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When was the last time you introduced a new product consumers REALLY needed? Really, truly, met the needs of your target audience? A product so clever in its simplicity that it almost boarded on brilliant?

## Introducing, the Tank Topper!

You read it right—the Tank Topper. It gets our vote for new product of the year—although, we’re not exactly sure how long it’s been around.

As more and more attention is paid to the fundamental rules of product positioning, it seems that less and less attention is often paid to the actual product being positioned. It stands to reason that before a product can be successfully positioned, it must be an inherently good product. But what, exactly, defines a good product? One worthy of and able to carry a strong, well thought-out positioning platform?

## A Place for Extra Passengers Or Beverages

We contend that it must first and foremost be born from a

consumer need, which might be directly articulated or demonstrated through a compensatory behavior.

Ask any boater what he needs most (besides a bigger boat), and nine out of ten are guaranteed to answer “more seating” and “more cup holders.”

Note how the Tank Topper directly meets both needs. It instantly creates additional seating that is traditionally forfeited to the gas tank and, at the same time, provides four new cup holders. The primary product benefits are immediately understood. But wait, there’s more. The Tank Topper also offers two important secondary benefits. It has a built in ruler – critical to determining if that wall-eye is a keeper. It also has hooks to hang tools and secure the Topper, along with the tank, to the bottom of the boat.

## Do I Need It?

Granted, it is often the job of marketing professionals to create new products consumers didn’t know they needed. This is where the concept of compensatory behaviors comes into play. Consumers many not know what they need, but they certainly know how to work around something that is not working or not meeting their needs. How many boaters have put a boating cushion, a two-by-four or even a piece of cardboard over their gasoline tanks in an effort to maximize deck seating? None of these options are very comfortable, nor do they provide a place for a cold beverage.

The next time you are developing a new product, we recommend taking a hard look at consumer needs and determine where the deficits lie. At the

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same time, identify compensatory behaviors that occur as a result of these deficits. Not every need is as blatant as the one filled by the Tank Topper. But for a new product to be successful, it is critical that enough time is spent with the target to truly understand their (changing) needs and behaviors.

## Tell Us How You Really Use It

One brainstorming technique we've used is to ask consumers what they do with a product that they think is a little different from how others might use it. Take, for example, the mom of a toddler who told us in a brainstorming session she makes peanut butter and jelly sandwiches out of mini frozen pancakes. What a great idea and

what a great potential new product—PB&J cakes!

**Bottom line:** New product ideas are often found in the most obvious places, where consumers “live” and in how they compensate for what they are not currently getting.