

THE HIDDEN CPG GAP: Are You Leveraging the Right Growth Levers?

05 Minute Read

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For CPG brands, consumer retention is a myth. Here's why you need to identify and prioritize your growth levers. We bet retention won't be one of them.

Executive Summary

For decades, CPG marketers have been trapped in a false binary: recruit new consumers or retain existing ones. But what if both views miss the point?

In today's fragmented, fast-moving consumer landscape, **the real key to unlocking growth isn't retention. It's re-recruitment with the ultimate goal of creating habits.** Unlike telecoms or streaming platforms, CPG brands don't have contracts. Consumers must actively choose you again and again. Every day.

Your job isn't to retain — it's to re-win. But most brands don't structure their strategies to reflect that.

This paper exposes the **hidden growth gap** that comes from misunderstanding consumer behavior and offers a sharper, data-backed framework that has helped brands like Coca-Cola, Johnson & Johnson, and Chobani move beyond simplistic KPIs and deliver real growth.

The Illusion of Retention in the CPG Space

The debate around retention vs. recruitment isn't new. Since the 90s, when brands hit maturity and private labels rose, the conversation has been driven by fear:

“How do we stop consumers from leaving us?”

This fear borrowed logic from subscription-based industries—where high acquisition costs make retention king. But in CPG, that logic doesn't translate. Consumers aren't locked in. There's no “contract renewal” moment. Every purchase is a new decision.

Trying to force-fit traditional retention models into CPG is like trying to paddle in whitewater with an anchor. You're fighting the current instead of navigating it.

Enter Re-Recruitment: The Missing Middle

Re-recruitment is not loyalty marketing. It's about winning the consumer *again* — through the right message, pack, price, and context — based on where they're at in the customer journey. And it is not the only way to grow a brand. Depending on your industry there are different pathways that can lead to sustained growth. Each one will likely present its unique challenges and opportunities depending on your brand's situation. We call these “consumer growth levers”. Below is a non exhaustive list of growth levers that apply to CPG

CONSUMER GROWTH LEVER	JOURNEY POINT	KEY BARRIERS	STRATEGIC FOCUS	EXAMPLE
RECRUITMENT	First-time users entering the brand	Awareness, availability	Distribution, big brand campaigns, sampling	Coke with teens via FIFA sponsorship
RE-RECRUITMENT	Past users or lapsed users choosing the brand again	Price, relevance, memory structures	Targeted promos, emotional storytelling, relevant occasions	Contact lens "Reborn" campaign in Japan
HABIT BUILDING	Creating consistent use across occasions	Usage context, routine formation	Occasion-based marketing, pack strategy	Glade associated with home care rituals
FREQUENCY & TRADE-UP	Increasing number or value of transactions	Perceived utility, premium stretch	Premium innovation, bundle offers	Chobani introducing multipacks and indulgent SKUs

Crucially, each lever requires a different marketing programs, budget allocation, and success metrics - making it an imperative to identify, quantify and then prioritize how you want to grow your brand. Yet most brands just measure average penetration or frequency and wonder why growth stalls.

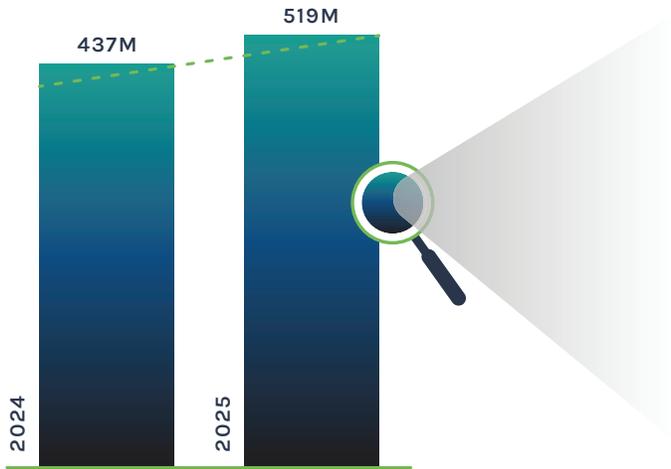
The Whitewater Problem: Why Average Metrics Lie

Look at a typical CPG penetration curve over time, and you'll see a flat line. But underneath that surface? Turbulent inflows and outflows.

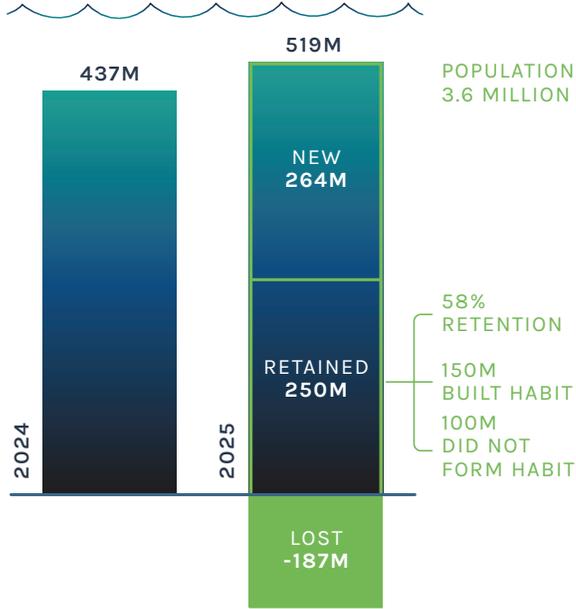
Imagine a river after a rainstorm. You're pouring in new users (recruitment), but just as many are draining out (lapsed or infrequent users). On the surface, it looks stable, but you're spending through your valuable budget just to stay flat.

If you don't understand the churn below the topline, you're missing the real dynamics of your brand. We've visualized this with actual client data:

What people typically see



Under the whitewater



Strategy by Consumer Growth Lever: What Changes?

Understanding growth levers isn't just theoretical. It should transform how you invest.

LEVER	STRATEGIC FOCUS	TACTICAL LEVERS
RECRUITMENT	Where and when are new consumers entering?	Mass awareness, new usage occasions, distribution, sampling
RE-RECRUITMENT	Why are consumers leaving? Can we bring them back?	Price-promo strategy, emotional reconnection, occasion relevance
HABIT BUILDING	How do we embed usage into life?	Consistent presence, pack formats, rituals
FREQUENCY/ TRADE-UP	Can we drive more value from current users?	Premium offerings, bundling, new formats, innovation

Take Coca-Cola:

They over-invest in recruitment (FIFA, Christmas) to ensure high share of voice at first entry points.

But they don't stop there. Pack size innovation, price tiers, and emotional storytelling drive re-recruitment and habit formation.

Or Acuvue contact lenses:

- In the US, growth came from new entrants – consumers trying lenses for the first time.
- In Japan, growth came from lapsed users – customers who stopped using lenses and came back through targeted, emotional campaigns.

Same category. Different market dynamics. Different growth levers. Different playbooks.

Make Your Growth Levers Actionable

To build strategy around growth levers, brands must shift from tracking average KPIs to understanding flows of consumer behavior. This means:

1. Map consumer behavior. Not averages.

Look at switching, lapsed behavior, and real usage patterns—not just incidence and transactions.

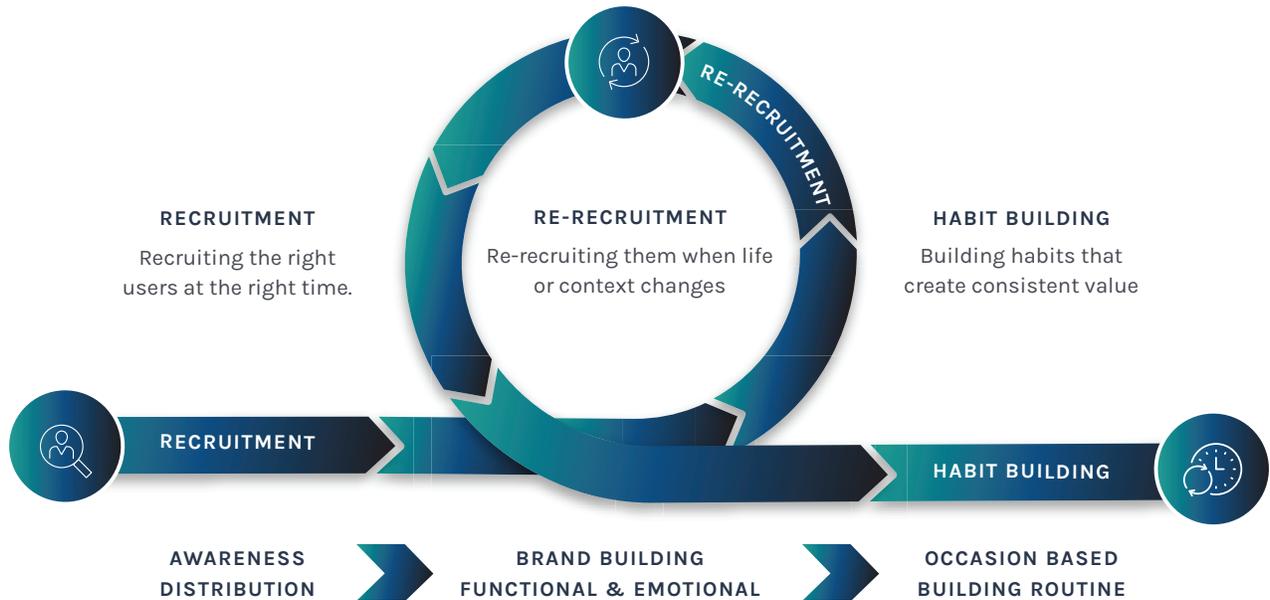
2. Identify true growth levers.

Focus only on levers that are:

- o **Real** (based on actual consumer data)
- o **Controllable** (can be influenced by marketing)
- o **Differentiated** (require distinct marketing programs)

3. Model outcomes.

Use data to quantify which levers contributed to past growth and simulate where to play next. This doesn't require black-box AI. Simple, transparent models calibrated to your business can drive disproportionate impact.



Conclusion: Growing Beyond the Myth of Loyalty

Consumer loyalty in CPG is a myth. What exists is choice. A repeated, dynamic, emotionally driven choice.

Winning means:

- Recruiting the right users at the right time
- Re-recruiting them when life or context changes
- Building habits that create consistent value

Brands that win don't just fill the top of the funnel. They master the entire consumer flow – above and below the whitewater surface.

It's time to reframe the conversation from retention vs. recruitment to mastering the full consumer lifecycle with re-recruitment at the heart of it all.

About Foresight Strategy

We help the world's leading CPG companies decode consumer behavior, quantify growth levers, and create winning portfolio strategies. From Coca-Cola to Chobani to Johnson & Johnson, we go beyond the surface to help brands navigate the white waters of modern consumer dynamics. Ready to supercharge your growth strategy with a clear path forward? Let's connect.



Do you know the consumer growth levers for your business?

Take our 15 minute brand check to find out.

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