

A splash of thought

SERVICES DESIGNED FOR SATISFACTION?

Try this

Market research can only ever tell you about demand, never about supply, but just having a demand-side picture can't tell you what will give the best return on investment. Indeed, only 5-10% of a business plan is about market demand, the rest is about explaining how to meet this demand profitably. So to make research more effective, involve implementers in the research early on and try to second guess the decisions you might take at the end, so the research can be matched with supply-side issues and costs from the start.

Happy customers are loyal customers and businesses go to great lengths to monitor customer satisfaction to ensure that staff are providing a helpful, quick, responsive service. But in many instances the cause of customer dissatisfaction is not the staff but a systemic failure in the rules, policies or communications of the business.

For example, the Inland Revenue has sent out payment reminders with a contact phone number that is permanently engaged. If you get through staff are helpful, effective, polite, but the service fails because the contact process lets it down.

Such systemic failures are common in larger businesses. Take the example of when a customer trans-

fers across departments, which, in the worst cases, can require the customer to redial on a different number. Many customer satisfaction surveys are blind to these type of failures, measuring the quality of the human interaction on doggedly internal lines—was the service delivered to our specification, but not how the encounter as a whole was experienced by the customer.

Some firms seem to go out of their way to automate service failures with automated responses, voice-mail and telephone redirect services. Anyone familiar with technology companies will know of all the gadgets they use to avoid dealing with a customer, yet these same firms still measure customer satisfaction expecting happy customers



Designing services for happy customers

at the end.

Many companies wouldn't launch a new product, or new advertising, or packaging or a new website without first running it through market research, but services and service design are often left to internal processes without any external checking against customer needs. Where services are designed for customers, they are more likely to get customer satisfaction at the end.

Did you know?

- B2B customers often complain their research replies disappear into a black hole if they don't get feedback on what they said.

FIND OPPORTUNITIES BY THINKING LIKE YOUR COMPETITION

Why is it that despite a steady stream of product development and masses of detailed market information and know-how there are always new challenges from competitors and new entrants bringing better products to market?

One reason is that businesses can become locked into one view of how things are done (colourfully

known as drinking your own bath-water) and can't see that it could be done differently.

In building a competitor analysis function, don't just monitor competitor activity, but try and understand why competitors are acting in a certain way and where they think you are vulnerable.

Start-ups are often a more danger-

ous threat, challenging existing orthodoxy and often coming out of nowhere. So take a step back and ask the question 'if I was to design a competitor to destroy us, what would it look like and how would it work?' This will provide the clues to future threats and will produce a steady stream of new ideas that are opportunities for your business.

WHAT TYPE OF RESEARCH BUYER ARE YOU?



Research clients come in all varieties

Different businesses have different styles for carrying out and using market research. In our experience buyers come in four broad types.

Firstly, expert purchasers who want high survey standards with slick presentation and reporting that serve to illustrate their purchasing skills within their business. Rarely conducting their own analysis, this buyer likes known research brands and bigger projects acting as a gatekeeper only letting a few preferred agencies pitch.

Secondly are analysts/librarians who are often budget constrained, and will shortcut where needed.

More interested in data than polished delivery, they will do much reporting themselves. They are more likely to try smaller agencies where they can keep an eye on the details and keep costs under control.

Thirdly, internal consultants who have a role representing the customer in business decision making. They need business-literate agencies who can recommend research to tackle the business question with pragmatic answers and not just research for its own sake. Their suppliers are sounding boards as much as research providers.

Finally there is the non-researcher. With fewer preconceptions and understanding of research, they expect the agency to be a consultant that they can discuss their market and marketing problems with and not just research. They look for someone who understands their business and who can help shape the direction of that business with trust forming a strong element of the relationship.

And dobney.com? Much of our work is with the last two buyer types where research is only part of the solution and there is more attention to the bigger picture.

ARE BRANDS BECOMING TOO PERVASIVE?

“Brands reduce risk, promise quality and simplify complexity”

In an unfamiliar territory do you try out a local cafe or try out a known national chain? Do you risk unbranded shampoo on your hair? Do you believe that you are more compatible with Aries than Scorpio?

Brands reduce risk, promise quality and simplify complexity. They provide emotional reassurance that you know what you're getting, and reduce the psychological fear of

doing the wrong thing and creating an uncertain outcome. A strong brand conveys values and beliefs as much as performance, giving brand owners the options of a price-premium and increased demand.

But with brands everywhere and many sharing similar values and offering similar emotional benefits (in many ads you could substitute a competing product and no-one would notice) consumers are find-

ing it easier to switch between offerings, taking brand owners back to competing on features and price.

Whilst more distinctive (and so risky) promotion can work, one unique area for differentiation is the brand experience. This is not just service or how the brand looks, but how it feels in use, how it is used and purchased and, most importantly, how it demonstrates that it lives up to its brand values.

dobney.com is a market research and intelligence consultancy based in Bath.

Formed in 2000, we provide a full range of market information services off and on-line, from focus groups and depth interviews to quantitative projects, desk research, web-applications and consultancy.

Our clients range from blue chip companies looking for specific project-based research, to smaller pre-IPO companies who value our wider business perspective and the quality of our insight

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