



## UNIQUE CAPABILITIES

---

“ How do we determine if we’ve got a winner without spending a ton of money on a clinic...? ”

---

### QUALITATIVE NEW CAR CLINIC: q-NCC

#### THE AUTO CLINIC

A standard process in the automotive industry, prior to launching a new model, is to run a “clinic” to explore reactions to a prototype, to assess the relative appeal of a new design or to confirm final pricing and equipment specs prior to the introduction of a new model. Clinics are typically large affairs incorporating an array of competitive models in a simulated showroom environment during which pre-screened prospective buyers rate them on appearance, comfort, standard equipment, possible optional features and price. Most clinics involve both a quantitative and a qualitative phase; some include a “ride & drive” component, as well.

#### UNUSUAL SITUATION- INNOVATIVE RESPONSE

Like most major automotive brands, our client routinely used the standard “Quant + Qual” design for their new model automotive clinics. In this instance, however, they were facing a severe budget squeeze and were looking for an innovative, and lower-cost, option to prepare for the launch of their latest model.

The stakes were high for this new model – a virtual re-launch of the brand following several years of declining sales. Our response was to design a purely qualitative clinic centered on an extended, self-directed, “Ride & Drive” experience.

## THE TYPICAL "RIDE & DRIVE"

The individual driving experience is the central activity for a q-NCC clinic. Most clinics with a "ride & drive" employ a pre-determined route typically involving a tightly scripted series of turns, one or more open stretches for acceleration, several stopping points and – occasionally – some other more complicated maneuvers, such as parking. An interviewer accompanying the driver will have a structured questionnaire that checks off the driver's reactions to each task and milestone accomplishment along the route. The "ride & drive" usually closes with a series of summary ratings about the driving experience and a short battery of specific questions pertaining to the vehicle's new design, equipment or competitive positioning.

## THE q-NCC "RIDE & DRIVE"

The driver's experience in a q-NCC exercise is entirely different: we hand the keys to the clinic participant and say "We have about half an hour of so: where do you want to go?" The participant determines the route while the interviewer sits in the passenger seat with a check list of topics to cover. Instead of marching through a pre-set list of questions, the interviewer introduces the open-ended probes as the opportunities present themselves, e.g.:

- "Share with me about your thoughts and feelings as we move along..."
- "You seemed to be accelerating as we went through that turn: talk to me about that..."
- "How would you describe the braking as we approached that stop sign...?"
- "How does it feel to be in the driver's seat of this car...?"

With a small digital voice recorder we then record all comments made during the ride and drive.



## THE POST RIDE INTERVIEW

The self-directed driving experience is capped-off with a role-playing task to draw out the prospect's identification with the vehicle. The prospect is asked to imagine writing a review for a major metropolitan newspaper that will incorporate snap-shots of the vehicle. He or she is then given a digital camera and asked to take a fixed number of pictures that – in his or her opinion – highlight or characterize the vehicle's most distinctive features, be they positive or negative. The prospect is then invited to walk the interviewer through the pictures, explaining what each one signifies and why that feature or characteristics is considered to be distinctive. We close with a specifically designed projective exercise to assess the level of the driver's emotional engagement with the vehicle.

## THE FOCUS GROUPS

Typically, a q-NCC clinic closes with a small series of focus groups: prospects with similar characteristics are recruited to return at a specific time to share their thoughts – and their images – with owners who represent specific marketing segments. Depending on the marketing challenge for the new model, these focus groups (indeed, all of the recruiting) can be structured to emphasize owner retention, competitor conquests, move-up potential – or some mix of those plus other objectives...

- ❑ In segments where brand “badging” and the perceived status of the marque are important, the focus groups provide a forum to gauge how owners and competitors will place this new model in the segment’s ever-evolving brand/product hierarchy.
- ❑ The group discussions also reveal how this type of owner or prospect will view buyers who opt for the new model over other competitive options.

Finally, the focus groups provide the marketing team with an opportunity to introduce and assess early positioning concepts and communications strategies.

## AN INFORMATIVE METHOD; A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH

Like many of our unique methods, q-NCC was developed to address a specific client need. For a fraction of the cost of a traditional clinic, we were able to provide the client, and their advertising agency, with all the customer-centered information they needed for a critical new model launch. Our assessment of target prospects’ reactions reaffirmed the brand’s nascent positioning as the segment leader in both design and driver involvement. The launch of this new model not only introduced one of the segment’s best known best known – and top selling – models, it also paved the way for the successful North American re-launch of a category-leading brand.

## A FLEXIBLE TECHNIQUE

Though q-NCC was developed as a cost-effective alternative to the traditional new model auto clinic, it can be easily adapted to address related marketing needs, such as:

- ❑ A cost-effective review of an existing model’s mid-cycle design refreshment.
- ❑ A quick and relative inexpensive assessment of a competitive product.
- ❑ Or – moving outside the automotive field – in-home trials of new appliances or technologically-driven consumer products.

## TO LEARN MORE...

q-NCC is one of several unique capabilities we have developed at StarPoint Consulting. To learn more about this technique, its application and its interpretation, please feel to contact us directly. We would be pleased to discuss your marketing challenge and help you determine whether q-NCC – or one of our other innovative approaches – could contribute to the launch of your next new product.



1341 W. Fullerton, #256  
Chicago, IL 60614  
773.342.5660

[www.starpointgroup.com](http://www.starpointgroup.com)  
[info@starpointgroup.com](mailto:info@starpointgroup.com)