



# Reinventing a Paper Store Brand

## The Challenge

To provide customer value, a leading retailer was offering paper towels and bath tissue as price point items with product qualities less than the equivalent National Retail Brands (NRB). However, the products were of such low quality consumer purchase decreased and the complaints increased.

Tired of the poor feedback, the retailer looked to partner with UL to help increase product quality. Supplied by the same private label manufacturer, and for less than one year, the retailer informed the manufacturer that both items would be put out to bid. The manufacturer would need to submit a new and improved formulation to be considered in the bidding process.

## UL's Response

UL recommended using the proprietary Technically Advanced Quality Assurance (TAQA) Program to correlate and compare each submission from the various manufacturers. TAQA testing is performed to determine if a product is equivalent to the NRB. Although meeting NRB equivalence was not the company's store brand strategy, understanding how they compared to the NRB would identify areas for improvement while reinventing their brand.

TAQA testing provides actionable information in support of educated decisions. To understand where the actionable information comes from – you need to first understand how TAQA and its scoring work. For a store brand product to be considered the same as its NRB equivalent, it must contain the same active ingredients, perform the same, possess physical characteristics that are on par, look, smell, taste the same, and so on.

TAQA provides a holistic comparison based on side-by-side testing that includes microbiological, chemical, physical, performance, and sensory evaluation. Once completed, the results are reviewed and the products are scored based on performance. Products scoring is 1-10 with 9.0 or above considered to be equivalent to the NRB. Subsequently, points are deducted for product qualities differing from the NRB to provide the company with a science-based evaluation of all of the products submitted under the bid.





Figure 1

Bathroom Tissue Results

Product	Score
Supplier 1	10
Supplier 2 (old supplier - lost last bid)	10
Supplier 3 – (Premium)	9.5
Supplier 4 – (Premium)	9.5
Supplier 3 – (Economy)	9.25
Supplier 4 – (Economy)	9.25
Supplier 5	9.0
Supplier 4 – (Value)	8.0
Current Supplier – New Submission	8.0
Current Supplier – Current Submission	8.0
Supplier 6	6.75

Figure 1

Provides the overall TAQA score for each product evaluated in the Bathroom Tissue bid process. Seven suppliers including prior and current suppliers submitted products. Additionally, some suppliers submitted multiple products (premium, economy, value) that were of different product qualities.

The TAQA score sums up the overall product quality; however it is helpful to know the deficiencies in each product. If there are multiple consumer complaints about the strength of a store brand bathroom tissue – before telling your customer that you understand the issue and are offering a new product with improved strength – it is imperative to ensure that the product selected actually does possess higher strength characteristics.

Figure 2

Bathroom Tissue Deduction Breakdown

Product	Score	Tensile cross	Tensile Machine	Absorbency rate	Thickness	Average sheet weight	Basis weight
Supplier 1	10						
Supplier 2 (old supplier)	10						
Supplier 3 (Premium)	9.5		x				
Supplier 4 (Premium)	9.5			x			
Supplier 3 (Economy)	9.25	x	x				
Supplier 4 (Economy)	9.25	x	x				
Supplier 5	9.0	x		x	x		
Supplier 4 (Value)	8.0	x	x	x			
Current Supplier (New Submission)	8.0	x	x	x	x		
Current Supplier (Current Submission)	8.0	x	x	x	x		
Supplier 6	6.75	x	x	x	x	x	x

Figure 2

Indicates the specific tests where deductions were received. With a score of 10 there were no deductions for either Supplier 1 or Supplier 2. The more deductions, the lower the product scored. It is also interesting to note that the current supplier received deductions in the same areas for both their current submission and their new and improved submission.

Much like the bathroom tissue, the paper towel was also put out to bid and all of the products were evaluated under TAQA and benchmarked against a NRB.

Figure 3

Paper Towel Deduction Breakdown

Product	Score	Tensile Cross (wet)	Tensile cross	Tensile Machine	Absorbency rate	Total Absorbance (g/sheet)	Total Absorbance (g/m <sup>2</sup> )	Thickness	Basis weight
NRB	NA	.633	1.69	2.71	1.76	45.5	368	.706	38.2
Supplier 1	9.25	.81	3.17	3.21	1.71	44.6	597	.761	44.4
Supplier 2	7.25	.34	1.84	2.67	1.22	30.1	387	.688	39.2
Supplier 3 (Premium)	6.75	.56	1.51	2.84	1.64	22.4	279	.591	45.4
Supplier 3 (Blue)	5.75	.27	1.26	2.94	1.47	18.5	231	.508	39.7
Supplier 4 (Blue)	5.5	.35	1.8	2.96	1.35	14.2	224	.637	40.3
Supplier 4	5.5	.79	1.50	2.38	1.11	37.3	499	.699	34.8
Supplier 5	5.5	.39	2.09	2.39	1.32	28.4	388	.675	44.8
Current Supplier (Current Submission)	5.5	.18	1.14	2.74	1.55	16.7	303	.640	45.1
Current Supplier (New Submission)	5.5	.22	1.29	3.06	1.31	10.2	261	.657	43.4

Figure 3

Details the results from the products tested in the paper towel category. The top row provides the NRB data. Any result seen in red indicated that the product is of lesser quality in that aspect and therefore received a deduction.



### Impact

When looking at the bathroom tissue results it was interesting to note that the original supplier scored a 10 in the TAQA testing, placing their product at NRB equivalence in all areas evaluated under TAQA criteria. At the other end of the spectrum was the current manufacturer of the bath tissue. As the retailer was aware of the consumer feedback and knew they had to improve product quality – they made sure they talked to their manufacturer about the need for an improved formulation. Based on overall score and deductions as seen in Figures 1 and 2, it is apparent that the reformulation never changed the quality level – and the current manufacturer was trying to pass off the “new submission” as being improved from the current offering – clearly not the case.

There was some push back from a few of the suppliers after reviewing the results and scores from the paper towel portion of the study. Additionally, the current manufacturer was in disagreement that they were deducted points for having an absorbency rate that was different from the NRB. They argued that it was a shorter time so it must be better and definitely not worse. Of note is that the products receiving deductions on the absorbency rate also received deductions for total absorbency (g/sheet).

Based on knowledge and experience, UL understands that products that absorb the quickest do not always indicate enhanced product quality. In fact in many cases it is the opposite. There are many of examples of paper towels, often found in public restrooms, which absorb very quickly and will never be confused with a world-class product. This is just one example of the value that UL can bring based on its deep understanding of the store brands industry.





## Benefits

By partnering with UL the retailer can now be assured that their brand is something both they and the consumer can stand behind.

## Conclusion

The retailer was able reinvent their store brand based on the insights gained through the testing provided by the UL TAQA Program. While still using price point as their go-to-market strategy the retailer was able to make a more informed supplier decision based on data collected and scientifically verify:

- How product quality measured against competitive products
- Areas where they were willing to sacrifice some quality
- How cost per unit correlated to its TAQA score
- Product quality remains the same through periodic testing

## Recommendations

Once the supplier selection is completed, a critical step for consistent success of the brand lays with the retailer and their ability to ensure product qualities remain consistent. UL advises writing a specification based on the golden sample – thus defining the bottom end of quality in their price point product.

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