04 / DECISION BRIEF

# Investigate the offer before cutting the price.

Public-source observations checked 20 Nov 2026. The business brief is illustrative; named companies are research subjects, not VCS clients.

**FINDING**

A 30% price difference exists inside the official Hydro Flask product family. It is attached to a separate sale-colour offer. Treating it as the normal price of every variant would distort a competitor audit.

## The commissioning situation

A brand already selling in Japan sees cheaper competing listings and wants to know whether it needs to discount, change its range or improve distribution. This independent sample uses Hydro Flask's public 21 oz listings as an observable example; Hydro Flask has not commissioned or endorsed the work.

**¥5,280**
regular official listing [S1]

**¥3,696**
selected sale listing [S2]

**30%**
difference in item price

| What this review establishes | What remains unavailable |
|---|---|
| Published offer structure, variant labels, delivery rules and examples of retail presence. | Sell-through, replenishment, conversion, dealer agreements and actual warehouse inventory. |

Read listing record p2; offer interpretation p3; channel/assortment checks p4; management actions p5; sources p6. The modeled client is an established brand, not the named research subject.

**04 / EXHIBIT 01 / PUBLIC LISTING RECORD**

# One product name can hide several different offers.

| Observation | Published detail | Correct use |
|---|---|---|
| Regular official page [S1] | 21 oz / 621 ml; ¥5,280. Colour selector includes Burgundy, Utopia Purple and Palmer Green labelled NEW. | Reference for the regular product family. Selected-colour availability is not verified. |
| Separate official sale page [S2] | ¥3,696 versus ¥5,280; White, Black and Goji shown. | Promotion observation tied to that page and colour set. |
| Official delivery policy [S3] | Free domestic shipping from ¥3,300. | Both item prices exceed the published threshold; calculated delivery charge is zero. |
| ALCO collection [S4] | 21 oz at ¥5,280 alongside 18 oz and other Standard Mouth options. | Assortment/navigation evidence. Do not count as independent market confirmation. |
| ELEPHANT SPORTS [S5] | ¥5,280, delivery included. White/Agave marked unavailable; Trillium/Surf marked limited stock. | Dated page labels show colour-level differences; checkout and actual inventory unverified. |
| HANDS feature, May 2025 [S6] | 621 ml product at ¥5,280 in a dated feature. | Historical distribution signal only. |

Observation unit: page + product family + stated variant set + date. A current listing page can coexist with obsolete text or unavailable variants. No checkout was completed.

04 / INTERPRETATION

# The gap is real. The explanation matters.

**Official selected-colour sale [S2]**



**3,696 JPY**

**Official regular product [S1]**



**5,280 JPY**

The absolute item-price difference is ¥1,584: 5,280 - 3,696. The sale is 30% below the regular price; reversing the comparison gives a 42.9% premium for regular versus sale. Those percentages answer different questions.

## Why a competitor should not immediately match ¥3,696

The observed reduction is attached to selected colours and a sale restriction. It does not show that the entire regular assortment has permanently repriced or that a new brand can profitably match the offer. It also does not establish the reason for the sale.

## What a customer actually chooses

Some customers will accept a sale colour; others may value a new colour or a different size. The audit must preserve that distinction. Do not average regular and sale offers into one “market price” unless the weighting reflects real buying behaviour.

**MANAGEMENT IMPLICATION**

Separate permanent positioning from temporary promotion pressure. Review the overlapping SKU and customer use case before changing the whole price ladder.

04 / ASSORTMENT AND AVAILABILITY

# Measure presence without inventing distribution strength.

| Dimension | What the public record shows | Next evidence needed |
|---|---|---|
| Assortment | Regular and sale-colour sets are presented separately; neighbouring sizes exist [S1-S2, S4]. | SKU-level catalogue with colour, capacity, generation and official identifier. |
| Availability | ELEPHANT lists White/Agave as unavailable and Trillium/Surf with limited stock [S5]. | Time-stamped variant-level checks and, if authorised, basket verification. |
| Retail presence | An independent retailer listing and a historical HANDS feature [S5-S6]. | Current dealer confirmation or a systematic store sample. |
| Commercial performance | Not observable from these pages. | Brand/dealer sales, stock, returns and replenishment data. |

## An audit record that can be repeated

For each client and competitor SKU, record: retailer; URL; exact identifier; capacity; colour; generation; regular/current price; delivery; promotion condition; stock observation; timestamp; and evidence quality. Preserve “not established” as a value rather than converting it to “out of stock”.

Repeat observations on an agreed cadence and flag changes at the SKU level. A discontinued listing disappearing is different from a core item repeatedly becoming unavailable. A retail page count is not a count of active stores or sales.

The same operating group can publish several sites. Avoid treating multiple owned pages as several independent distributors; this would overstate coverage.

04 / DECISION MEMO

# Three possible actions, with different triggers.

| Action | Use it when | Do not infer it from |
|---|---|---|
| Repair content / assortment | The client's essential variant, usage detail or service information is missing or inconsistent. | A competitor having more colour options on one page. |
| Run a targeted offer test | A like-for-like available offer is materially cheaper and client economics support a test. | An unmatched clearance colour or an old press release. |
| Reconsider channel or price ladder | Repeated checks and internal data show a structural gap in relevance, availability or contribution. | A single-day price snapshot or a retailer listing count. |

## The data request that unlocks the answer

Ask the client for 6-12 months of SKU sales, stockouts, price changes, promotions, returns and margin; a current distributor/dealer list; and the product-level marketing calendar. Without those inputs, this report can identify external offer differences but cannot diagnose weak sales.

## Recommended next step

Build a matched set of the client's five priority SKUs and their closest alternatives. Validate colour/size equivalence, record actual purchasability and compare delivered totals. Then combine that record with the client's contribution data before approving a discount.

No claim is made about Hydro Flask's sales, stock strategy, commercial health or reason for discounting. This sample demonstrates an external audit method using observable listings.

04 / SOURCE RECORD

# Separate current observations from historical evidence.

### [S1] Hydro Flask Japan: regular 21 oz offer

Regular price and published colour options. A colour option is not confirmed available inventory.

www.hydroflask.co.jp/shopdetail/000000000003/

### [S2] Hydro Flask Japan: sale 21 oz offer

Separate discounted colour set, price and sale-specific return restriction.

www.hydroflask.co.jp/shopdetail/000000000157/

### [S3] Hydro Flask Japan: delivery and returns

Domestic shipping threshold and terms. Published conditions only.

www.hydroflask.co.jp/info.html

### [S4] ALCO online: Standard Mouth collection

Second owned/operated catalogue context; regular 21 oz price and wider size range. Not an independent retailer vote.

alco-online.jp/collections/hydroflask/mouthsize_standard

### [S5] ELEPHANT SPORTS: 21 oz listing

Published price, delivery and colour-level stock labels were observed. Checkout and actual warehouse stock were not verified.

www.elephant-sports.jp/c/0000000000/0000000153/0000000699/hydro-21oz-sm

### [S6] HANDS: official May 2025 product feature

Historical retail evidence for the 621 ml product at ¥5,280. Not a current stock or sales observation.

info.hands.net/news/20250509_Event_waterbottle.pdf

Sources checked 20 Nov 2026. HANDS document is dated May 2025 and used only as historical evidence. No mystery shopping, physical visit or contact was conducted. Prepared by Vladimirov Maksim. powermaxta@gmail.com.