Part One

Facilitating Decision-Making
Chapter One

Creating Maximum Value for the Client: Developing a New Strategic Role for Market Researchers

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This chapter argues the case for market researchers extending their skill sets to embrace a range of business consultancy skills.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes the view that much of the past frustration with the output of market research centres on our failure to extend our skill set into four key areas that are critically important to improving the quality of information-based decision-making. First, there is the skill required to work more holistically with qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a rounded picture of the complexity of many of today’s markets. Second, there are skills associated with knowing how to apply powerful business concepts and constructs in order to bring our consumer evidence alive. Third is the skill in knowing how to incorporate management hunch, intuition, flair and imagination into our data analysis. Fourth, there are the skills in knowing how to help decision-makers test

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the safety of evidence-based decisions by applying various decision facilitation techniques. By extending market researchers’ skills in these areas, coupled with a greater focus on communicating with decision-makers in an impactful way, we will dramatically improve the quality of the market research offer to our clients. In order to make these ideas concrete, we provide an illustrative case study example of these ideas in action. We look at a project to assess a new high technology business communications device. We conclude the chapter by arguing that extending the market research offer in this way is a ‘win-win’ for the market research industry: we can continue to offer excellence in traditional market research but will be responding to the growing need to bridge the worlds of data analysis and management intuition. In this way we can prevent the industry from becoming a low cost commodity provider of data, with other management service players picking up the responsibility for explaining how our consumer data impacts on business decisions.

The calls for market research to be engaged more actively in helping decision-makers make informed judgements has led to various research agencies extending their traditional remit over the last decade or so to include various skills more traditionally associated with business and management consultancy. But an important point to make is that agencies which have extended their traditional market research offer in this way do not see themselves as ‘top-down’ management styled consultants (‘we have seen that problem before and would like to prescribe our solution to your company’). Rather, they see themselves as essentially ‘bottom-up’—what we might call research information-based business consultants. Everything they do is founded on a detailed and research-led understanding of what consumers in different markets are trying to tell us. The core of their work remains knowing what is in the heads of consumers. This is their power. But, in addition, they offer a broad set of strategic business skills that allow critical customer-based insights to be used to maximum advantage during the decision-making process.

**SETTING THE VOICE OF THE CONSUMER IN THE DECISION-MAKING CONTEXT**

Market research earned its spurs during the days when most businesses were production, rather than consumer, led. In this era, individuals who could be the ‘voice of the customer’ were seen as being of enormous value. However, over the last few decades decision-makers – as their
own understanding of consumers has expanded – have raised the barrier in terms of their expectations of the feedback from market researchers. So today, market research that is presented exclusively, some would say naively, from solely the consumer perspective is often no longer tolerated. Decision-makers now want market researchers to explain exactly how the consumer perspective nestles within the complex business, technological and social context that underpins most commercial decision-making. They want to integrate the consumer fully into the commercial process. Today, it is much more important than in the past for market researchers to understand the business context for which they are providing the consumer perspective. Business success is primarily down to strategic excellence rather than tactical retrieval. Therefore, it is important for market researchers to understand leading edge thinking about what makes for success, and to recognize that latent consumer need is only part of the equation. For example, rather than simply jumping on the brand bandwagon and assuming that having one is all that is needed, researchers must be equipped to explain exactly why, and more importantly how, brand building should command its share of management time and investment. The brand’s contribution as a corporate asset must be understood realistically, rather than assumed, if it is to be leveraged properly. And the wider commercial context that market researchers are expected to understand does not rest on having a good working knowledge of fundamental business concepts and a perspective on how leading edge strategic business thinking is evolving constantly. It also extends to understanding the technological context. Today, with the interconnectivity and convergence of so many different products, it is imperative for market researchers to have a full mastery of the technological environment, if they are properly to assess opportunities that might not fit with existing convention. We cannot rely on researched consumers, on their own, to be clear about what is happening around them. We have to be able to interpret their, by definition, naïve responses in an appropriate manner.

For today’s market researchers to be taken seriously, they also need to have a perspective – a sound conceptual grasp – of how communications in our complex, chaotic, nonlinear and multimedia culture operate. They need to be at the forefront of challenging the received wisdom and leading the way in reconstructing their measurement systems to, for example, reflect the behaviour of decreasingly deferential and more streetwise, communications-aware consumers. Consumers today can read the writing on the wall – and elsewhere. Consumers now know how to
pick up all the cues and clues about what brands represent. In short, it is a world that requires the researcher to take a properly holistic view of the different communication 'touch-points' that can impact on building brand reputations.

In sum, agencies that are extending their traditional offer to include more business consultancy skills are today attaching much more importance to understanding the wider context of the problem they are investigating. They know that 'context explains everything'. It is all about the 'panorama principle'. This tells us that, all other things being equal, in most investigations if there is a choice between going in for more detail or stepping back and understanding the big conceptual picture, then the latter, rather than the former, is likely to pay the greater dividends. It is the researchers’ ability to see the ‘wood for the trees’, and to stand back and see the shapes and patterns at work that differentiate the consultancy-based agency from the more traditional data-centric market research supplier. The future is becoming less about drilling down into a more and more detailed understanding of the consumer evidence alone, and more about understanding the underlying structures that explain what is happening in society, technology and within organizations.

DEVELOPING A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MARKET RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The market research discipline grew out of classic social science methodologies. This set up the expectation that market research provides something close to ‘scientifically objective’ truth, whereas in reality what we do is no more than loosely follow some of these guiding principles to achieve what we might call a ‘scientific approach’ (this, by the way, is totally respectable). In short, the harsh reality is that, at best, market research is as much an art as it is a science. But everything is confused by the pressure we face as an industry, on the one hand, to deliver data that lives up to the quality ‘gold’ standard of ‘correct’ social science methodology, but, on the other hand, to respond to the realities and pressures of the modern business information world. This tension is seen in the frustration many market researchers experience in trying to make sense of the enormous breadth that is the reality of 21st century marketing data. With a few exceptions, the current market research literature looks rather tired and outdated because it does not look holistically at both the art and science of market research. One particular peculiarity of our technical
literature is that it is devoted largely to the idea of analysing a solitary dataset, on the assumption that these data have been collected in a fairly orthodox way, thereby enabling the application of classic ‘textbook’ statistical tests. This rigid adherence to, now outdated, analytical concepts about the way we handle data is very frustrating for new look market research agencies genuinely keen to help business leaders make informed evidence-based decisions. They know, of course, that most decisions are based on multiple sources of data where the information rarely meets the requirements of orthodox methodology. The challenge, therefore, is to develop rigorous frameworks that allow us to understand information in a more holistic way. Here it is important to stress that the holistic approach does not mean that we have drifted into an ‘anything goes’ way of collecting and interpreting consumer data. The holistic researcher will follow a rigorous process akin to journeying along an ‘information learning curve’. As they do so they will know that many of the data they are evaluating will be of questionable accuracy with no rigorous account of the method employed to assemble the data. None of this, though, disturbs today’s experienced analysts. They are rapidly learning how to ‘compensate’ for these methodological inadequacies in their evidence. As they journey along the information learning curve they constantly evaluate each piece of evidence by referring to other prior knowledge. Critically, today’s researchers do not suspend disbelief and assume or ‘pretend’ that the data have been collected using ‘classic’ methodologies. They are totally transparent with clients about the way they operate in today’s imperfect information world. Specifically they are committed to developing holistic analysis frameworks that help them make sense of imperfect data and resolve the mismatch between the classic purist techniques still being used, and the messy evidence with which we typically have to work. (See Smith and Fletcher, 2004 for a comprehensive review of holistic analysis frameworks.)

**CAPITALIZING ON THE GROWING INTERPRETIVE POWER OF MARKET RESEARCHERS**

Today’s breed of more business-consultancy-based market researchers are honest enough to state explicitly that ‘not all respondents are created equal in their ability to contribute to the survey process’. They are transparent in arguing that it is legitimate, on occasions, to ‘override’ some of the consumer evidence by setting it in the context of everything else
we know – the cumulative knowledge we have acquired over the years about the survey process. There is a growing confidence in taking into account the insights we now have about how attitudes are formed, and under what conditions they can be expected to fluctuate and change. In the early days of market research there was an inevitable tendency to be very nervous about overriding the literal feedback provided by consumers. Of course, the doyens of different forms of psychoanalytical-based qualitative research were always inviting us to look more deeply into exactly what people were saying. But much mainstream market research was conducted, and interpreted, largely on the premise that it was the market researcher’s job to provide a straight reportage of the direct feedback being provided by consumers. But now, as our expertise of how people respond to surveys has grown, we are more confident in our ability to get underneath what our respondents are telling us. Therefore, it is important to pass our consumer data through various ‘knowledge filters’ (what we now know about the psychology of people’s responses to surveys and how to interpret consumer feedback in this context). These are discussed in detail in Smith and Fletcher (2004), so here we simply make the point that new look market research agencies work in a transparent way with analytical holistic frameworks that openly juxtapose literal consumer feedback with what we know from years of experience about the robustness of the particular types of consumer feedback. This makes for more informed and less naïve market research. Business consultancy oriented agencies take the view that conceptual thinking – informed by the consumer evidence – is the most powerful way of solving problems. They know what key business concepts and principles will add most power to the consumer evidence. On occasions, this evaluation of the available concepts will place the consumer evidence centre stage in its more literal form. But in other situations such an evaluation may lead to a ‘down weighting’ of the consumer evidence, given what else we know about the issue under investigation.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF MANAGEMENT INTUITION

Seasoned market research veterans within our ranks will have been brought up in an era where market research represented ‘detached objectivity’. As such, it was believed to be ‘superior’ to softer, more anecdotal and archetypal evidence. This reflects the way market research, as it sought
to achieve credibility in the 1960s and 1970s, relegated management intuition and forced it to play second fiddle to the hard ‘scientific’ consumer data. But there has been an upsurge of interest in the ‘scientific’ basis for intuitive thought over the last decade or so. In fact, the topic of the power of intuitive thought has almost forced its way into the bestsellers’ list. Goleman has sold millions of copies of his book *Emotional Intelligence*. And the idea of left (logical) and right (creative) brain thinking is now commonplace. Claxton’s *Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind* is another popular text, as is Patricia Einstein’s book on the wisdom of intuition, and Wiseman’s *The Luck Factor*. On top of all this, we find a massive upsurge in what we might call the personal and business ‘success’ literature, much of which highlights the power of positive thinking and the value of marshalling positive energy to help deliver successful outcomes. Thus, we now know that ‘informed’ productive intuition can be cultivated; practice helps. We also know that there is scientific evidence that backs up the idea that our brains develop instincts during childhood that can serve us well in later life (this is about the laying down of ‘somatic markers’). We also know that in certain situations – notably where there is ambiguity and uncertainty – the ability to think in a circular, unorthodox, nonlinear way about a problem can produce big breakthroughs. These days, we have also learnt to respect practical knowledge acquired by osmosis, and to be less ‘sniffy’ about individuals who can perform without being able to articulate the theoretical basis for what they are doing. So, in sum, we know that there is much to commend intuitive thought. It has many sound credentials and is no longer seen as some inconsequential irrelevance. It is now recognized formally as having the potential to make a substantial contribution in certain decision-making situations and, as such, needs to be managed accordingly. (See Smith, 2003, for a review of the role of intuition in decision-making.)

However, the attendant dangers of eschewing the hard data route and just going down the intuitive route are also now being recognized fully. We know that many decision-makers operate with rather flawed self-knowledge, often coupled with low levels of technical know-how. This means that when faced with uncertainty decision-makers have an instinctive predilection to fill this vacuum with what is simply erroneous or partial thinking. They will confidently present what they have concluded as ‘powerful intuitive thought’, whereas, in fact, it is often just plain wrong. Put another way, we know that decision-makers have a tendency to let lazy, partial and stereotypical thinking – based on false assumptions and sloppy technical knowledge – masquerade as true ‘informed’
intuition. So, the more business consultancy-oriented agency knows the importance of having rigorous checks and balances in place in order not to allow over zealous and erroneous ‘intuition’ to ride roughshod over the consumer evidence we have assembled painstakingly. The trick is to know when, like Henry Ford, to back your intuition (‘If I had listened to my consumers, I would have invented a faster horse’), and when to be aware of the danger of not having proper checks and balances in place to curb any intuitive excesses. The following comment by Piers Brendan in his biography of Mussolini neatly illustrates the point. He writes of Mussolini: ‘Anything that is not spontaneous intuition fails to attract and seduce him. In this way he creates around himself a dangerous atmosphere of messianic expectation, which he enjoys as a sign of blind faith in his ideas (Brendan, 2000).’

In summary, market researchers have recognized the need to adapt their approach to better reflect what we now know about the nature of intuitive creative thought and decide how best to factor this into the decision process. Specifically they have been active in finding checks and balances that allow us to combine flair and imagination with the hard consumer evidence. Here is not the place to detail the various frameworks that holistic researchers have developed to tackle the problem of pure consumer data being ‘dumb’, but management beliefs being ‘blind’. But it can be confirmed that considerable effort is now going into developing analytical frameworks that embrace the power of management hunch, prior knowledge and intuition. It is no longer just dismissed as unfounded, risky or dangerous.

**ADDING FLAIR AND IMAGINATION TO THE ANALYSIS PROCESS**

Agencies, which are now placing an emphasis on acquiring more business consultancy skills, are becoming more confident than their predecessors in bringing flair, imagination and creativity into the data analysis process. Exactly what constitutes creativity in the market research context is a big topic; it is one that has been addressed elsewhere by the author (see Smith 2004). But the evidence suggests that market research agencies will benefit from including in the project team different types of creative individuals. We know, for example, there is creativity that is born out of the existence of a problem; necessity being the mother of invention (Barnes Wallace, inventor of the bouncing bomb, once said: ‘There always has to
be a problem first. I have never had a novel idea in my life.'). Then there is ‘synthetic’ creativity, using various, what we might call ‘thinkertoys’ in order to help individuals think outside the box (running brainstorming sessions using techniques to turn everything upside down and thereby generate a creative outcome). There is also creativity defined in terms of people’s ability to see the emerging big picture that is just round the corner (for instance, Winston Churchill saw the likely emergence of the communist Iron Curtain). Then there is a form of creativity that is not just about having the analytical skills, but also the courage to push ahead with your observations and beliefs in the face of opposition from conventional thinking (Galileo and Darwin fall into this category of creativity). And then we have creativity as a form of charismatic entrepreneurial energy, the Stellios, Woodruffe and Branson types who have the drive to overcome practical obstacles being thrown in their way and power ideas through to a successful execution. And sitting in pride of place in the nobility of creativity is surely the ability to think clearly, deeply, intelligently, sensitively and perceptively about issues in order to generate a richer understanding about what is actually happening in our world.

Therefore we are beginning to find more market research agencies prepared to recruit into the analysis team brand development specialists who are able to add conceptual power to the evaluation of brands. Similarly, agencies are beginning to recruit communications specialists able to unravel the complexity of the way modern day marketing communications ‘work’. The key is finding ways of retaining the rigour of orthodox data analysis, while still encouraging flair and imagination. It is about creating an environment within which both rigour and imagination are respected and can flourish.

**BEING ENGAGED WITH, NOT DETACHED FROM, THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

We now know that many senior decision-makers, when listening to market research presentations, make their decisions in ‘real time’. The notion of decision-takers sitting passively listening to market researchers present different ‘building blocks’ of desk, qualitative and quantitative evidence before thinking about what this means for them is increasingly misguided. The big decisions are being made as the presenter is speaking. Today decision-makers want presenters to start at the end by focusing on the overall implications of the evidence for the end decision. They want
market researchers to be action oriented, to take risks, and to become involved in the decision. They do not want them to be detached from the data by drawing out arcane distinctions between the ‘purist evidence’ and the ‘interpretation’. Many market researchers still tend to labour under the misapprehension that provided they have done an incredibly thorough job in collecting and analysing their data, then senior decision-makers will listen, and do justice, to their knowledge. Unfortunately, the world is not like this. Today, everyone has to fight when it comes to getting his or her message over. Thus, agencies seriously committed to putting market research in the vanguard of business decision-making are aware of the enormous power of ‘corporate storytelling’. Stories are one way in which human beings make sense of the world; we are storytelling animals. Consultancy-based agencies have learnt that information presented as a story offers a number of important benefits. For instance, it is a delivery style that can help communicate the complex whole, and also one that aids comprehension. It enriches and involves and can be inspirational, while also providing an opportunity to entertain. It also enhances actionability and helps gain buy-in to the end decision. In short, consultancy style agencies know that a powerful way of presenting consumer survey evidence is to tell it as a narrative. We know that we are presenting data for an aggregate sample, but a simple technique that adds a bit of theatre and immediately brings presentations to life is to present data drawn from a total sample as if they form a story from a single customer.

And there is growing awareness of the value of market researchers developing various decision facilitation skills: helping decision-makers test the ‘safety of the putative decisions’. First, there are the basic techniques: helping decision-makers think clearly, logically, deeply and dispassionately about the available evidence, and deciding whether the lessons about the flaws that we know characterize the way people go about applying information to decision-making have been applied. Are we deceiving ourselves about the apparent quality of a critical piece of consumer evidence? Are we trying too hard to believe something is true to validate our predetermined decision? Second, there are techniques we can apply to help decision-makers stretch their thinking. The goal here is to help decision-makers to think big and imaginatively: to assist them to reach out for more ‘creative’ interpretations of what the hard evidence might be telling us. For example, amongst various techniques we might use to get middle managers out of their tendency to default to a ‘safety shot’, rather than be more ambitious, would be to work through the consequences of
what such a cautious approach to the market might mean in the longer term. The third set of techniques seeks to balance out the power of rigorous analysis and the potential of the imagination. Thus, the ultimate measure of the success of the holistic approach is its ability to stretch the decision-makers’ imaginations and do justice to brilliant, intuitive thinking, whilst also ensuring that these creative insights are grounded in hard consumer evidence-based reality. This requires the application of various checks and balances. This could include, on the one hand, turning any extravagant, abstract, outrageous or woolly claims into concrete accounts of how this impacts on the key decision points. And, on the other hand, it could seek to lighten up certain data-literal decisions by getting the parties involved to go with the overall flow of the wider body of more intuitive-led ‘evidence’.

We now illustrate the way in which market research agencies that have extended their offer to include various skills more traditionally associated with business consultancy might look at the introduction of a new communications device.

MAKING SENSE OF AN IMPERFECT WORLD TO DEVELOP THE ‘PERFECT’ BRAND: AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE HISTORY

One of the leading new technology companies wanted help to explore the possibilities for capturing a slice of the burgeoning handheld multimedia messaging market. This is an exploding product territory that the company felt was rapidly in danger of becoming terminally hijacked by companies like Blackberry.

Following an intensive programme of product development, the company – who, for reasons of confidentiality, we must refer to as ‘Newco’ – had arrived at what it believed to be the perfect product to displace alternatives. The technology was working, the funding secured and the planning in process. All they needed was to perfect the brand, which they recognized they needed to build in order to realize the potential. Project ‘Perfect’ was born.

For a combination of reasons, Newco decided that it needed to launch ‘Perfect’ under a new and distinct identity. Although Newco’s well-known, highly regarded and undeniably potent brand property was a head-brand option, it was felt that too overt an association could limit success. More importantly perhaps, and with an eye to the future, it was
decided that the brand should lie within an entirely separate commercial operation.

Newco recognized at an early stage that, before any brand name, identity or communications strategy could be developed, a number of fundamental issues needed to be explored.

- Just how important is any eventual brand likely to be? To what extent will it lie behind customer decision-making and, therefore, what level of resource (in terms of time, effort and investment) should be allocated to its development?
- How should the brand be structured to most effectively create, capture and secure consumer demand?
- Where should Newco be looking for appropriate, and indeed competitive, brand attributes? What is currently driving brands in the sector and what could, with the appropriate application, come to drive the new brand's equity?
- Which elements of what we might call the ‘touch-point’ universe should Newco's marketing strategy be seeking to prioritize? How could Newco best take advantage of, and indeed orchestrate, the different messaging channels that collectively would produce the new brand's reputation and equity?

These questions presented Newco with a number of issues that precluded a ‘traditional’ market research solution.

- The market is still very new. It is not yet fully formed and the brand ‘rules’ are still being written. Any definition to emerge from an audit or examination of the opportunity defined by the extant competitive brand properties would be likely to be at best bland, and at worst, misleading.
- Relevant information was scarce and spread across a diverse range of sources. Whilst there was a substantial body of product research attesting to the technological leap that ‘Perfect’ represented, because of that – and the very newness of the sector – directly relevant data had to be teased from a variety of different places. This required not only a degree of ‘detection skill’ but also, and probably more importantly, a capacity to extrapolate meaning into a new space.
- Newco’s management team possessed a considerable amount of accumulated knowledge and expertise. However, they did not have ready access to adequately focused consumer attitude and behaviour data and,
more importantly, data that were felt to be either sufficiently comprehensive or, given the rapid pace of market growth, suitably up to date.

Rather than take the more traditional approach and jump straight into blue-sky brand development – platform, name, identity and so forth – Newco decided that it was important to take time to explore these issues beforehand, and thereby create a more informed foundation for the branding process that was to follow.

Accordingly, we worked with them to create a learning programme that would make full use of existing knowledge. This was founded on objective consumer input and fully enrolled and involved the brand development team. This was a learning programme that, whilst founded on original consumer insight, would also draw in existing management expertise and create a framework to intuit answers to the questions that lay beyond the capabilities of immediately accessible consumer data.

It was an holistic learning programme that combined the needs of Newco’s corporate aims with the competitive and consumer contexts, in order to first and foremost understand the potential for brand leverage and the application of the touch-points (Figure 1.1).

The learning programme was delivered through a five step process:

1. Desk research – a review of information residing in a variety of data sources, coupled with exploratory management and trade interviews.
2. Development team workshop – initiating the active involvement of the business development team in the learning process, thereby empowering their contribution:
   – establishing working hypotheses and options for brand leverage;
   – defining the initial ‘touch-point set’.
3. Dynamic consumer discovery groups:
   – simulating the market context;
   – exploring, testing and refining brand leverage options;
   – clarifying the touch-points;
   – identifying the core brand equity attribute options.
4. Quantitative research to validate the touch-point and competitive, equity opportunities.
5. Analysis and reporting.

In the course of the above programme, we tailored a number of different conceptual frameworks to help us evaluate the ‘Perfect’ brand in the context of what, by definition, was a market whose structure was still to be set properly. This allowed us to provide Newco with an objectively reasoned and initially evidenced case for the new brand based on three pillars. (Note: the following examples are for illustrative purposes only; all data has been disguised to protect confidentiality.)

A structure for brand leverage

The first step of the learning programme was designed to develop a reasoned, and as far as possible, evidenced case for exactly how important the brand was actually likely to be, i.e. the brand leverage. Then, building on this, providing an explanation of the drivers that needed to be structured for maximum impact.

In the course of the analysis, we identified that consumer choice of ‘Perfect’ would most probably be governed by six main drivers: quality, visual impact, imagery, recommendation, price and familiarity. Allied with that, we determined that the relative importance of those drivers to the consumer universe as a whole was such that ‘quality’ accounted for more than 30% of the influence, ‘appearance’ around 23%, ‘image’ just under 20%, and so on (Figure 1.2). Finally, this phase of the analysis established the extent to which each driver was likely to ‘depend on brand’ which, in this instance, was expressed as a range from ‘minimum required’ to ‘maximum possible’.
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With this knowledge we not only confirmed the potential importance of the required brand property to the eventual success of the business as a whole (and so helped rationalize the need for investment) but also, more importantly, established an initial foundation and framework for its brand platform.

A candidate for pool of equity attributes

Once the scale and location of brand reputation leverage had been established, the learning programme moved on to explore the equity attributes operating in the sector. These are the various components of brand reputations that are currently influencing consumer preference for one option over another. To do that, we identified, and then quantified, the contribution of the different elements making up the brand reputation universe that are most actively influencing choice of similar products (Figure 1.3). Those attributes, collectively defining the sector drivers, represented the starting point for planning the new brand's make up. They not only determined which attributes could be employed to greatest advantage (i.e. against a particular competitor) but also, and equally importantly, those that were ‘free’ (that is, not ‘owned’ by any competitor) and so arguably ‘available’.

That insight, combined with the implications for branding that emerged from a parallel analysis of the corporate aims and intent created the basis for the definition of the brand platform.
The touch-point opportunity map

There is an ever-widening appreciation that brand reputations are the result of every point of contact between the brand and the consumer, and therefore need to be managed in a correspondingly holistic sense if they are to be developed effectively and efficiently. This holistic approach takes in, for example, design, peer group ‘comment’, product performance (‘satisfaction’) and so on, as well as the more didactic traditional messaging channels such as above-the-line advertising. This understanding is leading brand managers to consider a far wider set of options than used to be the case. This is something that was judged to be particularly important for a high touch, high profile item such as ‘Perfect’.

In view of that, the third component of the learning programme was designed to identify the touch-point opportunity map. This exposed the different points of contact exerting effect in the sector as well as quantifying their importance (in terms of contribution to consumer understanding) and their capacity to deliver relevant messages (Figure 1.4). Armed with this, Newco has been able to structure its brand communications plan in the most efficient and impactful manner. It has helped to decide more effectively which touch-points the company needed to concentrate its efforts on, as well as how to coordinate them for maximum impact.

In the course of this learning programme, Newco was provided with powerful guidance for both its forthcoming brand development and its initial communications strategy. Through joining reasoned and informed argument with market and consumer evidence it successfully completed what would otherwise have been a somewhat less than full picture.
Moreover, it did that using a combination of analytical tools tailored to the specific circumstances – such as the Brand Leverage Matrix and Touch-Point Audit – and a framework to tap the intuition of those closest to the business, its owners and its managers.

**THE VISION OF WHERE YOU WANT TO BE IS ANYONE’S GREATEST ASSET**

The emergence of the new breed of business-consultancy-based market research agencies should be welcomed as a distinct ‘win-win’ for the market research industry. Unfortunately, however, this perception does not seem to be the general view within the market research industry, which harbours three central concerns about the development. First, there seems to be a concern that the arrival of market researchers who wish to be involved more actively in the decision process somehow implies that more orthodox data-centric market research is of less value. There is a feeling in some quarters that the holistic, more consultancy-styled approach compromises the ‘science’ of orthodox market research. So, will this threaten mainstream market research? We would say no. New look market research will not undercut the bedrock of the industry: the professional collection and analysis of market and consumer data remains at the heart of what we do. Second, the ‘stretching’ of a market researcher’s data collection and
analysis skills into the broader arena of business decision-making consultancy is seen by some as a ‘bridge too far’. For some it is a development that represents the slippery slope into market research that places a ‘dangerous’ emphasis on flair, creativity and imagination, something with which they secretly feel deeply uncomfortable. The business consultancy approach is seen as being rather ephemeral and flaky – something that is seriously flawed with a lack of sound principles, grounded methodologies and solid reasoning. So, does the consultancy approach imply a lowering of methodological rigour? We would say no: it is simply replacing orthodox approaches with a more holistic approach that has its own rigour and set of inbuilt checks and balances. Third, there are concerns that the claims being made by the more business-focused agencies are not sustainable; how can we as an industry, provide the requisite bigger picture business skills? The task of recruiting talent that not only can analyse data, but can also help to demystify decisions, is seen as a Herculean challenge. And related to this is the issue of whether appropriate education and training programmes can be developed to teach the skills needed for such an ambitious undertaking as extending the boundaries of traditional market research. Others simply seem to feel nervous about dabbling in complex and murky decision-making waters. Trying to establish exactly what is going on in the heads of senior decision-makers when they decide to do what they do is seen as someone else’s bailiwick.

So, is the extended market research consultancy model sustainable? We say yes. As an industry we must recognize, and believe in, our strengths. If we continue to harbour self-deprecating fears about our capabilities, we will simply fall by the wayside and become commodity providers of low cost data. If market researchers are going to play a more prominent role in business decision-making, they must first believe that they have a contribution to make. Market researchers must believe in the powerful position they occupy within the management services arena. We are not seeking to replicate the excellent work already done by management consultants, who already have the powerful conceptual thinking toolkits needed to analyse business problems. The territory that new style market researchers seek to occupy still pivots around knowing what customer information really means. The focus remains on our in-depth understanding of consumer psychology. But this now needs to be set in the context of a greater appreciation of critical business concepts, and a greater confidence to engage creatively with decision-makers.

In summary, we are a superbly talented industry, but one that somehow wants to ‘sabotage’ our own efforts to integrate market research
into the business decision-making process. This sabotage takes the form of a predilection to cling to a now outmoded notion of what market research is all about. Market research is no longer just about reporting what consumers say. Increasingly it is about helping clients demystify complex problems and make informed decisions. It is about combining our flair and imagination with our expertise in consumer market research. We are a fantastic industry, but one that is divided by a confused vision about what market research is now about. Therefore, we need to articulate clearly to senior business decision-takers what ‘new’, more consultancy-styled market research is now able to deliver. Perhaps ESOMAR should introduce a ‘Charter’ outlining the approach followed by today’s more consultancy-oriented market researchers. Such a manifesto would demonstrate that today’s ‘new’ market research is about the fusion of our traditional mastery of consumer data with imaginative multidisciplinary thinking that is focused firmly on helping clients achieve business success.

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