

Marketing a new product? Getting consumers to visualize using it could backfire

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Companies often provide detailed information that encourages consumers to visualize using a new product. But does this make consumers more likely to buy it? According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, it depends on whether consumers picture themselves using a new product in the past or in the future.

"Getting [consumers](#) to visualize using a new product helps if they picture themselves using the product in the past. But this doesn't work if consumers picture themselves using the new product in the future, which is the default perspective consumers tend to use when evaluating [new products](#)," write authors Min Zhao (University of Toronto), Darren W. Dahl (University of British Columbia), and Steve Hoeffler (Vanderbilt University).

In a series of studies, consumers were asked to evaluate various new products (a tablet PC, a [heart rate monitor](#), a vacation package, Google Glass). When prompted to visualize using a new product in the past, consumers were more interested in the product if they were given detailed and concrete information. When asked to visualize using a new product in the future, they were more interested if it was described in more general and abstract terms.

However, this effect was strongest when it was easier for consumers to visualize using a new product (when they were regular runners familiar with heart rate monitors, when they knew something about a vacation destination, or when the more visualizable features of Google Glass were

emphasized). Meanwhile, the effect was attenuated when the new product was difficult to visualize (when they were non-runners unfamiliar with [heart rate](#) monitors, when the vacation destination was very unfamiliar, or when the less visualizable features of Google Glass were emphasized). When a product was highly familiar to consumers (not a new product), the effect was reversed because prior images of using the product interfered with their visualization.

"Our findings have important implications for companies introducing new products to consumers. Contrary to the popular belief that providing consumers with more detailed information is always better, this is only true when consumers picture themselves using new products in the past. The effectiveness of visualizing using a product depends on the temporal perspective consumers take," the authors conclude.

More information: Min Zhao, Darren W. Dahl, and Steve Hoeffler. "Optimal Visualization Aids and Temporal Framing for New Products." *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2014.

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