

Consumer Insight: Old Chestnuts & New Tricks

If marketers were to compile a list of their most over-used words they'd probably include at least one, if not all three, of the following:

Passionate

Used by agencies to impress upon clients how enthusiastic they are about their business;

Workshop

Used largely because it sounds more impressive than 'meeting'

Insight

Used loosely to label anything that emerges from observations or research as having inherent value about a brand or a form of consumer behaviour

Of these three buzzwords, it's the 'I' word that is generating far and away the most discussion. Everyone is talking about Insight; from clients to the trade press, from conference speakers to agency specialists. One of our bigger clients attaches so much importance to insight that it has 37 (yes, I counted them) full time insight managers on its books.

All this noise about insight has naturally driven a fair amount of myth-making, and one of our jobs is to sort the nuggets from the nonsense; to de-bunk some of the myths that we can show aren't true. We also need to test the more obvious barriers

to insight to see if they're real obstacles or not and find the solutions to overcome them.

Our aim is to give you an answer to the important question: "How do I know when I've got a really useful, inspirational insight?"

Insight myths



Nobody can agree on what insight really means.

A scan of our trade press, client and agency websites, reveals a variety of views on what insight actually means, but there is a fairly common agreement on how to define it. Nearly all definitions include words like 'discovery' or 'new perspective', something about 'understanding consumer behaviour' and a reference to 'driving change or growing brands'. So whilst we could all argue about the exact choice of words, the interpretation of what insight actually means is commonly agreed upon and understood. At GfK NOP we simply refer to it as 'a breakthrough of understanding that has the potential to drive positive change'.

Insight is the 'new thing' in marketing. In the 1950s Ingvar Kamprad, the founder of IKEA, was wrestling with the problem

of how to provide well designed, quality products but at affordable prices. He realised that if he could ship his furniture unassembled and have the customers put it together after purchase, then his brand promise could be achieved. That was a simple insight, around which a global business was built. Today the company has about 280 stores in 40 countries, with a turnover of £10 billion. That's a lot of furniture, but it also sold two billion meatballs and enough hot dogs to feed the Russian army!

The following decade, in the 1960s, Professor Theodore Levitt told his Harvard business school students 'People don't want quarter inch drills. They want quarter inch holes'. Insight? Yes. New? Hardly.



At around the same time an ad agency called Doyle Dane Bernbach were handed the tricky task of selling a car, which was small, odd-looking and foreign, to an American public who, at that time, were looking for exactly the opposite. Their insight for the VW Beetle – that smart people chose reliability over size and looks – led to an ongoing successful campaign

that helped the VW Beetle to become the best selling car ever. It also spawned the classic voiceover line: 'have you ever wondered how the man who drives the snowplough, *drives to the snowplough?* This one drives a Volkswagen. So you can stop wondering.'



Starting in the late 1970s CDP, a UK ad agency, was faced with the challenge of selling boxes of small cigars that seemed to have limited appeal when compared with the universal pack of cigarettes. Their insight – that a calm, relaxing cigar is an enjoyable relief from life's daily mishaps – led to the memorable, and justifiably famous, 'Happiness is a cigar called Hamlet' campaign that amused audiences for more than twenty years - and sold lots of cigars.

So insight is not new, but it has become a priority on the marketer's agenda, fuelled by client demands for accountability, the pressure for growth, the search for competitive advantage and an increasingly more fragmented media landscape.

Insight can be pulled off the shelf.

Although we may all agree broadly on what insight means, we differ widely on how we get there. It can come from a single source, such as a focus group or a visit to a supermarket; or from a multiple of sources, such as combining call centre feedback with quantitative research and category data. However, it usually cannot be supplied and packaged up on demand. As one of our clients said in a recent interview, "You are always looking for it, but sometimes it may not come". Insight is not just about reading research data; it

is rooted in instinct, intuition and human understanding.

Barriers to Insight:

No clear view on where you want to go.

Any project needs clear and specific objectives; one around 'cost saving' is too vague and weak. A good example would be to launch a premium cider in the UK and make cider drinking fashionable amongst 18-34 year olds, as the recent success of Magners has proved.

Having the wrong people on the team.

Insight can come from a variety of sources but it takes an intuitive, questioning mind to identify the best routes to explore. Some people are better at this than others, and getting the more imaginative people on the project is more likely to lead to success. If you have the wrong people, they may kill off potentially good insights.



The consumer is king.....or is he?

In the catering business, this is the first rule any trainee will learn: the customer is always right. But in developing insight the process is not simply about asking consumers what they want, writing a strategy and then implementing it. After all, the great Henry Ford famously quipped in the early 1900s: "If I'd asked consumers what they want, they would have said a faster horse". He didn't ask them, but followed his instincts and launched a means of transport that was practical, reliable and affordable – the Ford Model T.

He went on to sell 15 million of them.

No forum for gathering the insights.

Insights are often about making connections based on certain facts or observations. There needs to be a means or a forum at which ideas can be shared and discussed.

Long winded, 100 page plus PowerPoint presentations.

Market Research companies are particularly guilty of this! What is the actionable insight? What is the understanding from which it was derived? What are the key data and observations that support it? Answer these key questions on two pages of PowerPoint and you've got the key points across.

Negative thinking.



We all know people like this...the 'it won't work because...' brigade or 'good idea, but it won't fit into our system' or 'people will never buy that....'. Just think of some famous products that were so different to what was on offer at the time: the original Hoover, the Swatch watch, the Apple iPod – they were all based on inspirational insights and may never have seen the light of day if the negative thinking brigade had their way.



How to spot that 'Eureka' moment

This is probably the most frequent question we are asked when we do insight training. Is there a checklist? Is there a way of 'road testing' whether you have got a genuine, actionable insight or is it just a strong, marketing-based observation? We would suggest a few questions to find your answer:

Is it inspiring? To the core team, the wider business, the sales force, your agencies.

Is it breakthrough thinking? Is it looking at a problem or a market from a new perspective.

Is it fresh? The penny drops....nobody has really thought about the issue in this way before.

Is it relevant? It must address a brand issue or be something you can act upon for your business.

Is it enduring? The best insights are based on a human truth, such as 'the clothes you wear say something about you', and therefore have a long shelf life and enduring appeal.

Is it actionable? If the insight can't be successfully applied to the business, then it is not actionable and is of little practical use. Equally importantly, it must offer the potential for business or brand growth.

The examples on the right, fulfil all of these criteria on spotting that 'eureka moment'

Of course the ultimate test for any insight is when you get the sales figures. They say the figures never lie. Sales figures? Now there are two words that are surely never open to loose interpretation! ■

Insight Nugget 1

Breakthrough understanding

People don't buy a watch just to tell the time, it also says something about you ...making it an affordable fashion accessory would allow people to express their individual personality



Actionable insight



Apply the rules of high street to watches. Several "collections" a year, use of sports of sponsorship, colourful designs etc.

swatch 

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