

Identifying new uses for old products

Background

Have you ever used maple syrup to revive an ailing houseplant? 402 resourceful consumers were interviewed to determine who they were and how they came up with good ideas.

It was found they often identified new uses for products because they wanted to save time and to decrease waste.

The need for convenience frequently motivated these consumers to focus more on the abstract benefits of a product instead of focusing on the traditional situation in which it is used. Unlike Depression-era parents or grandparents who identified alternative uses to save money, today's resourceful consumers identify them to save time.

They look for alternative uses in situations that stress the attributes of the products around the home, rather than specific situations themselves.

Key Teaching Point

- Consumers look for alternative uses in situations that product qualities are more relevant than specific situations
- Today's consumers are more time constrained than in past eras, making shortcuts necessary, not for cost savings as much as for convenience.

**This study was conducted at the University of Illinois, former location of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab.*

Student Demonstration

Begin this class period by allowing the students read, or discuss, the research conducted at the Food and Brand Lab*.

Remind them that many consumers use products in different ways. Typically this is done by focusing the thoughts on the beneficial attributes of a product, rather than the situation in which it's typically used. For example, soap cleans hands, but it is also good when you need something slippery.

Also at this time, show the students the list of new uses below:

Pancake Syrup	Revive ailing house plants
Coffee Filters	Keep dirt from spilling out of pots for plants
Salt	Soften jeans in the wash
Cola	Loosen rusted bolts
Yogurt	Substitute for higher fat eggs or oil in recipes
Lemon Juice	Clean cutting boards
Coffee	Carry earthworms for fishing
Ketchup	Remove stains on cookware

Finally, ask students to devise their own creative uses for normal household items.

Wansink, Brian (2003), "How Resourceful Consumers Identify New Uses for Old Products," *Journal of Family and Consumer Science*, 95:4, 109-113

