

Sources of product information used by consumers when purchasing kitchen cabinets

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Abstract

Survey data from home shows in Seattle, Washington and Anchorage, Alaska were used to determine the sources of product information used by consumers when buying kitchen cabinets. Results show that in-store sales staff are the most common source of product information, and that consumers' favorite wood species, age, and gender can influence the source of product information chosen. It was concluded that wood products manufacturers should consider customer demographics in their marketing efforts.

An active area of research in wood products literature is the study of consumer choice. Several recent studies have focused on how attributes of wood products influence consumer preferences. For example, Bumgardner and Bowe (2002) studied differences between name-based and species-based consumer preferences for six different wood species. They found that although seldom able to correctly identify the six species, respondents maintained strong preferences for certain species. Consequently, there often was a disparity between name-based and appearance-based preferences, particularly for red oak (*Quercus rubra*).

Fell (2002) evaluated consumer preferences for 11 lesser known Canadian species and found that color and grain were the two most important appearance attributes. Consumer preferences were found to be influenced by several demographic factors including gender, urban

versus suburban resident, and Canadian province.

Donovan and Nicholls (2003) studied consumer preferences for character-marked Alaska birch (*Betula papyrifera*) cabinets. They found most respondents preferred some degree of character marking and that consumers were willing to pay significant price premiums for their favorite cabinet, particularly the most heavily character-marked cabinets.

An important determinant of consumer preferences is the type of product information to which consumers are exposed. However, in the wood products literature, no evidence of studies investi-

gating the sources of product information used by consumers when making purchasing decisions could be found. This study identifies where consumers receive information on wood products and determines whether demographic factors such as age, income, and gender influence which product information source is chosen.

Methods

Wood products is such a broad category that it was believed that consumers would have difficulty identifying a single source of product information. Therefore, kitchen cabinets were selected as a representative wood product for which respondents would be able to identify a primary source of product information. Data were collected at home shows in Anchorage, Alaska and Seattle, Washington during October 2002. Respondents were asked to select their favorite kitchen cabinet door from a group of seven. The seven possible doors were oak, hickory, maple, cherry, and three alder doors with differing levels of stain (an additional goal of this study, not discussed here, was to evalu-

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ate consumer preferences for stained red alder). All doors were constructed in a raised panel style and in a size typical for residential use. Respondents were then asked to select their primary information source for kitchen cabinets: magazines, home shows, in store sales staff, the Internet, or word of mouth. Demographic information on age, income, and gender was also collected. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to identify differences in demographics between groups of respondents who selected each of the five possible information sources.

Results

A total of 1,360 responses were received at the two home shows: 509 in Anchorage and 851 in Seattle. In both states, respondents were older and wealthier than the average and therefore did not constitute a random sample of the states' population (Table 1).

However, it was assumed that home show attendees would be more likely to buy kitchen cabinets than the general population, so their preferences may be of more interest to cabinet makers and other secondary wood products manufacturers than the preferences of the general population. In addition, a sample of home show attendees is probably biased toward using home shows as a product information source, so this study may overstate the relative importance of home shows.

Figure 1 shows the proportion of the sample that selected each of the five possible options as the primary information source used when making kitchen cabinet purchasing decisions.

Almost half the sample (48.5%) used in-store sales staff as their primary information source for kitchen cabinets. Magazines and home shows were the next two most popular sources of product information (both 16.0%), followed by word of mouth (13.7%), and the Internet (5.8%). Table 2 provides sample demographics separated by choice of primary information source.

An ANOVA analysis was conducted to determine if the differences in demographic data shown in Table 2 were significant at a confidence level of 90 percent. The sample exhibited significant differences in mean age ($p = 0.00$), proportion of female respondents ($p = 0.021$), and proportion of Seattle respondents ($p = 0.068$) though not in income ($p = 0.30$).

Table 1. — A comparison of sample mean age and mean income to 2000 U.S. census values.

	Anchorage, AK		Seattle, WA	
	2000 U.S. census	Home show respondents	2000 U.S. census	Home show respondents
Mean age (years)	32.7	46.9	35.9	47.4
Mean family income (\$ per year)	69,711	77,729	61,580	86,628

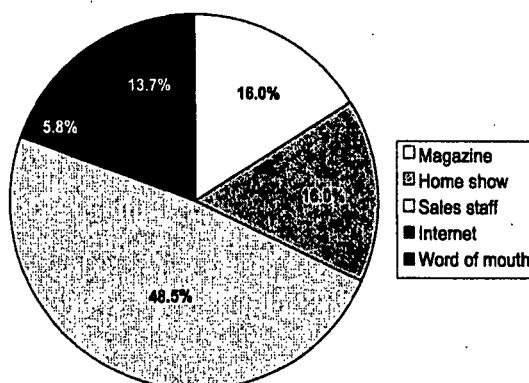


Figure 1. — Primary information source for kitchen cabinet purchases as indicated by attendees at home shows in Anchorage, AK and Seattle, WA.

Table 2. — Demographic information by choice of primary information source.

Information source	Number of responses	Seattle responses	Female	Mean age	Mean family income
		(%)			(\$ 000's)
Magazine	217	64.1	60.4	46.2	87.0
Home show	217	63.1	47.9	49.6	82.6
Sales staff	659	59.2	60.1	47.4	82.5
Internet	79	70.9	49.4	40.0	88.0
Word of mouth	188	68.6	57.4	46.5	79.7

It was further hypothesized that a respondent's choice of favorite species might be correlated with their choice of information source. The only species that showed a significant difference in popularity by information source was red oak ($p = 0.08$). Respondents who selected home shows as their primary source of product information were twice as likely to prefer oak compared to respondents whose primary information source was the Internet or magazines.

Discussion

This study used survey data from two home shows to determine what information sources consumers use when making kitchen cabinet purchasing decisions. In-store sales staff were the most popular information source, chosen by almost half the sample. This result suggests that cabinet makers, and possibly

other secondary manufacturers, should focus a significant amount of their marketing effort on in-store sales staff. This study does not distinguish between in-store sales staff and in-store displays. Therefore, it is worth noting that in-store displays may have at least partially influenced the popularity of in-store sales staff among survey respondents.

The comparison between the demographics of the five information source groups revealed significant differences in mean age and proportion of female respondents. Respondents who used the Internet as their primary information source had the lowest mean age (40), whereas those who favored home shows were the oldest (49.6) — almost 10 years older than the Internet group. Women favored magazines and sales staff as information sources whereas men were more likely to use the Internet or home

shows. The difference between the proportion of Seattle respondents that chose each information source may be interpreted in several ways. Narrowly interpreted, Seattle respondents were more likely to use the Internet or word of mouth, whereas Anchorage respondents were more likely to use home shows. This result may be broadly interpreted as the difference between respondents from a large metropolitan area and those from a smaller city. In this context, the Internet appears to be a more effective tool for influencing urban consumers whereas home shows are more important to consumers from less populous areas. In general, manufacturers need to be aware that different demographic groups favor different information sources and tailor their marketing efforts accordingly.

The analysis of respondents by their choice of favorite species found only preferences for oak showed any significant differences by choice of information source. This result suggests that, compared to other species, when marketing oak products more emphasis should be placed on home shows and less on magazines and the Internet. However, although home shows were more popular with respondents who preferred oak, in-store sales staff were still the most common source of product information.

Kitchen cabinets were used as a representative secondary wood product; future research could determine if the results from this study hold for other products. An additional question is whether consumers place equal weight on information from different sources. For ex-

ample, is equal weight given to a magazine advertisement and a recommendation from a salesperson?

Literature cited

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