

# INSIGHT-DRIVEN INNOVATION

## HOW TO GET BETTER AT SPOTTING INSIGHTS

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**StandPoint**<sup>®</sup>  
A MORE HUMAN APPROACH TO INNOVATION RESEARCH

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*A lot of firms in our industry claim they are in the “insights business.” In many respects, it is one of the most overused terms in our profession. For clients, the lack of insights (i.e. when a body of research fails to make the team think differently about their business) is a huge source of frustration. The reason being that innovation which hinges on an insight has a much greater chance of commercialization success. Finding insights is not easy but there are several reliable frameworks to make the process more productive.*

## WHAT EXACTLY IS AN INSIGHT?

Many sources define an insight as a new fact or something not previously known, but we disagree with this definition. For us an “insight” is far more than a collection of facts: it is a deep and intuitive understanding of the consumer, customer, or end-user that defines an area of opportunity. It is often a motivation or belief wrapped in an emotion. It is the “so what” that will drive behavior and is integral to high-potential ideas and concepts.

And, in our experience, there are good insights and weak insights. What makes a good insight?

- It resonates with people. It’s something believed or experienced that prompts an action.
- It’s unique and differentiated. It’s something you can own and has not been used by competitors.
- It has depth. It’s not common knowledge and is at the root of what drives behavior. It should make you think differently about your business.
- It hits on an emotional trigger. Most decisions and behaviors are driven by emotions and not logic.

Insights are rarely articulated directly. Oftentimes, the researcher must knit together bits and pieces of information across a single study or multiple studies. Sometimes you will hear or read a comment and the flash moment occurs and only a single quote acted as the glue to cement dozens of different pieces together.

When conducting research the goal is dig deep and uncover needs, pain points, motivation, and beliefs. When analyzing feedback, we typically organize the content into one of six buckets: higher order needs, insights, needs, opinions, solutions, and specifications. For us, there is a clear taxonomy of customer feedback (see next page.)

A focus on recommended solutions and specifications will often yield incremental innovation. Needs statements (I wish..., I want..., what if...) are excellent inputs to brainstorming. Ideating around insights, however, yields a greater number of new-to-world ideas. There is also growing evidence that concepts framed in an insight have a higher probability of commercialization success.

Why is an insight like a refrigerator?

*Because the moment you look into it, the light comes on!*

— Jeremy Bullmore,  
Executive Director, WPP  
London, U.K.

## TAXONOMY OF FEEDBACK

<b>HIGHER ORDER NEED</b>	Think Maslow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to grasp as we are all motivated by higher order needs and have many of them in common</li> <li>• Not specific and actionable to product development</li> <li>• Some are not communicated but are obvious undercurrents</li> <li>• Predictor of successful products but often understood retrospectively</li> </ul>
<b>INSIGHT</b>	The Eureka Moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep intuitive understanding of a person / situation</li> <li>• The “what” that is driving behavior. Often framed as a belief or motivation. Ideally enveloped in an emotion.</li> <li>• Rarely or unclearly articulated</li> <li>• Requires understanding of consumer behavior</li> <li>• Knitted together</li> <li>• Predictor of successful products</li> </ul>
<b>NEED WANT DESIRE PAIN POINT PROBLEM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wish that...</li> <li>• Wouldn't it be great if...</li> <li>• It really is bothersome when...</li> <li>• Why doesn't someone...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually veiled in key words to listen for. Specific enough that you can imagine a solution but is not a specific solution.</li> <li>• Can be very difficult for some people to articulate</li> <li>• Important to have a firm handle on these as they are the springboards for innovation</li> <li>• Establish these and group them into buckets for potential ideas / concepts</li> <li>• Attempt to “ladder up” to identify the core belief or motivation</li> </ul>
<b>OPINION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think...</li> <li>• They are...</li> <li>• He is...</li> <li>• She is...</li> <li>• In my experience...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy for people to articulate</li> <li>• Can be veiled needs and often couched in a personal point of view</li> <li>• Often expressed as a barrier to something which can be re-engineered into a need</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need more...</li> <li>• We lack...</li> <li>• This thing needs to...</li> <li>• I'd change this...</li> <li>• I'd like for this to do this...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often expressed as a lack of resources / features / functionality and are generally broad statements</li> <li>• Understand the root need – what is driving the need for something more</li> <li>• Can also be very specific. Listen to those as they may be valuable, but don't get stuck in the weeds if the focus of your inquiry is broader.</li> </ul>
<b>SPECIFICATION</b>	Something you can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, or measure in some manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For products already on the market, customers will readily recommend specific tweaks</li> <li>• Many of these can be linked back to a need. Reverse engineering can shed light on unmet or inadequately met needs</li> </ul>

*So, the million-dollar question is: How do you get better at spotting insights? The most common frameworks are detailed below.*

## **PINPOINT THE ACCEPTED BELIEFS**

During qualitative research we often identify a set of pervasive beliefs that are an outstanding input to ideation. The bias of innovation teams, however, is to discount these nuggets because the feedback is uninformed. Don't do this; even if your first reaction is that the belief is outlandish, or scientifically impossible. Embracing the belief can give you much broader playing field for innovation.

Several years ago, we conducted a series of ethnographies related to indoor air quality. We purposefully included lead users (or those who self-identified as being very concerned about this topic and had a family member with chronic respiratory problems.) We were stunned at the number of consumers who believed that kitchen garbage cans were emitters of unhealthy bacteria and viruses, among other health concerns, into the air of the home. While the project engineers believed this was possible, it was highly improbable. Some arm-twisting was required to convince the innovation team not to lose sight of this consumer belief. During ideation some very creative solutions emerged. one of which led to a very successful innovations in garbage can liners and in products that "cleansed household air."

## **LOOK FOR A PARADOX**

The definition of paradox is a statement/circumstance that seems contradictory or absurd but is valid or true. Several years ago, we did a significant amount of work in smoking cessation products. This was also during the time we began to fully understand the addictive nature of nicotine. We clearly remember the despair of patients who wanted to stop smoking and the somewhat callous attitude of physicians who often didn't believe that patients struggled so heavily with quitting. This insight led to some breakthrough approaches in physician education to support the launch of a new-to-market smoking cessation product.

## **FORCE ANALOGIES**

Finding the similarities between two different things can also lead to startling insights. For example, what are the similarities between homeless people and business travelers? While business travelers are not pushing shopping carts, we do have all of our possessions packed into rolling suitcases. Both of us do not have permanent shelter at one point in time and face great stress while handling the necessary activities of our daily lives. For a hospitality company, comparing business travelers to the homeless unleashed great empathy, and led to a series of low-cost / high-value guest services.

## **FOLLOW THE MONEY**

While this sounds like a line from a crime drama, it proves just as useful for marketers looking for new insights. There are only a few infallible motivators for humans, and one of them is profit. As such, when analyzing feedback, one should apply a behavioral economics lens. For example, in a recent study we were exploring the behavior of physicians who refer patients to one another. By understanding the

dollar impact of different referral scenarios, we recognized that their behavior was both cooperation and competition. This insight allowed our client to better understand their customers' behavior in a way that was previously not recognized.

Generating insights is hard to do. Admittedly, some insights are truly breakthrough and some only provide incremental understanding. Yes, it takes time and it takes money to do this. The organizations best at identifying insights, however, typically have a very unique culture: curiosity is rewarded, they challenge what they already know, and are paranoid about what they don't know.

If you or your team would like to learn more about insight-driven innovation, we offer training that allows your team to participate in the art and science of building insights. For more information, contact Kip Creel at [kcreel@standpointgroup](mailto:kcreel@standpointgroup).

## ABOUT KIP CREEL & STANDPOINT



KIP CREEL is the president and founder of StandPoint. Kip has chief responsibility for business development and methodology and is the firm's overall research supervisor. Prior to founding StandPoint in 2002, Kip spent 8 years at another Atlanta-based market research firm in positions of increasing responsibility, including Director of Research and Vice President.

Previously, Kip worked for a division of Merck Pharmaceuticals, and InfoQuest, a clinical research organization, in analytical roles.

Kip is a thought leader in insight-driven innovation and is on the faculty for Stage-Gate® International and teaches marketing management in an executive education program affiliated with Texas A&M University.

Kip holds a BS in Microbiology and Statistics and an MBA in Hospital Administration from The University of Florida.