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*The setting sun, and music at the close,  
As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last,  
Writ in remembrance more, than things long past.  
-- Shakespeare, Richard II*

### **“APC – Take Two and Call me in the Morning”**

#### *Saccharin vs. Nutrasweet*

Getting consumers to describe a product can be a real headache. Two of the most common problems are that:

- Consumers can't think of the right words to use, or if they do,
- They don't give the proper emphasis to each word.

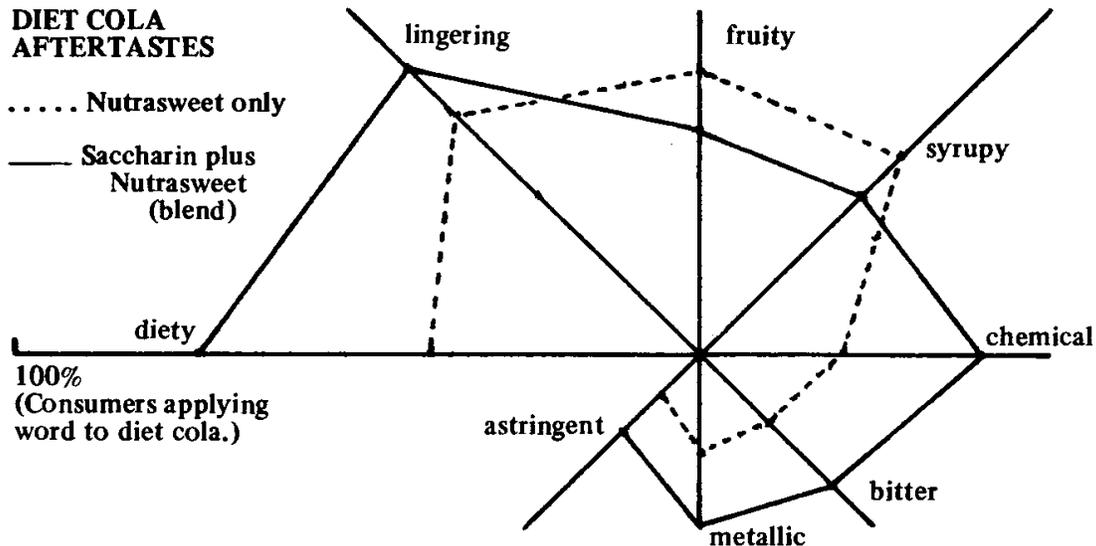
Selecting the words is a qualitative problem; giving them emphasis is a quantitative problem. The proper prescription is APC. Not the traditional pain pill of **A**spirin – **P**henacetin – **C**affeine but the **A**tttribute **P**rofile: **C**onsumer.

An APC is essentially an accurate, composite description of a product made by a group of consumers, usually 100 or more. It begins with a list of 10 or more words that might possibly be used by an articulate person to describe the product(s) in question.

After becoming familiar with a product, each word is offered to each consumer as possibly describing the product or not describing the product. From the words selected by one consumer, a qualitative picture of the product as seen by that consumer is obtained. When information from all of the consumers in the survey is combined, both a qualitative and quantitative profile of the characteristics or attributes of the product in question is obtained.

#### **Diet Cola Aftertastes**

Of course this technique is ideal for comparing different products. It can also be used to focus in detail on a specific attribute such as appearance, aroma, flavor, texture, aftertaste, etc. This is illustrated by a comparative study of the aftertastes of colas sweetened with 100% nutrasweet vs. nutrasweet blend (nutrasweet plus saccharin).



In these profiles, each word is represented by a ray. A point on the first ray (at the left) is arbitrarily given a value of 100%. And that ray is assigned to the word used most frequently to describe the products. For the aftertaste of diet colas that word is “diety.” Each product is then marked on the line in proportion to the percent of consumers who selected that word as descriptive of that product. For the saccharin containing product that is 73%.

This process is then repeated for each other word, clockwise in decreasing order of their use. Then the points for each product are joined by a line to form an attribute profile based on consumer opinions. The shape of the spirals thus formed gives a convenient picture of the products.

For the aftertaste of the diet colas, it can be readily seen that the dominant characteristics of the product containing only Nutrasweet are fruity and syrupy whereas the Saccharin containing product is identified as diety, lingering, chemical, bitter, metallic and astringent.

### Comparison to Others

Another way to get information of this type is to ask open-end questions. Here consumers are simply asked to describe in their own words the product in question. This gives good information but the range of responses tends to be limited, because their speaking vocabulary is limited. However, their recognition vocabulary is likely to be much larger. So that if they are provided a range of words to use (as in APC), they will be more accurate in their description of the products.

To get quantitative information attribute scaling is frequently used. For example, is the product:

- Much too sweet
- Slightly too sweet
- Just Right
- Not quite sweet enough
- Not nearly sweet enough

This is an excellent approach for a limited number of attributes and allows thorough statistical evaluation (analysis of variance, etc.). But it can be time consuming and difficult for a consumer to scale a large number of attributes. This is particularly a problem when the consumer doesn't see the importance of the attribute to the product. The APC allows a large number of attributes to be considered about as quickly as one or two could be scaled. And because of the speed and convenience of APC, it can frequently be incorporated in a broader study that includes both open end questions and scaling.

Like the other APC (aspirin – phenacetin – caffeine), APC (attribute profile: consumer) will not cure all headaches, but properly used, it may provide relief when a consumer description of a product is needed.