Consumer Perspectives on Smoke Alarms

Vision 20/20 and Salter Mitchell
Qualitative Formative and Message Testing Research

salter mitchell
COMMUNICATION + BEHAVIOR CHANGE

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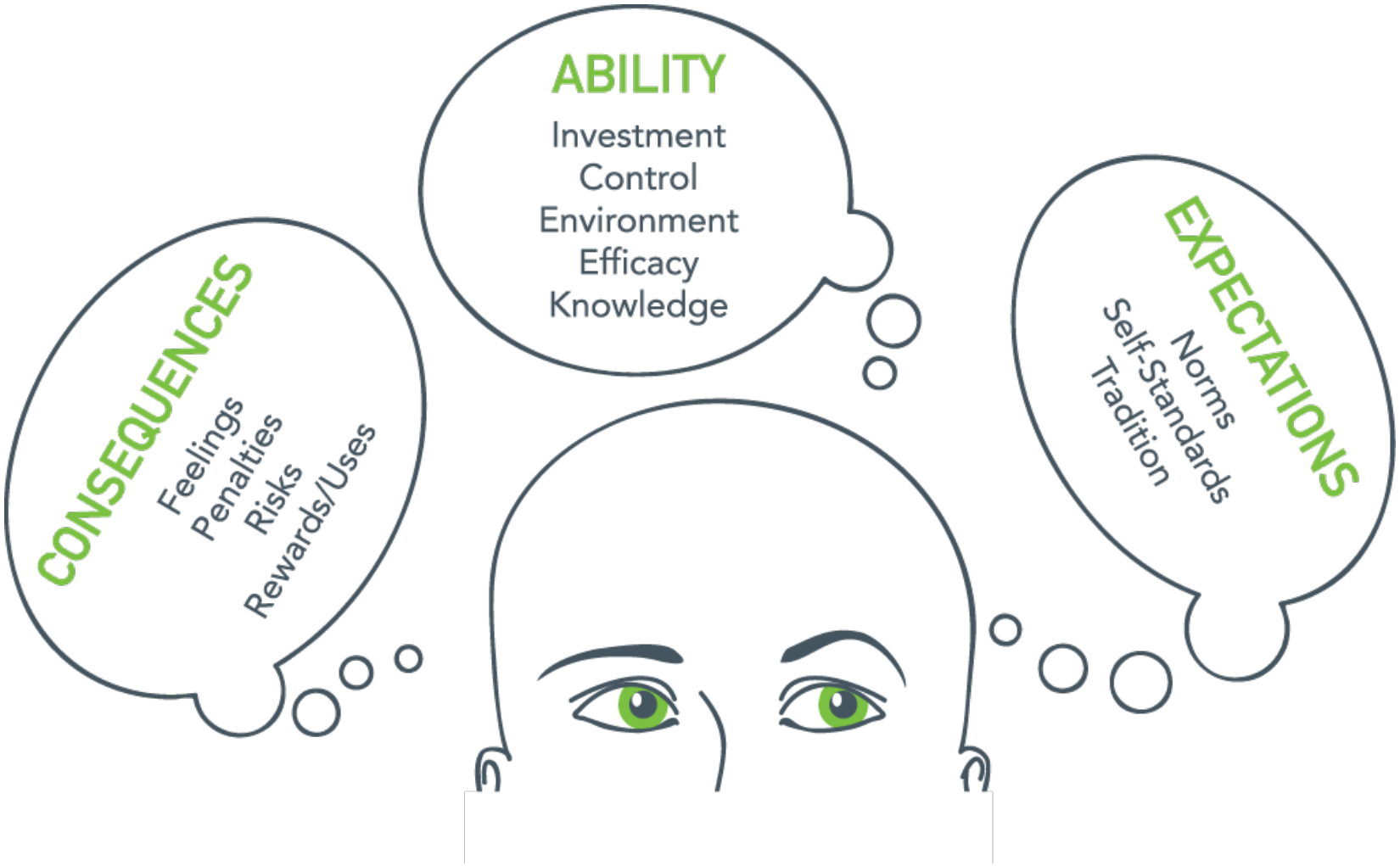
GOALS & METHODS

- Understand perceptions and behaviors related to smoke alarms among at-risk consumers
- Leverage findings into communication framing strategies
- Draft messages and taglines based on most successful framing strategies
- Gather feedback and perspectives on the potential taglines and messages
- Identify potential problematic elements and "disaster check" messages and interventions with fire departments
- Move toward materials generator among fire departments nationwide

- Iterative, qualitative, year-long process
- Six 90-minute focus groups of 18-30 "at-risk" individuals (Fall '12)
  - Formative behavior discussion
  - Message testing
- Series of 120 door-to-door intercept interviews in "at-risk" neighborhoods of Alexandria, Va., and Tallahassee, Fla. (Spring and Fall '13)
  - Target behavior discussion
  - Message and intervention testing
- Nationwide online survey of 211 fire department professionals (Fall '13)
  - Message testing
  - Program interest

BEHAVIORS & BARRIERS

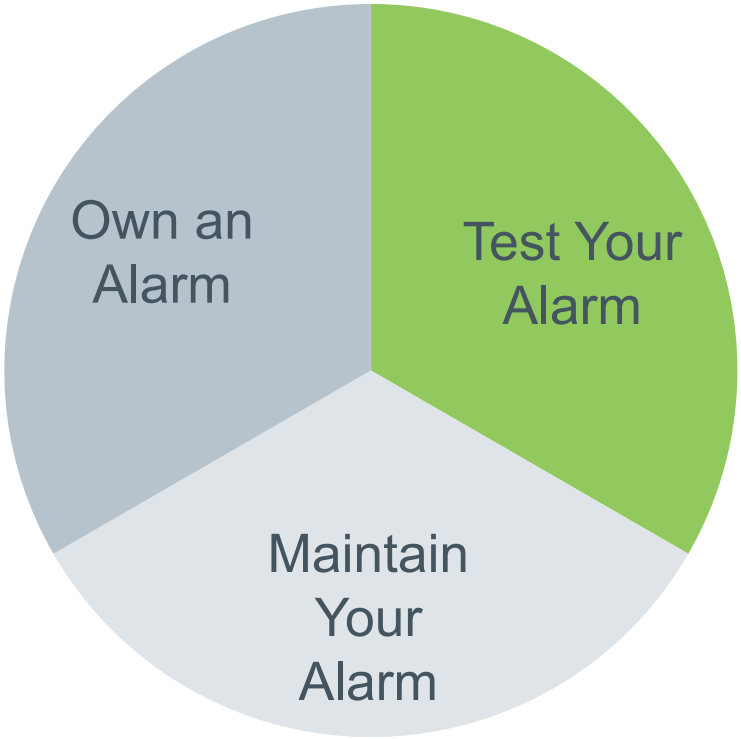
THINKING BEYOND RISK



BEHAVIORS

- Multi-pronged desired behaviors complicate messaging
  - Face different challenges
  - Require different calls to action

- Break overall behavior of *Having a working smoke alarm* into three discreet behaviors:



BEHAVIOR: Owning Alarms

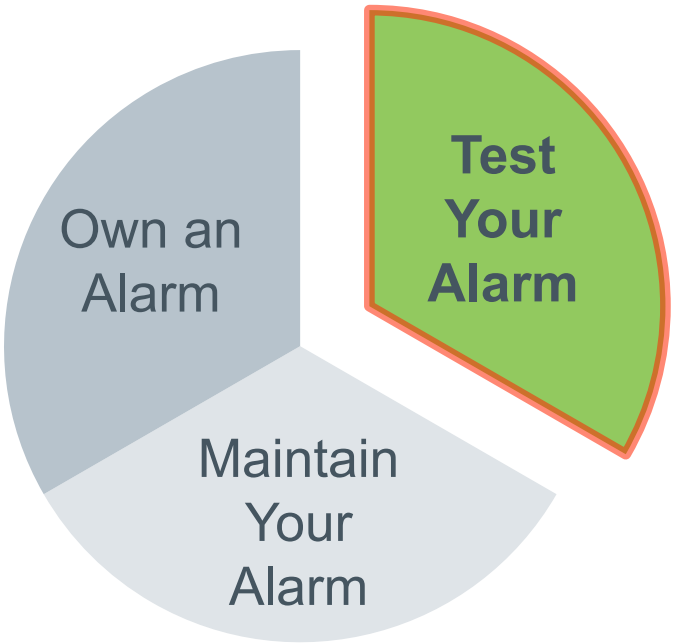
CURRENT BEHAVIOR

- Most claim to own at least one alarm (some claim to own more)
- Most felt confident that alarms worked (even though several did not work)

BARRIERS

- Perceived lack of fire risk
- Lack of urgency
- Apathy
- Understanding and experience of alarm as a “nuisance” more than as a “savior”

BEHAVIOR: Testing Alarms



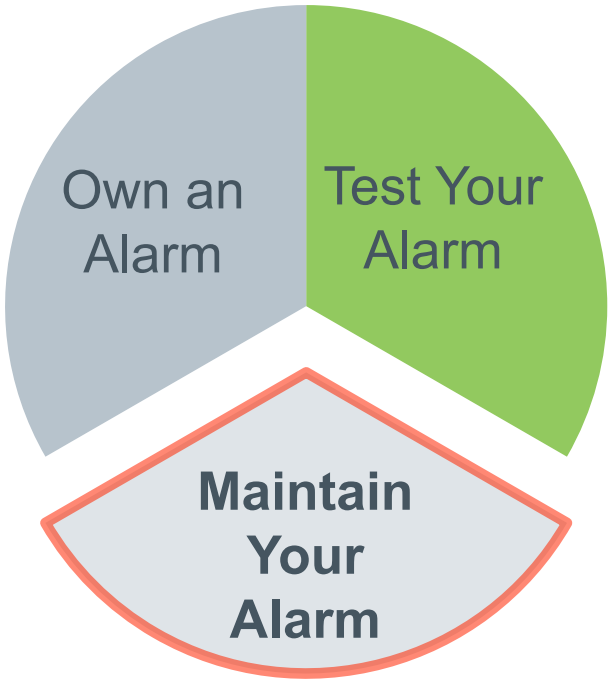
CURRENT BEHAVIOR

- Most did push test button
- Rely on accidentally going off while cooking to "test"
- Of those who tested, many claimed to have a schedule, but few could describe it (habit, calendar, landlords)

BARRIERS

- Out of physical reach
- Out of renter's hands
- Lack of visual cue – out of sight, out of mind
- Perceived low risk of fire
- Skepticism of recommendation – monthly, even annually
- Simply remembering

BEHAVIOR: Disabling Alarms



CURRENT BEHAVIOR

- Not all would admit to disabling alarms in the past
- Those who did more often mentioned disabling due to the “chirp” rather than because of cooking
- Visual cues prompted restoring disabled alarms

BARRIERS

- Annoyance complaints:
  - The noise
  - Pets' agitation
  - Too close to kitchen (frequently going off)
  - Malfunctions

EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

MESSAGE ENVIRONMENT

- Smoke alarms represent one of the many, many things people "should" be paying more attention to…

- Air Pollution
- Automobile crashes
- Bullying
- Cancer
- Cholesterol
- Child abduction
- Crime
- Damaging junior's self-esteem
- Depression
- Drowning
- Drugs
- Earthquakes
- Extreme heat
- Fires
- Floods
- Food poisoning
- Gambling addictions
- Global warming
- Guns
- Heat Stroke
- Heart disease
- HIV/AIDS
- Hurricanes
- Identity theft
- Influenza pandemic
- Iraq
- Iran
- Landslide or debris flow
- Mad cow disease
- Male pattern baldness
- Medical errors
- Not enough water
- Nuclear threat
- Obesity
- Old age
- Radiation threat
- Resistant bacteria
- Roofies
- Russian incursions
- Saying the wrong thing
- Serial killers
- STDs
- Terrorism
- Thunderstorms
- Tics / Lyme disease
- Tobacco
- Too much sun
- Tornadoes
- Thunderstorms

WHICH ARE WE SELLING?

This … or…. this?

MESSAGE FRAMEWORK

People know they should have an alarm and they know that home fires are rare. So our target behavior suffers from a lack of IMMEDIATE REWARDS and NEW INFORMATION. Installing or testing an alarm is an easy action to put off.

To effectively influence smoke alarm-related behaviors, messages should focus on immediate rewards (showing you care versus long-term safety) and include new information people can use.

RECOMMENDED MESSAGE RECIPE

EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS

Emotional Appeals	1	• Humanizes the subject • Re-frames it from annoyance to love • Grabs attention • Memorable
Appeals to Control	2	• Responsibility and role as provider, protector
"How-to" Info	3	• Undercuts assumption that they know everything • Rational balance to emotional impact
Concrete Actions	4	• Provides clear guidance
Vivid, uncomplicated language	5	• Makes for clear, approachable messages and take-away

“Where there is love, there are smoke alarms.”

- Connects “love and protection” to “smoke alarms and fire safety.” “Alarm = love” connection was new
- Message interpretation: If you love your family, you should have smoke alarms to protect them.
- Majority had emotional response (happy, safe, secure, protective, worried and warm).
- Lacking catchiness
- Unexpected match with smoke alarm image

“Smoke alarms. A sound you can live with.”

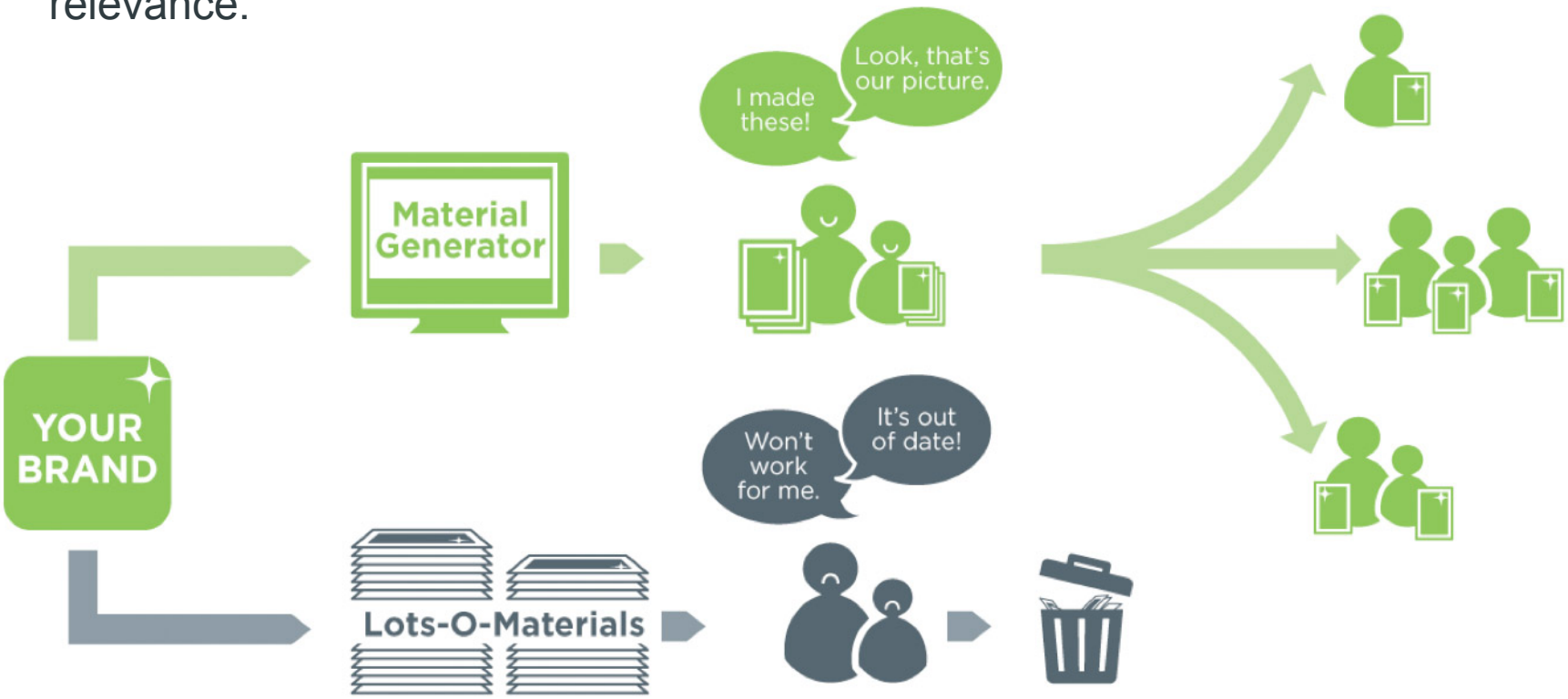
- Full message misunderstood
- Message interpretation: Smoke alarms can save lives (which they already knew)
- “Sound” primary focus
- No nonsense direction and sentiment appreciated
- Paired best with stand-alone smoke alarm image
- Low literacy difficult to follow

FIRE PROFESSIONALS

FIRE PROFESSIONALS

- Interested in emotional messaging that focuses on demonstrating love – provides a new direction
- Want to avoid anything that could be seen as risqué or offensive – avoiding risks
- Expressed need for multiple messages rather than a single over-arching “smoke alarm” message
- Very interested in online tool to customize and fit together various messages and materials for their specific audiences – Materials Generator

MATERIALS GENERATOR

Benefits of a Materials Generator

A materials generator allows an organization to create professional looking materials that are all tied to one brand, while still allowing for local relevance.