

Getting Tools Used

Lessons for Health Care from Successful Consumer Decision Aids



NOTE: THIS IS ONLY A PORTION OF THE GETTING TOOLS USED RESEARCH REPORT. FOR THE FULL DOCUMENT AND OTHER INFORMATION VISIT WWW.CFAH.ORG.

Table of Contents

Foreword by Jessie Gruman.....	1
Executive Summary.....	3
About CFAH.....	7
Table of Contents.....	8
Introduction: 21 st Century Marketplace.....	9
Research Framework.....	17
Case Studies.....	25
<i>Consumer Reports: Car Buying Guide</i>	25
eBay.....	65
FDA Nutrition Fact Panels.....	113
<i>U.S. News and World Report: America's Best Colleges</i>	163
Case Study Commentaries.....	209
Margaret Holmes-Rovner, PhD.....	209
David E. Kanouse, PhD.....	225
Stephen Parente, PhD.....	239
Dale Shaller, MPA.....	250
Shoshanna Sofaer, DrPH.....	263
Lessons Learned: Key Variables of Success.....	275
Advancing Healthcare Decision Aids.....	293
Getting Tools Used Research Team Biographies.....	311
Acknowledgements.....	317

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Getting Tools Used

Case Study Research Framework

Objective

The objective of this research is to help healthcare decision aid developers and sponsors improve their approaches to development, dissemination, and promotion with the ultimate goal of increasing consumers' use of decision aids to make informed choices about healthcare.

Hypothesis

We hypothesize that:

- a. Decision aids – those that are popular in the commercial sector as well as those developed within healthcare – vary along a number of common variables;
- b. Wide audience use of a decision aid depends on some combination of variables, such as the characteristics of the audience, the context of the decision the individual is making, the tool itself and its content, the context in which the tool is presented, the marketing and promotion of the tool, and the organization that is sponsoring the tool; and
- c. For any given tool, the combination of variables related to wide audience use may change over time.

The hypothesis will be tested through a set of four case studies of successful decision aids for non-healthcare products and services.

In this hypothesis and research, the Center for Advancing Health defines “decision aid” as a paper or electronic aid, or both, to “help people make informed decisions by providing and managing information . . . and presenting the tradeoffs involved in various possible choices” by arraying comparative information. (Adapted for tools concerning non-healthcare decisions from The RAND Corporation for healthcare-specific tools.)¹

¹ Carlisle E, Spranca M, Kanouse DE. (2003). *Empirical studies of decision aids for consumers*. Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation. As cited in: Shaller Consulting. (2006). *Consumers in health care: Creating decision-support tools that work*. California Health Care Foundation.

Research Questions

For each unit of analysis (i.e., decision aid), the case study will explore:

- a. What are the primary characteristics of each tool in terms of development, design, dissemination and promotion, audience, use, external context and business model – both now and in the past?
- b. Which variables, or combination of variables, for each tool appear to be more influential than others in achieving and maintaining wide audience use?
- c. How, if at all, did the combination of influential variables change over time for each tool?
- d. What measures and analyses did the tool developer use to assess the tool's effectiveness and design improvements?

Cross-case analysis will explore:

- e. How are these influential variables (or variable combinations) the same and different across case studies?
- f. What are the implications of the case study findings for the design, development, promotion, and business models of potential healthcare decision aids?

Variables

To organize potential variables affecting wide audience use, the project team adapted the Kanouse et al framework of seven basic principles for a successful quality-reporting effort.² (Although presented linearly in Figure 1, the Kanouse principles inform an iterative process to develop objectives; understand and shape context, design and test; implement with promotion and dissemination; and evaluate and continue testing.)

² Kanouse DE, Spranca M, Vaiana M. (2004). Reporting about health care quality: A guide to the galaxy. *Health Promotion Practice* 5(3): 222-231.

FIGURE 1. Variables of Interest for Exploratory Case Studies

Kanouse Basic Principles ²	Variables
Planning Phase <i>to develop objectives that make sense in a particular context</i>	
Audience Know your audience; clearly identify who they are, what they care about and what actions they can take; tool design, promotion, and dissemination must all accommodate a specific audience's goals, preferences, values and ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic demographics (e.g., age, gender, language) • Psychographics (e.g., social class, lifestyle, behavior, opinions, values, motivators) • Cognitive ability for processing information and learning style • Awareness of having a choice • Awareness of reasons to attend to choice • Audience goals for choice • Context(s) in which audience would typically make a choice
Resources and Constraints Identify resource and other constraints that may limit what is possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources of sponsor (e.g., financial, technical skills, brand/reputation, partners) • Business model for the tool • Resources of target audience • Social context • Political considerations • Organizational capabilities • Trade-offs (e.g., audience size, tool scope, and features) • Time and schedule • Availability of authoritative information to integrate into the tool • Sponsor goals and expectations • Conflicts of interest with sponsor or information source(s)

Kanouse Basic Principles ²	Variables
<p>Barriers and Facilitators Consider barriers and facilitators to achieving objectives and figure out how to overcome them and/or turn them to your advantage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature of choice (e.g., frequency, number of options, range of consequences for different choices, number and salience of dimensions along which attributes differ, difficulty of choice absent information or a tool) • Physical environment for choice • Social environment for choice • Prevailing norms for target audience • Potential champions and messengers • Potential benefits to promote • Audience comprehension of content of tool • Convenience (time and cost) for audience • Barriers to audience use (e.g., literacy levels, habits, technology access, pricing, sponsor credibility) • Risks
<p>Objectives Define your objectives – the decisions of your audience that you want to inform and the outcomes you want to effect – and set priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target audience (user, perhaps provider) • Dimensions of choice seek to have audience use tool to inform • Desired outcomes from audience using the tool to make choice • Desired outcome for market penetration • Prioritization (e.g., trade-offs)
<p>Design Phase <i>to create a design for a tool and a marketing plan that will accomplish the prioritized objectives</i></p>	
<p>Tool Design Design a tool that specifically incorporates the results of the priority-setting and trade-off process and looks at everything from the audience's perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Format(s) • Relevance of information for audience • Presentation of information in terms audience understands • Ease for target audience in navigating or using tool accurately • Features (e.g., customization, displays that support decisionmaking) • Optional services
<p>Promotion and Dissemination Develop a plan for promotion and dissemination at the project's outset</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning of tool relative to choice (e.g., point in decision process, promoted benefits, time needed to effectively use tool) • Placement of tool relative to choice (e.g., locations, distribution channels) • Promotion (e.g., frequency and relevance of messages about tool, messengers, communication channels, publicity, partnerships with intermediaries) • Pricing (e.g., list price, discounts, terms)

Kanouse Basic Principles ²	Variables
<p>Testing and Evaluation Build in ongoing testing and evaluation – formative work to shape the reporting effort and “after-the-fact” evaluation to identify successes and areas needing improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer testing of tool pre- and post-release • Impact of tool on audience(s) included in sponsor’s objective • Deliberate feedback loop from users and non-users to tool sponsor and partners, including designers, for ongoing monitoring and improvement • Resources for periodic evaluations to measure success and learn from experience for future modifications

Case Study Tasks and Methods

At their first meeting on August 11, 2008, the specialist panel finalized the overall research framework (this document, as revised) and the specific research questions (page 18). The panel discussed and agreed on the criteria for case inclusion and will confirm or modify the case study selection via e-mail after the potential cases are arrayed in a matrix. Among the decision aids considered are:

- Best Buy Home Theater Recommendation Center
- *Consumer Reports New Car Buying Guide* and *Used Car Buying Guide* (print publications) and *ConsumerReports.org Car Buying Guide* (electronic)
- eBay³
- Nutrition Facts Panels
- *U.S. News & World Report: America’s Best Colleges* (print and electronic)

Case Study Selection Criteria

The unit of analysis is a decision aid for consumers. To be selected for a case study, the tools had to meet all five of the required criteria, as presented in Figure 2.

³ The focus would be on eBay’s decision aids that assist individual consumers with making auction and shopping choices on nondurable goods through the provision of comparative information such as cost, location, etc.

FIGURE 2. Required Criteria for Case Study Tools

REQUIRED CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION AS A CASE STUDY	POTENTIAL TOOLS FOR CASE STUDIES			
	Consumer Reports/ Cars	eBay/ Non-healthcare	Nutrition Facts Panels	U.S. News & World Report/ Colleges
Fits definition of “decision aid” (pg. 17)	X	X	X	X
Is familiar and widely used by the public, from lower-middle to upper-income consumers	X	X	X	X
Supports a non-healthcare decision	X	X	X	X
Supports decisions about products or services for which there is no one “right” answer	X	X	X	X
Supports decisions for which it would be almost impossible for an individual to accurately compare relevant attributes without the aid of some tool	X	X	X	X

To aid application of the research findings to the healthcare sector, the project team and panel wanted some variation in case study characteristics. Figure 3 lists the desired characteristics that at least one case study among the four should have.

FIGURE 3. Desired Characteristics for Case Study Set

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS FOR SET OF CASE STUDIES	POTENTIAL TOOLS FOR CASE STUDIES			
	Consumer Reports/ Cars	eBay/ Non-healthcare	Nutrition Facts Panels	U.S. News & World Report/ Colleges
Readily accessible to low-income consumers ⁴			X	X
Engages user in considering	X	X		X

⁴ The other tools are widely available in public libraries that offer patrons free computer access.

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS FOR SET OF CASE STUDIES		POTENTIAL TOOLS FOR CASE STUDIES			
		Consumer Reports/ Cars	eBay/ Non-healthcare	Nutrition Facts Panels	U.S. News & World Report/ Colleges
his/her budget					
Tool Content ⁵	Data only			X	
	Global recommendation	X			X
	Comparative functions with multiple variables	X	X		X
Tool Format ⁵	Print and static	X		X	X
	Web-based, with static and customizable forms	X	X		X
Tool Context	For unassisted use	X	X	X	X
	For assisted use in some cases				X
Decision Type	Yes or no decision		X	X	
	Comparative decision	X	X	X	X
Decision Subject	Product	X	X	X	
	Service				X
Sponsor	Nonprofit	X			
	Commercial		X		X
	Government mandate			X	

After reviewing the tools against the criteria, the project team and panel selected the four case studies: *Consumer Reports Car Buying Guide*, eBay, Nutrition Facts Panels, and *U.S. News & World Report: America's Best Colleges*.

⁵ Some tools may fit several types.

The next steps of the project are listed briefly below with the final research reports released publicly in June of 2009.

1. Establish the Data Collection and Reporting Protocol
2. Collect Data and Prepare Case Reports
3. Commentaries: Interpretive and Comparative Process and Reports
4. Plan and Conduct a Small Meeting of Experts
5. Prepare Final Research Reports
6. Disseminate Findings