

Case Study: Educational assessment product strategy research

1. Identifying the issue

A major publisher of educational materials needed to decide whether to continue investing in product development for one of its assessment offerings. Sales of the product had declined for several years. Some stakeholders in the company argued that sales would improve if the company invested in product enhancements. Other stakeholders believed the company should invest in other assessment solutions and sunset the existing product.

The client hired Isurus to provide primary market research data to inform their decision.

Due to the range of stakeholders involved in the decision and the strategic implications of the decision, Isurus conducted interviews with internal stakeholders ranging from executive management to the sales force. These interviews provided a clear set of hypotheses about trends in the market and future opportunities for the product. The interviews also created buy-in for the research results.

2. Research approach

The research used a two phased approach: Qualitative in-depth interviews followed by a quantitative survey.

Both phases of research targeted assessment decision makers in schools across the US, including major adoption states (FL, CA, TX).

The in-depth interviews explored the strengths and weaknesses of the product versus competitors and substitutes, and how trends in assessment (e.g., state and national standards, use of formative and summative assessments, development of CBT and adaptive assessment) were shaping the market's future needs for assessment tools. All in-depth interviews were conducted by telephone.

The quantitative research provided data on market share and satisfaction with the client's product versus competitors, likelihood to invest in a range of different types of assessment solutions, and preferences for a range of existing and proposed new product features. The quantitative research was conducted using an online survey.

3. Analysis and reporting

The data provided findings on:

- Current market share and future intent to purchase the existing product
- The likely impact of proposed new features on future product purchase
- New and evolving needs for assessment solutions driven by changes in NCLB and support for common core national standards
- The impact of state and federal budget cuts on assessment spending
- Potential niche opportunities for the existing product with private schools, very large districts, and others.

Isurus delivered the findings from each stage of research in a report, followed by a presentation and discussion of the results. After both phases of research were complete, Isurus presented the results first to the core project team and then to a broader group of stakeholders. Isurus participated in several roundtable discussions about the strategic implications of the results.

4. Actions taken

Based on a combination of the research data and its product portfolio strategy, the client decided not to invest in further enhancements to the existing product. Sales of the product are expected to decline, and the client's goal is to maximize profit on its existing product. Concurrently, they are using the survey data to develop a new solution that incorporates features that tested well in the research and addresses a broader range of current and future assessment needs.