

## **Session 12**

### **GTNF 2015**

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#### **Session 12 - Consumer wants and needs**

Defining “the consumer” and his needs with regard to the tobacco industry has become a more demanding task in the past decade. Next to the traditional cigarette business, the vapor industry has by now developed into a sector in its own right, and its user base is at least as heterogeneous as the group of conventional smokers, as GTNF panelists showed. Users of both product categories, however, are united by their need for industry competition, the freedom to choose and the requirement of accurate information to make informed choices. In connection with e-cigarettes, the question of “what consumers need” has to be broadened to “what consumers need to stop smoking.” The improvement of the quality of e-cigarettes, panelists agreed, will help more smokers switch.

Among vapers, the panel singled out four types: first-generation users, standard users, casual users and vapor enthusiasts. Consumers are characterized by product-use dynamics; a lot of people have moved toward higher-end products, and most new vapers start on second-generation products, looking for more satisfaction. At the same time, however, many consumers are happy with the older-style e-cigarettes and ego kits and have no desire to change; they look for easy-to-use products.

Standard users want safe and reliable hardware and e-liquid, including childproof packaging. They look for a range of e-liquid flavors, both tobacco and sweet, and they would like to choose from a wide range of nicotine strengths. A good throat-hit is vital. They expect e-cigarettes to be stylish and have strong branding. A long battery life and reliability are important, as are temperature control features. Standard vapers want easy-to-use products and good value for their (tobacco) money, and they need reassurance with regard to long-term safety. In contrast, for many low-income vapers cost is the key issue. As one panelist related, owners of vape shops located in poorer areas report that the most important factor is cost—even as customers claim that they prefer quality e-liquid, they will buy cheaper e-juices.

Smokers of conventional cigarettes experience a different environment than do vapers, consuming a product that is legal but ever more strictly regulated. From this point of view, it is perhaps obvious to point out what smokers don’t want: They don’t want to be marginalized, stigmatized or told by their government that they shouldn’t smoke in their cars when their children are present. They don’t want to be patronized or discriminated against, and they refuse to become victims of excessive regulation.

What they do want is accurate information instead of fearmongering—“quit or die,” a panelist argued, was just propaganda. Furthermore, smokers want to be treated as adults. Yet thus far, consumers’ wants have routinely been left out of the equation. However, smokers want to have their voices heard by the government—for example, when the introduction of a measure such as generic packaging for cigarettes is planned. Smokers want smoking bans to be amended so that they can smoke in a social environment in some pubs and bars. They also want high-quality products and, more precisely, a wide

range of them so that they have the freedom to choose. Smokers consent to their products being taxed, but they want them to be taxed and priced fairly.

Panelists agreed that, going forward, the industry must embrace harm reduction, regulation and new technologies but in this context must not forget the consumers who simply don't want to quit their traditional cigarettes. As far as regulation of the vapor industry is concerned, panelists called for transparent research and innovation to develop new technologies. The vapor sector, they concluded, needs to get new products into the market as quickly as possible, and it needs to bring people together to engage in public discussions.