

How the Vaseline Brand Remains Relevant after 125 Years



Using Social Media Research to Gain Context and Insight



Overview

In an era of continuing innovation in skin care products, as well as breakthroughs in technology and evolving standards, Vaseline Petroleum Jelly has maintained a relevant position in the personal care category with little innovation or changes in formula since its inception in 1872. To understand how Vaseline Petroleum Jelly has remained competitive, J.D. Power Web Intelligence analyzed consumer conversations about their use of this product. The analysis was conducted internally and independent of parent company Unilever.

“Males and Boomers lead conversations regarding the many uses of Vaseline Petroleum Jelly”

Beyond understanding the size, sentiment, and demographics of the online Vaseline Petroleum Jelly discussion, Web Intelligence analyzed the context of these conversations to identify the “why” behind the data. Based on more than 27,000 blog and message board posts between May 1, 2009, and April 30, 2010, Web Intelligence finds that the success of Vaseline Petroleum Jelly has been driven by consumers’ preference for a basic product and remains successful due to the expansive number of uses they find for it.

Approximately 90% of total consumer mentions for Vaseline relate to the Petroleum Jelly product, indicating that this is still the core product with which consumers associate the brand. The following results reflect the quantitative and qualitative findings from this discussion, and also illustrate some of the many uses for Vaseline Petroleum Jelly that transcend the traditional use—personal care. Findings show that Vaseline Petroleum Jelly discussions take place largely on message boards, and that males and Boomers¹ lead conversations regarding the many uses of the product.

These additional and innovative uses for Vaseline do not discount the passion consumers have for the therapeutic properties of the core Petroleum Jelly product. In fact, they provide Vaseline an opportunity to create new products that carry the Vaseline brand name. Consumers not only appreciate Vaseline Petroleum Jelly’s multipurpose nature, but also appreciate the product’s simplicity and time-tested effectiveness. Because many consumers indicate an interest in returning to the simpler things in life, or a “back to basics” approach, Vaseline may be able to leverage this association in messaging and product positioning.

Conversation Volume

The following chart shows the comparative conversation volume between boards and blogs in the 12 months analyzed for this case study. Due to the information-sharing nature of message boards, this forum environment accounts for 74% of Vaseline mentions. The breadth of message board themes are indicative of the wide range of topics in which Vaseline is discussed.

Vaseline Is Primarily Discussed in Message Board Environments



Message Board/Platform	Theme
answers.yahoo.com	General
imdb.com	Film and Entertainment
espn.go.com	Sports
moneysavingexpert.com	Financial
ivillage.com	Women
medhelp.org	Medical
bodybuilding.com	Health and Fitness
webmd.com	Medical
myspace.com	General
rcgroups.com	Electrical

Source: J.D. Power Web Intelligence Division

Source	Volume	% Share
Blogs	6,836	26%
Message Boards	20,484	74%

Source: J.D. Power Web Intelligence Division

Conversation Demographics

Gender	Index*
	81
	127

*Index is on a 100-point scale

Source: J.D. Power Web Intelligence Division

“Vaseline helps everything. It’s a moisturizer, chap stick, eye cream and make up remover all in one. I swear by it.”

Boomers and Males Lead Vaseline Discussions

The demographic breakout is a further indicator that Vaseline mentions extend beyond the personal care category. Males significantly over-index² in Vaseline discussions, compared with females, who under-index at 81. Compared to discussion levels in the general blogosphere, Boomers are especially active in Vaseline discussions, compared with Gen X and Gen Y consumers³. Consumer verbatims provide a snapshot of actual consumer discussions.

Generation	Index*
Gen Y	97
Gen X	92
Boomer	128

**Index is on a 100-point scale.
Source: J.D. Power Web Intelligence Division*

Brand Snapshot

A brand snapshot provides a high-level summary of associations and perceptions consumers have with the Vaseline brand in their online discussions.

Verbatims provide examples of the types of conversations that consumers have. To maintain the integrity of these posts, the verbatims included in this case study have not been edited for grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

"Vaseline helps everything. It's a moisturizer, chap stick, eye cream and make up remover all in one. I swear by it."

"If necessary, consult with a dermatologist. In the meantime, try an over-the-counter cortisone cream or good old vaseline. Use the simplest product that brings relief."

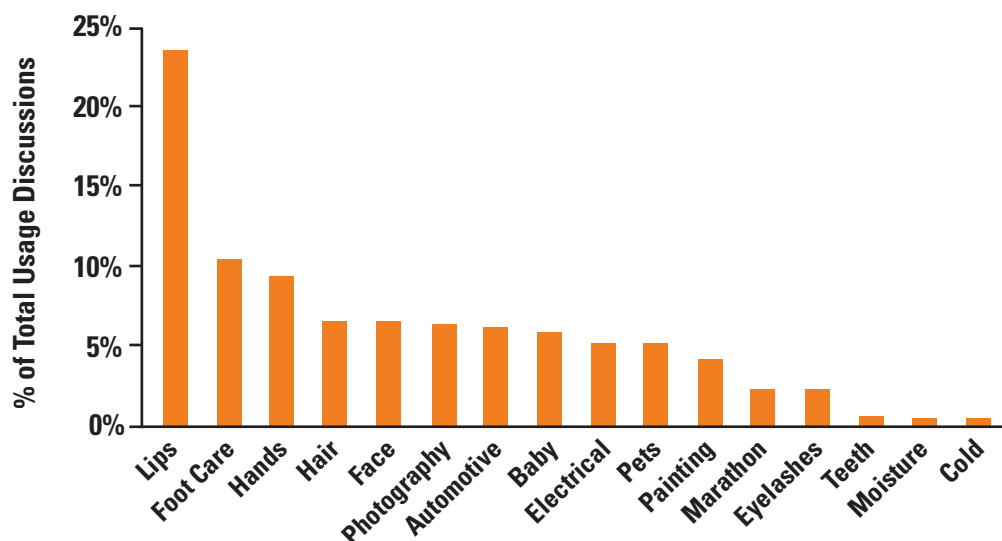


Source: J.D. Power Web Intelligence Division

"50 Uses for good old Vaseline 1. Put a coat on your eyelashes before you go to bed. Lots of people swear by this—and say it will make your lashes grow longer and thicker over time. 2. Put a coat of Vaseline on your feet at night, cover them with socks and wake up to softer feet—every day! 3. Put Vaseline on your elbows every day—they will stay soft! 4. Put Vaseline on your cuticles several times a day for softer and better looking cuticles every day. 5. Put Vaseline on chapped lips 6. Use Vaseline as lip gloss..."

Uses of Vaseline Petroleum Jelly

Top Mentioned Uses for Vaseline



Source: J.D. Power Web Intelligence

Lips Accounts for Almost 25% of Mentioned Uses

Among all of the applications of Vaseline Petroleum Jelly that consumers discuss, soothing and protecting chapped lips is most frequently mentioned. These consumers speak passionately about Vaseline and consider it a "must have" product. Vaseline's role as an everyday necessity is also reflected in consumers' tweets via Twitter, in which they often express gratitude for their "trusted" Vaseline. A number of fan pages on Facebook also emphasize consumers' loyalty to the product.

"Vaseline. This baby is waaaay bettter than your average chapstick which I personally think dries out and chaps your lips on purpose. Most weekends I spend bare-faced but I feel totally and 100% "incomplete" if I don't have Vaseline on my lips—it has my heart—always & forever."



However, the soothing nature of Vaseline is not limited to lips, as many consumers find that Vaseline effectively moisturizes and treats dry feet and hands as well. Vaseline is often mentioned as a nighttime treatment for these areas, which is applied right before bedtime.

Females Have No Issues Applying Vaseline to Their Faces

Among females who discuss Vaseline, 7% mention using it on their face for moisturizing purposes. Gen Y females are especially active in this usage behavior, over-indexing at 119. Some even apply a thick layer and leave it on overnight for a deep conditioning mask. In an era of expensive moisturizers and nutrient-enriched products, these consumers are at the opposite end of the spectrum, where a basic, simple, and inexpensive product meets their needs. There is no significant level of discussion regarding concerns with using a petroleum-based product on the skin.

In addition to providing moisture, Vaseline is often discussed for a variety of other cosmetic uses, including makeup removal, eyebrow control, do-it-yourself lip gloss, and cheek glow.

Vaseline Transcends Skin Care Uses

Approximately 13% of online posts analyzed were authored by consumers who discuss various industrial-related uses for Vaseline Petroleum Jelly, mostly for automotive- and electrical-related purposes. Whether to prevent battery corrosion, filter a camera lens, or prevent car windows from freezing, Vaseline has a reputation as a handy solution for industrial-related uses. Instructions for these types of uses are often shared on YouTube.

Opportunities

Web Intelligence analysts work with clients to understand key business issues, and provide recommendations and highlight opportunities that are both strategic and tactical in nature. The recommendations below are based on the information gathered online and are examples of transforming raw data into actionable insights for clients.

"I use black 3M weather stripping cement to glue them to the valve covers and apply a film of Vasoline to the head side. Tighten only enough to stop any seepage. The Vasoline helps prevent the cork from sticking to the head so that the VC can be removed and replaced several times without needing new gaskets."

Leverage Vaseline's Simplicity in Messaging

As the recession has compelled consumers to think in more budget-conscious terms, there is a trend to seek simplicity and a return to basics. What began as a need to reduce spending has evolved into a longer-term approach to living a simpler lifestyle, in which consumers are more aware of the value proposition of brands⁴ and demand authenticity in the products they purchase, rather than select them on the basis of



"I use Vaseline on my feet before bed. I like to slather it on my heels and then put some really thick socks on. It works better than most foot creams I've tried."

"I love vaseline. It's cured my face. The dryness, the acne, the wrinkles...poof."

status. Vaseline resonates with consumers because of its simple efficacy, low price point, and classic appeal.

Expand on the Theme of Vaseline's Multipurpose Nature

Participation by males in the online Vaseline conversation affirms consumers' perceptions of it as a product with many uses beyond those that are advertised. Vaseline may consider the implications of these additional uses and determine whether they align with the brand and its current strategy, or whether it may potentially taint Vaseline's image as a personal care product. For example, Vaseline's uses in the electrical, automotive, and photography arenas may present possibilities for new brand development that leverage the original Vaseline Petroleum Jelly formula, but use a different brand name geared specifically for industrial-related uses or introduce a separate brand name for each category.

Use Vaseline's Therapeutic Properties to Drive Innovation

Conditioning. Healing. Soothing. These words are often used by consumers in online discussions to describe the therapeutic power of Vaseline Petroleum Jelly, and could inspire new product innovation, such as healing patches or a 12-hour nighttime conditioning treatment.

Conclusion

This research was conducted internally and independently of Vaseline's parent company Unilever for illustrative purposes only. J.D. Power Web Intelligence listened to more than 27,000 unsolicited online consumer conversations to identify and explore the drivers of Vaseline Petroleum Jelly's success. These discussions show that the simple nature of the product, coupled with consumers' own innovative uses for it, have contributed to the popularity of this time-tested staple product. The findings of this research indicate several potential opportunities for the Vaseline brand, including messaging implications to leverage how consumers are naturally speaking about Vaseline Petroleum Jelly, as well as product development opportunities based on the extensive uses that consumers

Notes:

1. J.D. Power Web Intelligence defines Boomers as consumers born between 1945 and 1964.
2. Indexing allows a comparison of how relevant a topic is by comparing the percentage of topic conversations generated by a specific generational group to the percentage of topic conversations in the blogosphere. When a topic indexes above 100, it is referred to as over-indexing, and the assigned number designates the extent to which the group speaks about the topic more often than the blogosphere speaks about that same topic. Under-indexing refers to the degree to which a topic is discussed less often than the blogosphere. Indices are calculated by comparing the demographic breakdown of authors who mention a product to the demographic breakdown of blogosphere authors in general.
3. J.D. Power Web Intelligence data defines Generation Y as consumers born between 1979 and 1992; Generation X as born between 1965 and 1978; and Boomers as born between 1945 and 1964.
4. This value proposition is also referred to as brandwashing, which is defined as consciousness among consumers when a brand's essence or status outweighs the perceived actual quality or tangible benefits of its product or service. With higher expectations for value, consumers are calling out brands that fail to deliver on their value proposition.

About J.D. Power and Associates

J.D. Power and Associates is a global marketing information services company operating in key business sectors across a variety of industries, including market research, automotive forecasting, performance improvement, Web intelligence, and customer satisfaction. Established in 1968, the company has been listening to consumers and business customers; analyzing their opinions and perceptions; and refining research techniques and study methodologies to offer some of the most advanced product quality, customer satisfaction, and tracking research available today. The company's quality and satisfaction measurements are based on responses from millions of consumers annually. J.D. Power and Associates is a business unit of The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

About Web Intelligence

J.D. Power Web Intelligence provides an innovative approach to turn millions of social media conversations into actionable information. Combining the company's 40+ years of customer and industry insights with state-of-the-art patent-pending technology, Web Intelligence analyzes rich, but difficult to aggregate, text to derive insights about consumers, trends, brands, and products.

From our Intelligent Social Media Listening tools to our Tribe Intelligence consumer segmentation, J.D. Power Web Intelligence's unique combination of technology and industry expertise helps companies leverage social media research to drive decisions about market trends, understand how to reach a particular segment of consumer, or inform new product development.

To learn more about how J.D. Power's Web Intelligence Research, please contact:

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