

ANTI-VIRAL TISSUES

A large multinational tissue manufacturing company employing 70,000 people worldwide was approached by a chemist with a formula for applying citric acid-based chemicals to a tissue. It would be put on a middle tissue which was sandwiched between two soft tissues. The chemical was activated by moisture and acted as an anti-viral agent when the tissue was used. The chemist had laboratory research to indicate that it worked in preventing colds and flu from spreading.

Tissues are meant to be disposable and used only once. However, many people re-use tissues several times and in between use put the used tissue in their pocket or up their sleeve allowing germs to multiply. Cheaper quality tissue products are available but often the tissue does not provide the strength in use and often breaks resulting in spreading cold and flu germs.

The plan was to apply these chemicals to each middle layer tissue to kill 99.9% of cold and flu viruses and eliminate transferring germs on to hands from a sneeze, from blowing or wiping of the nose. This would effectively prevent germs from spreading from the person with the cold or flu to others. Common ways of transferring the germs are through the air although handshaking, touching objects such as door handles, cups, tools or desks can play a part. In other words, viruses can be conveyed by the person with the cold or flu and picked up not knowingly by others.

The tissue company was positive to the idea and undertook detailed market research. This involved using groups of students; some with cold and flu symptoms, some with symptoms developing and some without them. The students split into two groups who both played cards continuously for up to a week at a large circular table. Handling playing cards was a means of transferring the germs from those who had colds or flu to those who did not. In the first group, those who had these symptoms or they were developing were always instructed to use a tissue treated with the chemicals. In the other group those in a similar condition were asked to use ordinary tissues.

The research results clearly showed that using the treated tissue with the chemicals worked. Those who didn't have a cold or flu were prevented from contracting a cold or flu from the others. For the ordinary tissue group, all members eventually contracted colds or flu.

The tissue company set up a pilot plant to produce a quantity to be sold in a test area for 3-4 months in the cold and flu season. A small discount to the calculated premium price was established to encourage people to buy and try. During this trial period, sales of ordinary tissues fell away and the sales of the treated tissue grew steadily. After the trial period only ordinary tissues were available. People asked where the treated tissue had gone and when new stock was coming in.

Management knew they had a product which was effective in stopping the spread of colds and flu and reducing their number. However the sales success of the treated tissue made them concerned that their sales of ordinary tissues would be affected, potentially having an impact on tissue production, where there had been considerable investment in plant, manpower and new equipment. It was anticipated that stakeholders would see business operations as coming under change.

If the tissue company was to respond to the sales demand demonstrated in the test market, investment would be necessary in new plant as the pilot test plant was far too small. Other aspects of the product still needed further development, such as product packaging, shelf life, price point and use of brand and company name.

Investigations had revealed that it was not likely that adding chemicals to tissue could be well protected by patents and over time could be copied by competitors.