flavour, taste and texture in food.
- MMR has had a long relationship with the University of Reading which in 2008 resulted in the setting up of the Sensory Science Centre (SSC), based in the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences. The Department is the largest of its kind in the UK, and has a wide range of in-depth expertise in the development and analysis of food.
- The Centre uses a panel of professional assessors who have been trained to evaluate the sensory characteristics of a wide range of products.
- Basing its sensory facility within a research environment and at the University has bought significant benefits to MMR and its clients.

Background

MMR Research Worldwide Ltd, one the largest privately-owned consumer research companies in the UK, is a global leader in consumer and sensory research for food, drink and other consumer packaged goods. The company, located in the UK and the US, employs approximately 100 people and has an annual turnover of £16 million.

MMR specialises in quantitative and qualitative research and has many blue chip food, drink and consumer packaged goods clients. MMR has worked with the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences at the University of Reading for many years accessing its research expertise and utilising specialist equipment in the field of Food Science. The Department is the largest of its kind in the UK and aims to deliver international levels of research and teaching in the food biosciences using modern advanced technologies and inter-disciplinary expertise.

The Opportunity

In response to an expanding marketplace and increasing client demand for consumer and sensory research, MMR and the University of Reading identified an opportunity to develop a facility beneficial to both parties.

The facility, the Sensory Science Centre (SSC), provides high quality sensory evaluation data for MMR's blue chip food, drink and healthcare clients and for the University's research and teaching programmes. Based in the recently refurbished sensory laboratories in the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, the SSC houses a range of sensory facilities under one roof and is fitted with the latest Compusense® sensory software.

Current Status

The Centre, set up in 2008, uses a panel of professional assessors, who have been trained to evaluate the sensory characteristics of a wide range of products. The panel is managed directly by MMR's Sensory Manager, Phiala Mehring, working in close collaboration with Dr Lisa Methven, Lecturer in Sensory Science at the University.

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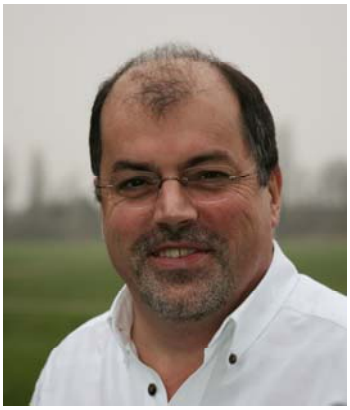
The sensory evaluation conducted by MMR on behalf of its clients helps in the reformulation of products by using better, healthier or lower cost ingredients. MMR offers alternative ways of conducting research and testing, and basing its sensory work within a research environment means it can investigate different methodologies. Some projects will involve competitive product benchmarking and larger projects combine consumer research elements (to provide the information on what is liked) with the expert sensory evaluation (to understand the sensory drivers). Recent work has focused on understanding the relationship between the sensory characteristics of a product with its emotional communication. This is of potential huge value to manufacturers in better aligning the product experience with their brands. In addition MMR continues to use the independent specialist expertise of the University.



'We've been collaborating with the University of Reading for many years. When we decided to bring MMR's sensory evaluation in-house, Food and Nutritional Sciences was the obvious choice for the facility. I'm delighted our company is enjoying a very fruitful business relationship with the University.'

Professor David Thomson

Chairman
MMR Research Worldwide Ltd

Benefits to the Partner

MMR has the desire to use and obtain the theoretical knowledge that underpins and otherwise assists in the marketing of its services and therefore benefits from its sensory evaluation facility being located within an academic setting.

Benefits to the University

Professor Don Mottram heralded the joint venture as a "major boost to the teaching of sensory science at Reading, and a fantastic research resource. Our relationship with MMR brings about the fusion of science and commerce, creating a unique sensory resource".

Involvement with up-to-the-minute industry developments allows academics to update their teaching practices with leading edge techniques and knowledge.

The contract has provided the University with upgraded Compusense® computer systems, including all the data analysis and data collection software. This has had a real impact on how well the University can conduct tests; it also enables the SSC staff to carry out the research in a very systematic way.

The collaboration has reinforced the role of sensory research within food science and nutrition.

University of Reading

The University of Reading is a world-class research-intensive university covering a broad spectrum of disciplines across the Life and Physical Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Henley Business School. Areas of particular strength include: Climate Systems Science, Preventative and Therapeutic Health Sciences, Sustainable Construction and Environments and Computational Science and Informatics.

The University recognises the important role universities play in supporting the regional, national and international knowledge economy. We value existing relationships with companies and hope to evolve many of them into collaborative or strategic partnerships, as well as to seek to develop new mutually beneficial relationships.

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