About the Company
This $20+ billion personal and healthcare products company employs over 50,000 people, and has a large number of global brands. Underlying their corporate mission is a genuine desire to connect with consumers and help make their lives better. Their commitment to this is reflected in the leading market position of their brands, many of which are Number 1 or 2 in over 80 countries. Nearly one quarter of the world’s population uses one of their products each day.

Sopheon counts a number of the world’s leading global consumer goods companies among its customers. Many of these are diversified, with large cosmetics and personal care divisions. A common challenge they face is not the quantity of new ideas they have at the front end of their innovation, but rather the quality of ideas.

Understanding how to manage the idea and concept development process is critical to success in the current environment of economic uncertainty, increased competition, rising raw material costs, and continuously changing consumer trends. This case study illustrates how one industry leader enhanced the front end of innovation by dramatically improving idea and concept development through bringing together Sopheon’s solutions with a central, global collaboration process to enable bigger and better ideas that drive bigger and better business results through:

- Linking front-end processes and the insights uncovered in consumer research;
- Multiplying the business value of good ideas by increasing their reuse across countries, regions, and brands;
- Leveraging and building upon key learnings from the company’s past—without reinventing them;
- Adopting repeatable, consumer-centric processes for idea and concept development that are continuously improved.

The Business Challenge
While the company is commercially very healthy, implementing the strategic vision for the future is a priority. This strategy rests on three keystones — investment in global brands, global innovation and global growth initiatives. At the time of their engagement with Sopheon in 2010, one corporate target was to double the number of $1+ billion brands in the portfolio. It quickly became clear that the pipeline of ideas feeding the innovation programs was not sufficient to fuel the company’s ambitions for growth.

Executive management, led by the CEO, formed global pilot groups organized around brands and white spaces. They were tasked with filling the portfolio with big ideas for a five-year innovation calendar, and with documenting and exploring the capabilities that would be needed to deliver on the plan. A number of issues were identified that would hamper execution of these directives:

- Little to no sharing of ideas even at the local level, never mind globally;
- Lack of clarity into the correct funding model – where to do the research and/or run the projects;
- Internal resistance to ideas;
- Lack of consumer and customer insights;
- No ability to analyze previous in-market successes and learn from what had been done in the past.
The natural inclination was to start generating new ideas, but then came the realization that people were being rewarded for “inventing” new ideas instead of reusing existing ones, and no matter how much brainstorming was done, there was nothing really new coming through. In the opinion of the Director of Global Innovation, “when you ask the same questions, you come up with the same answers.”

They began by mining the data they had already accumulated and never used. After searching company archives and laptops, and debriefing internal experts, the outcome was over 700 viable ideas listed in a Microsoft® Excel® spreadsheet. This didn’t lend itself to the type of analysis and exploration required for decision-making.

What was needed was a system that would capture ideas and consumer learnings in a single repository, enable visibility into how ideas and concepts were connected, and collate real-time test results.

**The Solution and Early Results**

A small team spent about six months working with Sopheon and one of Sopheon’s consulting partners to put a process and the Accolade® Idea Lab™ system in place. The reasons for choosing this particular tool included:

- Access to learnings from the past;
- Ideas in the system were linked;
- New ideas were easily added;
- Reuse of ideas across countries, regions and brands could be increased;
- The user interface was highly intuitive.

Some 70 brainstorming sessions since the Accolade Idea Lab implementation resulted in 7,000+ ideas, 5,000+ concepts and 300+ market research studies captured in the system. But the results went far beyond just more ideas and concepts, including the ability to:

- Trace a concept from initial idea through various concept iterations;
- Understand how concepts relate, and see what worked and what didn’t;
- Compare in-market results against research projections;
- Improve analytics into successes and failures;
- Export KPIs across concepts for analysis and reporting.

Virtual global collaboration was another aspect of process impacted by Accolade Idea Lab—ideas could be submitted in one part of the work and people somewhere else could build on these. As the Director of Global Innovation said about Accolade Idea Lab: “It works very, very well. You have real time input from more people engaged around the globe where time differences make it really hard to brainstorm, and it saves a lot of time and travel money as you use the tool for this purpose.”

At the time of writing this case study, the company is halfway to meeting their goal of doubling the number of $1+ billion brands. Through a strong focus on the front end with bigger and better ideas, they increased the value of their innovation by 75% within three years.

**Just the Beginning of the Journey**

For this company, this is just the beginning of the journey. Ambitions for application of the new process and Accolade systems include:

- Improving results from the front-end of innovation by analyzing the database and developing best practices—what concepts scored best, what were their common themes, improve test methodologies;
- Utilizing the data for more structured handover to the portfolio management team, making linkages more visible and only working on the high potential concepts that align with corporate strategies;
- Continuing to increase the value of the front end portfolio;
- Driving continuous improvements of the Accolade system itself.