



## 3-step research process for identifying your product's triggers and barriers

| By Scott Garrison

Anyone who has been involved in the launch of a new and/or innovative product knows the importance of clearly communicating the benefits of that product. But even if consumers are convinced that your product is right for them and are triggered to purchase the product, other forces may be working against you. Barriers to action – such as a concern about convenience, taste or substantiation – are often aspects of the product that you may falsely take for granted. When those barriers are not met with thoughtful reassurances, they can easily become deal-breakers.

For instance, a consumer may be attracted to a light ice cream because of its promise of less calories and sugar (triggers) but may also harbor serious doubts that it will taste good (barrier). Those doubts may be strong enough to prevail over the appeal of the health benefits and ultimately prevent purchase. However, when the brand communication is focused on taste, the consumer is reassured that it will indeed taste good and the initial barrier can be overcome.

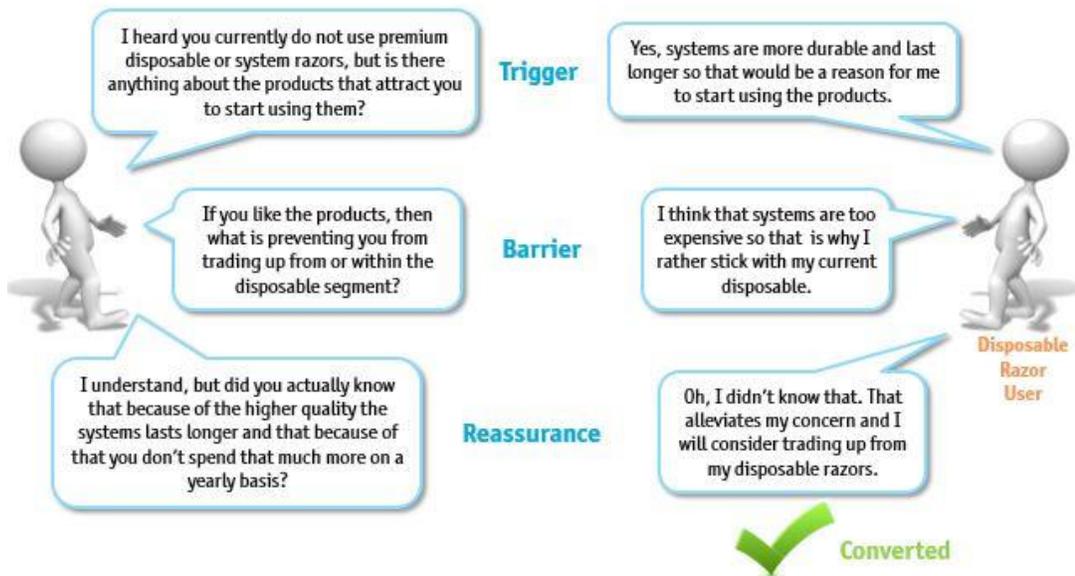
By conducting specific research into triggers and barriers one can create compelling reassurances that effectively close the deal. The three-step research process entails the following:

**Step 1:** Identify lists of potential triggers and barriers to consumers using your product. This can usually be done in collaboration with an internal marketing or product team if there is sufficient market and consumer knowledge within your company. Alternatively, research strategies (briefly outlined below) can be used to help uncover the most prevalent triggers and barriers.

**Step 2:** The importance of each trigger and barrier is validated quantitatively. This enables you to see how much of the market possesses a particular trigger or barrier and which are most important for your communication efforts.

**Step 3:** Consumers then identify reassurances that can help them overcome their barriers in order to provoke trial or increase usage. Ideally these consumers are either potential first-time users or those that have yet to engage in repeat trials.

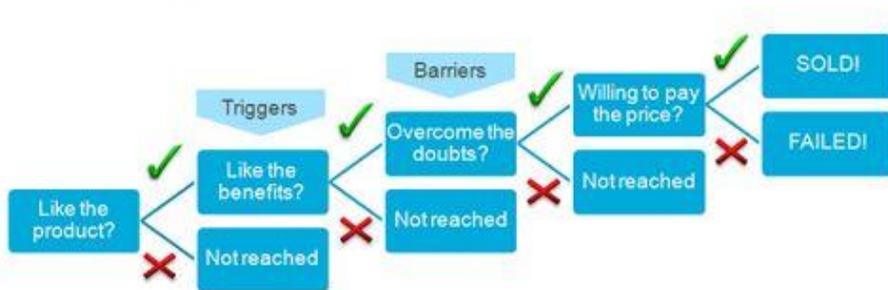
**Figure 1: Illustrative Example for Triggers and Barriers in Action**



A full understanding of triggers and barriers to action helps to reveal consumers' full decision-making process, as shown in Figure 1. A product runs the risk of failing to convince at every stage. However, one can use triggers and barriers to increase the likelihood that the consumer will at least try the product, as long as he or she is willing to pay for the purchase.

For very expensive items or new-to-market products, pricing should be considered as an independent trigger and/or barrier. Figure 2 provides an example where price is considered. However, if willingness to pay is not a key step for the brand or category in question, it need not be forced into a consumer's decision-making process during the study.

**Figure 2: The Triggers and Barriers Gauntlet**



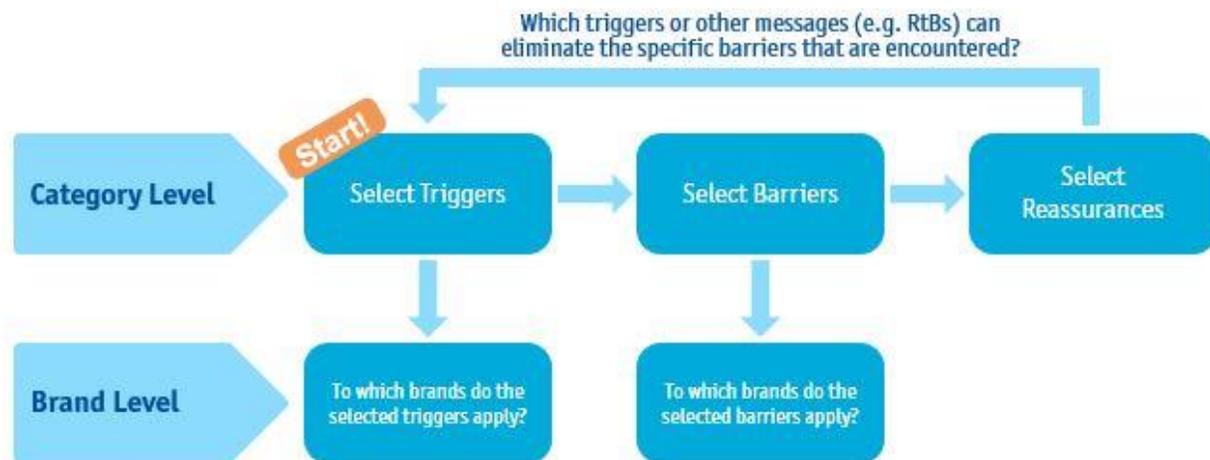
**Designing the study**

Prior to running a triggers and barriers study, researchers typically define a list of statements to test as triggers, barriers and reassurances through preliminary qualitative research. There is a wide variety of

sources from which these statements can emerge, such as a brand’s existing key claim, a tagline or any form of communication that is directed toward consumers. The statements can also be derived from aspects of other brands, products that dissatisfy consumers or those which are genuinely appreciated and could thus be mimicked.

The key to developing the optimal communications strategy is to gauge a consumer’s known or unanticipated triggers or barriers, which can be accomplished by including open-ended questions. By incorporating open-ended questions into the design, researchers can combine qualitative insights with the quantitative results from the triggers and barriers method to provide a full understanding of how to best formulate a communication strategy.

**Figure 3: Study Design**



While the main purpose of the study is to gain category-level insights (Figure 3), it is possible to also gain a better understanding of the statements that apply most to key brands. After identifying which triggers and barriers hold true category-wide, one can explore the more specific statements relevant to key brands. For example, a category trigger for energy drinks might be, “keeps you sharp, energetic and focused,” whereas a statement such as, “a shot of long-lasting energy that takes just seconds to take” may be linked exclusively to one brand. All energy drinks are expected to provide you with energy, while only certain brands will resonate with the promise of quick ingestion.

**Linking reassurances to barriers**

An essential element of the proposed methodology is to identify ways to overcome barriers, allowing consumers to use the product without any concerns or doubts. In other words, what can marketers say to reassure consumers that the barrier they are facing is not applicable and can be eliminated? It should be noted that these statements do not have to be the same as the triggers. They could also include additional reasons to believe in the product – statements that are not triggers but could be very relevant in reassuring people that a specific barrier can be overcome.

To better illustrate the differences that can exist between triggers and reassurances, let's return to the first example of a light ice cream. In this scenario, the idea of a lighter option is appealing to consumers but they have concerns about the taste of the ice cream. Communicating that the ice cream has 30 percent fewer calories or that it has less fat than other ice creams is a way to trigger the consumer to try the offering. However, this fails to address the concerns of taste and leaves the consumer with lingering doubts. To reassure the consumer, the brand may state that the light ice cream tastes just as good as regular ice cream. While the taste statement may not be as effective as the health statement in terms of triggering trial or uptake, it can be vital to the communication effort as a reassurance to overcome the barrier.

### **Taking action**

The end result of a triggers and barriers study is a thorough understanding of what prompts consumers to use your product, as well as the most crucial barriers that prevent them from wholeheartedly embracing your offerings. By also focusing on the reassurance statements, marketers and communicators are able to gauge the effectiveness of certain communications in terms of overcoming barriers and ultimately increasing product trial and usage.

This process delivers a forecasting instrument that determines what portion of the market can be reached by combining the right concept with benefits and reassurances. For example, if we know that 75 percent of those who do not use deodorant avoid it because they believe it causes cancer, we can also determine what percentage of those individuals could be converted by a reassuring message that states the product has been proven to be safe for your health. With this knowledge in hand, marketers can define an optimal communication strategy that can simultaneously prompt consumers to use a product while also removing any and all doubts that stand in their way.

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