



How our sizing research helped M&S to advertise

Richard Barnes * & Tony Rosella **

In 1997 our respective companies, Select Research & CCR were independently commissioned to undertake a pioneering sizing survey using 3D scanners for Next, one of the UK's leading clothes retailers.

We managed our respective responsibilities for Next and reported back on the findings for measurement of 2,500 women across the UK. Marks & Spencer (M&S) became aware of the Next project through the retail industry and decided to commission their own survey. CCR and Select were commissioned to undertake the survey and proceeded to plan out how to execute the survey in 1998 at a time when co-incidentally M&S encountered some unexpected financial issues, which were widely reported in the media at the time.

Given that the survey had been commissioned and would involve extensive contact with their customers, there was some anxiety about the publicity surrounding the survey amongst management at M&S given the negative publicity in the press at the time. After consultation with M&S, it was decided that the best policy with the sizing survey, being public facing, was to announce it via a press release before it became public knowledge together with a pre-arranged BBC1 News feature.

The resulting news item centred on the first day of measuring in Edinburgh and was very positive and the accompanying press release also resulted in some encouraging reporting. More significantly the announcement of the sizing survey to the financial markets triggered a 3 pence rise in the company's share price; a reflection that the markets regarded this survey as an indication that the Company were undertaking changes within the business to increase customer loyalty. M&S, the largest retailer in the UK, did not however consider it necessary to advertise to or engage with their customers through the advertising media and had at this stage, never undertaken an executed TV and outdoor media marketing campaign on a national scale.

We completed the survey with our respective teams at CCR and Select working together to measure the 2,500 women. We were subsequently commissioned to undertake three more surveys for M&S over the next three years following the success of the Womenswear Survey; a Menswear Survey (3,000), a Childrenswear Survey (3,500) and a Bra Survey (1,750). The initial results of the Womenswear Survey had indicated that women had become larger since the last published data.

M&S informed us during the time of the Childrenswear Survey that they, with their newly appointed advertising agency had decided to focus on the Womenswear Sizing Survey as the focal point of their first ever major advertising campaign. The resulting 'Size 16 is normal' campaign involved television and poster advertising and a dedicated 'Fit for You' point of sale marketing campaign (See Fig.1) aimed at communicating the message that M&S were listening and changing to meet their customer's needs. In 2010 M&S is one of the largest advertisers in the UK, having launched high profile campaigns for new clothing involving celebrities such as Twiggy, Myleene Klass, Dannii Minogue, Jamie Redknapp and Take That.

The extensive scanning and measuring of over 10,000 men, women and children for M&S by CCR and Select constituted the largest single collection of data in the UK and was the impetus behind 'Size UK – The National Sizing Survey' which we were commissioned to manage by the retailers given our experience in this field.

Sixteen retailers became involved in Size UK and M&S, as the largest retailer in the UK, were subsequently approached by us to become part of that project as their omission would have been inappropriate given their status. They subsequently took part in Size UK, becoming one of the main contributors to the management of the first national survey for the UK apparel industry using 3D scanners.

- * Managing Director, Select Research
- ** Course Director for Fashion, University of Hertfordshire and former Director at CCR

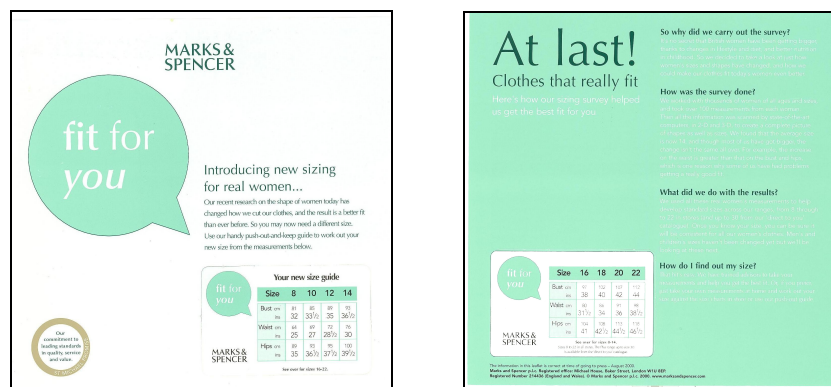


Fig 1: 'Fit for You' point of sale material used to promote use of sizing data to customers