

INSIGHT-
DRIVEN
INNOVATION

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THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMER

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, intuitive understanding of people and their circumstances.

We’ve heard other researchers say they are in the business of understanding “why?” We consider this too narrow. Brain science has shown that “why” questions often yield very short, rational answers. The insight is almost always centered around the “what”: what does this person really believe, what is driving their perceptions, and what would motivate and persuade them? Getting at the “what” takes a deliberate line of questioning and interventions that promotes a high-state of “storytelling” among the research participants.

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 where a single quote acted as the glue to cement dozens of different pieces together.

When analyzing voice-of-customer 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 input (see next page.)

A focus on customer-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.)

THE TAXONOMY OF CUSTOMER NEEDS

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

THE MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION IS: HOW DO YOU GET BETTER AT SPOTTING THE 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, naïve, 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 innovation in “cleansing 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. Neither of us 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, one of which is profit. As such, when analyzing feedback one should apply a behavioral economic 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 customer's 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 money to do this. The organizations best at identifying insights, however, typically have a very unique culture: their 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 generating insights, give us a call. We offer several training options that allow your team to practice the art and science of building insights. If you'd like to learn more contact Kip Creel at kcreel@standpointgroup.com or (770) 270-4800.