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MUCINEX USES SMART THERMOMETER DATA TO TARGET ADS AND KEEP SHELVES STOCKED

Kinsa temperature and symptom data help Reckitt brand spot outbreaks early in unpredictable 'multi-demic' world



By [Jack Neff](#). Published on September 29, 2021.

20210928_mucinex_thermometer_3x2.jpg

Credit: Composite images: Mucinex, Kinsa smart thermometer

COVID-19 was hard on cold medicine sales. All that mask wearing and social distancing meant fewer people getting colds and almost no one getting the flu.

But it was great for Kinsa smart thermometer sales, with the brand's units in market quadrupling to 4 million as more people needed to take their temperatures more often. Now all the data produced by Kinsa is powering marketing for Reckitt's Mucinex cold medicine in a volatile market by showing where people are starting to get sick before outbreaks peak.

Independently owned Kinsa tracks and anonymously reports by geography the temperature readings taken by its users, who also input symptom data into the brand's app. The symptom data is more useful for Mucinex than temperature readings, since fever alone doesn't mean people have cold or flu, and the brand's products aren't meant to treat COVID.

"We brought Kinsa on board last year before the pandemic, and so we started having these conversations before the world changed," said Carolyn Nephew, associate director of consumer engagement and digital at Reckitt. Now, as cold and flu re-emerges around the U.S., Kinsa data is helping target Mucinex ads and in-store merchandising to areas where symptoms are increasing and keep products on shelf where they're needed, she said.

"They have the earliest and most geographically predictable solution, so they can predict cough, cold and other things up to 20 weeks ahead of time," Nephew said. "That's earlier than any other data source we've ever employed."

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Kinsa has been particularly helpful during a pandemic that shut down the usual cold-flu remedies business last year and made it much harder to predict this year.

“We literally had no cold and flu season” last year into early this year, Nephew said. “Then, when the world opened up again and vaccines came out, people started to socialize and take their masks off, and we definitely saw an uptick in consumption. Kinsa helped us start looking at those implications and track the sort of off-season illness that we’ve been looking at.”

Reckitt directs Mucinex digital ads geographically to areas where Kinsa data predicts cold or flu outbreaks are emerging, she said. But the data is also helping make sure shelves are stocked with Mucinex products, which has been particularly hard this year given the combination of supply-chain disruptions and unpredictability of off-season cold outbreaks Reckitt has never seen before.

Reckitt noticed an uptick in demand earlier this year, varying by location, had led to Mucinex out-of-stocks in some stores. Then the company used a cold and flu forecast from Kinsa to improve forecast accuracy for a major retailer the company declined to name, discovering more than \$2 million in product demand that exceeded the original forecast.

“As a media and marketing person, it was interesting to bring a solution that had legs across the company,” Nephew said. “Normally someone in my role wouldn’t be dealing with supply and sales and the retail partners.”

After a pilot using Kinsa data with Walmart last year that provided proof of concept, Reckitt is now in discussions with four other major retailers, Nephew said, “so we can keep shelves filled based on these insights.”

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Jack Neff, editor at large, covers household and personal-care marketers, Walmart and market research. He’s based near Cincinnati and has previously written for the Atlanta Journal Constitution, Bloomberg, and trade publications covering the food, woodworking and graphic design industries and worked in corporate communications for the E.W. Scripps Co.

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