

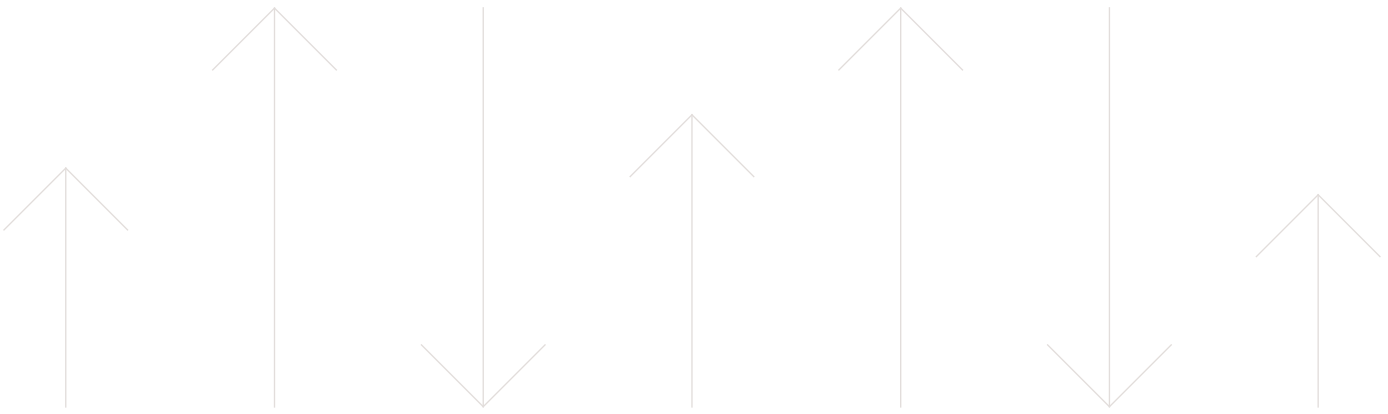
WHITE PAPER:

PRODUCT TESTING PROGRAM TRENDS

A Look at How Brands Are
Approaching Product Testing

MESH01 and Peggy Garcia





UNDERSTANDING BRAND PRODUCT TESTING TRENDS

Testing Approaches Across Product Categories

In 2023, we surveyed more than 30 product professionals about their brand's approach to product testing. This group included product developers, product testing specialists, marketing and consumer insights professionals, and business leaders including Chief Product Officers. The group represents more than two dozen brands across footwear, apparel, equipment, accessories, and personal products.

This report is based on the data from the brands we surveyed, roughly 55% of which are MESH01 customers. At the product category level, the group was split almost evenly between apparel, footwear, and equipment, with fewer than 10% of respondents representing accessories or other product categories.

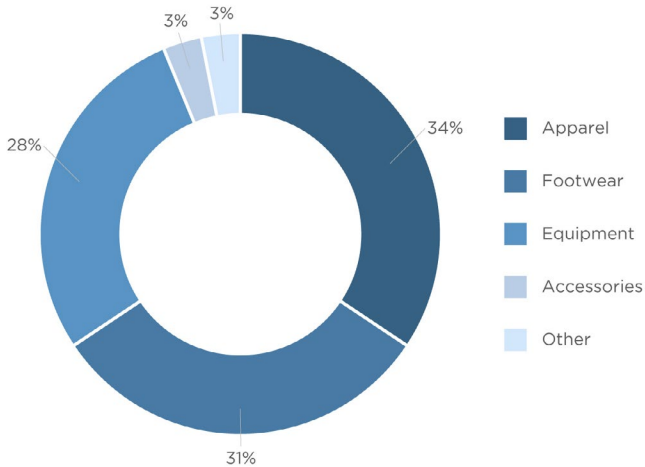
In terms of areas represented within each brand, the numbers were evenly split – about 30% of respondents represented product development roles, and 30% represented product testing roles. Less than half of the group was comprised of innovation and advanced concepts professionals, product engineers, product quality and sourcing professionals, and marketers.

Focus:

- | How often brands launch new products
- | How brands approach product testing
- | Which departments brands leverage for product testing
- | What tools and technology brands are using for product testing
- | Why brands test their products
- | What the future of product testing looks like

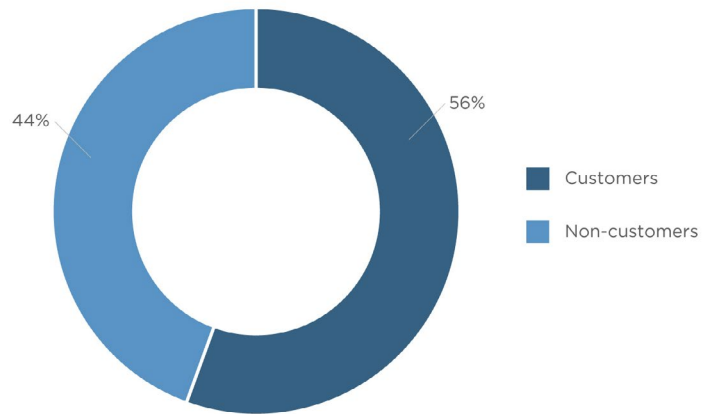
AT A GLANCE

Product Categories



This chart shows the top product categories in which the surveyed brands tested products in 2023.

Customers vs Non-customers



This chart shows the comparison of how many survey participants are MESH01 customers versus non-customers. Both inputs are important contributors to the insights included in this report.

11-19

The most common product development calendar is between 11-19 months.

68%

About 68% of brands use a mix of in-house and third-party product testing.

70%

About 70% of brands said they frequently perform formal product testing using surveys, data analysis, and reporting.

80%

Product development or a dedicated product testing role is responsible for product testing in over 80% of the brands surveyed.

80%

About 80% of brands see their product testing changing, innovating, or increasing in the future.

Hitting the Market

How Often Do Brands Launch New Products?

We first established a baseline by identifying norms across product development calendars and associated cadences of product launches.

Brands most commonly launch new products 2 times per year or 5 or more times per year.

Regardless of product type, the two most common frequencies of product launches per year were either two times per year or five or more times per year. Specifically, more than one-third of brands launch products twice a year, and just under one-third launch products five or more times per year, accounting for almost 70% of the total group of brands surveyed.

The next most common product launch cadence was four times per year, described by one brand as “quarterly” product launches.

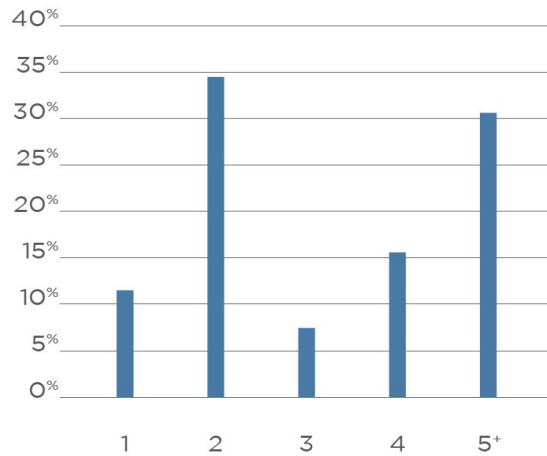
Product Launch Frequency by Product Type

The apparel category launches products more frequently than any other, with most apparel brands responding that they launch products five or more times a year – or four times per year (quarterly).

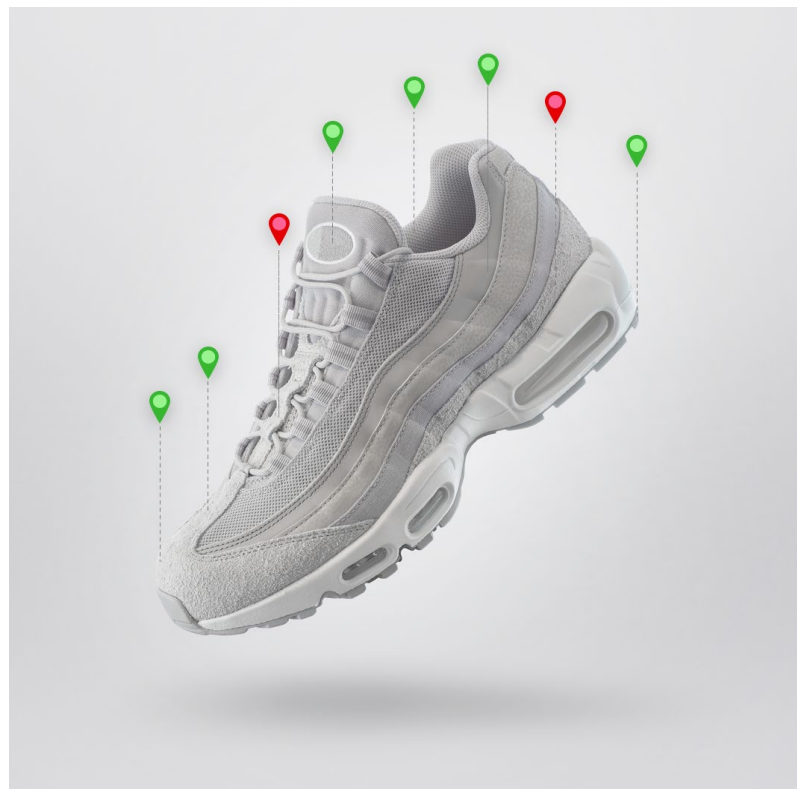
The equipment category, on the other hand, primarily launches products twice a year; however, the footwear category spans frequencies, with footwear brands reporting that they launch products anywhere from once, twice, or five or more times per year.

The footwear category maintains a more even distribution across these three frequencies than other categories, demonstrating how different footwear brands approach seasonal launches and product drops.

Product Launches per Year



Through our survey, we also received additional insights from product professionals regarding how many styles or models they worked on per season, which ranged evenly from fewer than five styles or models per season to more than 10. Notably, both apparel and equipment product creators worked on more products per season than footwear professionals.



Product Development Timelines

Common Lengths of Product Development Calendars

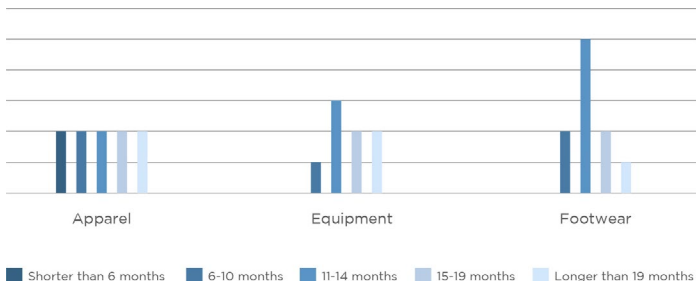
Across all product categories represented, including apparel, footwear, equipment, accessories, and personal products, 60% of the brands operate on a product development calendar between 11 and 19 months. The 11- to 14-month product development timeline was the most common across all product categories at 33%, followed closely by a 15- to 19-month product development calendar at 27%.

Apparel represented the fastest times to market with multiple brands reporting product development calendars shorter than six months.

60%

60% of brands surveyed reported operating on a product development calendar of between 11 and 19 months.

Length of Product Development Calendars by Product Type



11-14 Months

The most common product creation timeline across all product categories is 11-14 months.

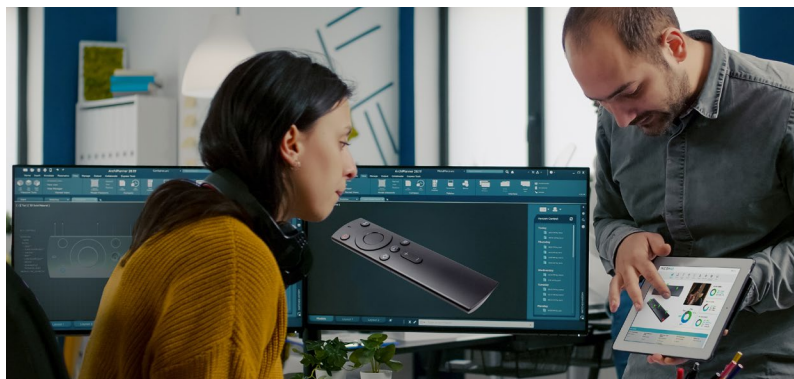
How Brands Approach Product Testing

Uncovering Current Norms in Product Testing Programs and Approaches

Brands reported a full range of approaches to product testing spanning from not conducting any testing, planning to conduct testing, or having formalized programs that support numerous tests per year through surveys, internal reporting, and more.

Regardless of whether a brand was a MESH01 customer (56%) or not (44%), a formal product testing program was the most common approach to product testing for all product categories combined.

About 70% of brands engaged reported that they “frequently perform formal product testing that includes surveys, data analysis, and reports”.



The next most common approach to product testing within these brands was similar in terms of testing volume – where numerous products are tested per year – but with a less formal approach.

70%

About 70% of brands engaged reported that they “frequently perform formal product testing that includes surveys, data analysis, and reports”.

Lastly, fewer than 10% of brands reported that they only test products if a specific issue or need arises, and one brand reported not product testing at all, stating that their “turnaround time is too fast” and that their “GTM strategy does not allow for testing.”

In-House Product Testing Vs. Third-Party Field Testing Services

Of the 70% of brands that reported having formal product testing programs, about 68% use a mix of in-house product testing and product-testing-as-a-service by a vendor.

Differing from lab testing, this outsourcing of product testing involves the coordination and execution of product tests performed by real people and often includes tester recruitment, survey development, data analysis, and reporting.

68%

68% of brands use a mix of in-house and third-party product testing.

Departments Responsible for Product Testing

Shifting Responsibilities to Dedicated Resources

At MESH01, we've had the opportunity to watch many of the world's leading brands evolve their product testing programs, and a common theme as product testing programs scale has been to move product testing responsibilities from product developers to dedicated product testing resources.

This evolution is often critical for supporting the product testing program's objectives of frequently conducting formal product testing on numerous products per season. Some brands support hundreds and even thousands of annual tests through their formal product testing programs.

Read More:

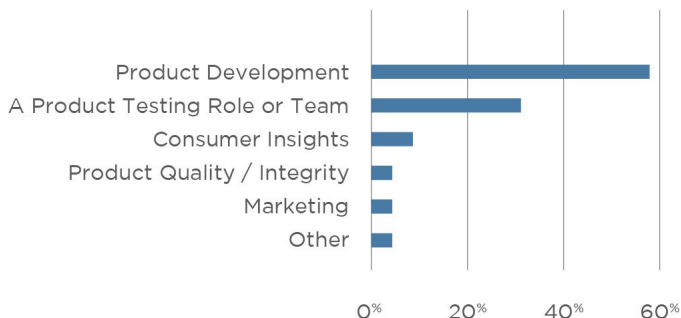
[A Look at How the World's Best Footwear and Apparel Brands Conduct Product Testing on MESH01](#)

Based on our survey responses, product development continues to be the most common department within an organization responsible for product testing.

Product development or a dedicated product testing role is responsible for product testing in over 80% of the brands.

Anecdotally, MESH01 has seen an overall continuation of the introduction of new, dedicated product testing roles and teams as brands' product testing programs either begin or scale.

Departments Responsible for Product Testing



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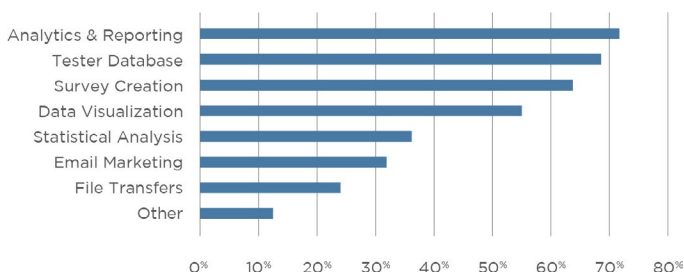
What Tools and Technology Do Brands Use for Product Testing?

Supporting Greater Effectiveness and Efficiency

Thanks to the ongoing trend toward business technology transformation across most industries, many of today's product creators enjoy the implementation of new supporting technologies designed to increase both their effectiveness and efficiency. As it relates to product testing, brands are leveraging numerous tools and technologies to achieve greater efficiencies and allow product creators to generate actionable product feedback from product testers within the product creation process.

The most common areas in which technology is leveraged to support product testing are analytical and reporting tools, a tester database, a way to create and distribute surveys, and ways to visualize findings. Ultimately, these four elements can quickly bridge the gap between product creators and the customers they are developing products for.

Tools and Tech for Product Testing



The Value of Formalized Product Testing

Improved Product Experiences and Performance Validation

The perceived value of product testing for brands is rooted in both the opportunity to create better product experiences, as well as to hedge against the potential for poor experiences within their customer base.

However, often considered the “insurance policy” approach, “avoiding product experience issues” accounted for fewer than 20% of the responses regarding a brand’s perceived value in their product testing program.

Why Brands Test Their Products



Alternatively, the most common theme for the value of product testing was rooted in the more positive interpretation of a similar theme; the ability to validate a product and its performance. This perceived value in validation is based on the ability to “prove” a product (or material, or construction, etc.) before going to market, and ultimately help brands avoid costly negative product experiences.

Beyond the concepts of validation and insurance, brands also value product testing for its ability to:

- Help product creators engage customers in the product creation process
- Prioritize product attributes during product development
- Improve products before launch
- Test lab findings in the field

In addition to both validating lab and lab-style testing, formal product testing allows product creators to better understand exactly how a customer will experience the product through use during the intended activity.

According to one respondent:

“[The value of our product testing program is] finding unique ways that our testers beat what is proven to be rule in the lab. Often times what we find to be true in a controlled setting, is quickly washed away once in the field.”

The Future of Product Testing Programs

Continued Innovation

According to our survey results, about 80% of brands see their product testing changing, innovating, or increasing in the future.

This view is particularly prevalent in brands that are testing products informally. According to our survey results, brands that conduct product testing see the future of product testing as including innovation and change. This view is particularly true for the 80% of brands surveyed that are testing products informally – these respondents see their approach changing in the future.

Brands that have formal programs, and even brands that only conduct testing if an issue arises, see their testing increasing in the future.

80%

About 80% of brands see their product testing changing, innovating, or increasing in the future.

Evolve Your Product Testing Program

Whether your brand is currently experiencing an evolution of its product testing program, or just starting to scale, MESH01 is here to help.

With more than a decade of experience working with the world's best brands to establish or improve their product testing programs, we can help you take your product testing and product experiences to the next level. MESH01's purpose-built platform, integrated community of relevant and reliable product testers and product testing expertise have made MESH01 the leading solution for product testing.



Peggy Garcia

Leader in Consumer Insights and Testing

The research design, survey development, and analysis that resulted in this report were done in collaboration with Peggy Garcia, a leader in consumer insights and product testing who specializes in athletic apparel and footwear. Garcia spent more than 15 years at Nike creating and executing testing strategies and is an expert at connecting consumer insights with product innovation and the customer experience.

Kick-start your product testing program, or take it to the next level with the MESH01 product testing platform.

Let's Connect:

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