



APPLYING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH TO MARKETING CHALLENGES:

Better Insight,
More Success!

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INTRODUCTION

You've heard it said before – qualitative research gives you the “Why?” and quantitative gives you the “How much?” However, qualitative research also delivers so much more than simply the “why” of consumer behavior.

What's the difference between qualitative research and quantitative research?



“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

-William Bruce Cameron

VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

Qualitative research shines when you need to hear how customers talk about your products and services. You may be trying to isolate what factors customers use to make decisions to purchase and then evaluate their satisfaction. Alternatively, maybe you just need to figure out what language customers use when they discuss your brand, your products/services, and the experience they have had with your employees. In any event, qualitative excels at helping you get close to your customer.

DIG DEEPER

Quantitative research techniques include open-end questions, but marketing researchers agree that most consumers don't take the time or make effort to enter their deeply held feelings and beliefs in surveys. Even if you have a live interviewer in-person or on the telephone, the nature of the question and response format discourages the contemplative thoughtfulness that a good moderator can elicit in a qualitative research setting. Qualitative research allows respondents the time to think deeply about their perceptions, their beliefs, and the reasons for their behavior.

BEFORE AND AFTER

When paired with quantitative research, qualitative research can help to improve the survey instrument, as well as to

increase the value of the quantitative results. Before the survey is designed, qualitative research can help inform the quantitative research by increasing the researcher's understanding of how the product/service is used, by whom, and to accomplish what goals. Additionally, identifying the appropriate metrics or scales for questions can ensure better data is collected. After the quantitative research is over, qualitative research can help the researcher better understand the data through the customer's explanation of their responses.

INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Qualitative research can help marketers explore new products and innovations by working with consumers to identify unmet needs and dissatisfaction with current solutions. After all, you can't ask what you don't know to ask! Using qualitative techniques such as focus groups or ethnography is often very helpful in developing new products and new marketing programs.

The purpose of this eBook is to bring you ideas and suggestions for applying qualitative research to your marketing efforts. Everyone seeks continuous improvement for growth and success, and qualitative techniques can identify new and different ways of better serving important customers and communities.

CHAPTER 1:

Build Your Brand with Qualitative Research



Brand

What is a brand anyway?



Seth Godin

In the words of Seth Godin, author of Purple Cow and Linchpin, “A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer’s decision to choose one product or service over another. If the consumer (whether it’s a business, a buyer, a voter or a donor) doesn’t pay a premium, make a selection or spread the word, then no brand value exists for that consumer.”

Alternatively, and perhaps more simply (from Amazon’s Jeff Bezos), “Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room.”

One thing is clear: To build your brand, you must understand what your customer thinks about you. You must go beyond measuring awareness and familiarity and how much your brand is associated with certain attributes. You need to tap into the deep, emotional relationship that your customers, and especially your most loyal customers, have with your brand. While it is interesting, and perhaps important, to understand the metrics of your brand, the real power comes from understanding and being able to access consumers’ emotional attachment to your brand.

Qualitative research is used in the following ways to uncover information to strengthen brands:

Establish Your Unique Brand Position

Your brand has more competition than ever. Regardless of your product or service, it is likely that your customers have multiple options from which to choose. This makes differentiating your brand from the competition essential to building loyalty and expanding your market influence. Qualitative market research offers ways to discover what your target market finds valuable about your brand or service and how that is different from and better than your competitors.

Define Customer and Brand Values and Voice

Establishing a set of core values and definitions is often included as part of a business plan. So, it is likely that your brand has already defined its value, quality, and integrity. However, are you sure that your core values and definitions reflect those of your audience? Through qualitative market research, you can determine how your market determines value, quality, and other key terms and align your products and services accordingly.



Jeff Bezos

Find Brand Weaknesses with Qualitative Research

If your brand is suffering or just not competing as well as you would like, you might try some qualitative research to understand why. Is it your service? Alternatively, perhaps your product quality has slipped recently? Or perhaps you just need to communicate better or differently? Qualitative research can help to highlight brand weaknesses, as well as identify ways to improve brand performance and defend your brand from the competition.

Whether it is focus groups, ethnography, or in-depth interviews, qualitative research allows marketers better to understand consumer relationships with their brand, as well as competitive brands. In this way, marketers can develop communications and branded experiences to strengthen competitive differentiation and build brand loyalty.



HOSPITALS ARE ALL THE SAME. OR ARE THEY?

A major Atlanta hospital was concerned about their brand position in the local market. “Hospitals are all the same,” claimed the CEO. “We all have emergency rooms and MRI’s. We all treat heart attacks and deliver babies. How can we be different from everyone else?”

Focus groups were conducted that explored that very question, and found the answer in the brand personality for several hospitals. While consumers were not aware of any differences in services offered or what hospital they would go to if they had a certain health challenge, they clearly identified with the personality of the hospital. One hospital was identified as the hospital for discerning, educated, professional women. Another was identified quite clearly as “for those with Old Atlanta Money.” And a third was identified as being best for rural, casual, outdoorsy male customers.

The hospital built their brand around being the hospital for women, in all their disparate roles in life: mother, daughter, businessperson, wife. Positioning the hospital as the healthcare partner most attuned to and developed to meet the needs of busy women created a clear differentiation that has survived for over 25 years.

CHAPTER 2:

Beat the Odds! New Product Success with Qualitative Research



DID YOU KNOW?

- 80% of all new product launches fail?
- 75% of CPG new product introductions fail?
- Less than 3% of CPG new product launches earn more than \$50 million in their first year?

The odds of new product success stories are certainly not good. But they can be improved by understanding the reasons why products fail. Copernicus Marketing identified ten reasons why the new product success rate is so shockingly low:

- Marketers assess the marketing climate inadequately.
- The wrong group was targeted.
- A weak positioning strategy was used.
- A less than optimal “configuration” of attributes and benefits was selected.
- A questionable pricing strategy was implemented.
- The ad campaign generated an insufficient level of awareness.
- Cannibalization depressed corporate profits
- Over-optimism about the marketing plan led to an unrealistic forecast.
- Poor implementation of the marketing plan in the real world.

- The new product was pronounced dead and buried too soon.

Further, Harvard Business Review has identified five other flaws that doom new products:

Flaw 1: The Company can't support fast growth.

Flaw 2: The product falls short of claims and gets bashed.

Flaw 3: The new item exists in “product limbo,” without significant differences to sway buyers.

Flaw 4: The product defines a new category and requires substantial consumer education—but doesn't get it.

Flaw 5: The product is revolutionary, but there's no market for it.

So, there are many causes for new product failure. And many of them can be addressed or avoided by marketing research, and especially qualitative research.

IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS THAT NEED SOLUTIONS

One of the most important applications of qualitative research is in exploring how consumers currently purchase products and services, how they much they like these products and services, and how they would improve the products and services they are using. Consumers are notoriously poor product designers (and hence Henry Ford's statement about the automobile, "If I had asked them what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse"). However, they excel at telling you how a product or service works for them and with or against their lifestyle. Focus groups, in-home or on-site tests, and in-depth interviews are all excellent techniques for learning what consumers like – and don't like – about using your product or service.

OBSERVATION

Ethnography, or research designed to observe the behavior of consumers, is a very powerful tool. Observing the consumer planning and preparing to use, using, and then evaluating the use of a product or service can lead to the identification of product improvements, as well as completely new products. A major U.S. city used ethnography to understand how families in nearby cities decided on where to go for a long weekend getaway. By understanding how the family evaluated nearby cities, how they searched for information and what information they sought, the city was able to deliver that information, positioning it to be more likely chosen for a visit. Additionally, the city understood where it was weak compared to other cities in the region and developed programs and investments to address those weaknesses.

Successful new product development requires a disciplined process and the courage to say "no" to weak concepts. However, without a good understanding of consumers' needs and desires, new product developers can only guess at what will work. If you want to increase the odds of new product success, you need more information, and qualitative research is an important tool for delivering that information.

HOW DID THEY THINK OF THAT?

Ever wonder how they thought of these products/services? Qualitative research played a part in the development of each of these innovations:

Watching consumers struggle to tie ordinary trash bags closed led Glad to the addition of "rabbit ears" that made tying the bags securely closed a cinch. Moreover, "what goes in stays in!"

Ugh! Is there any nastier housecleaning chore than the toilet? Observing consumers juggle cleansers, brushes, rubber gloves, bleach and other products led Scrubbing Bubbles to their "touchless, continuous clean" gel that leaves your bathroom smelling fresh longer.

A qualitative research community assisted Nabisco in developing their 100-calorie snack product line. Learning that most consumers snack in their car, but also wanted a limited-calorie and single serving package, Nabisco produced single-packet servings of their existing snack – all for 100 calories.

A qualitative research program of observation and focus groups with pet store visitors crystallized the importance of making a distinction between customers who were "getting pet food" and those who were "shopping for pets." After observing that most shoppers came into the store simply to get pet food, a pet supply retailer developed a program for loyal shoppers who wanted to get their pet food with speed and convenience. These shoppers could call ahead with their order, and the store would deliver the food directly to their car when they drove up. The stores also moved the pet food closer to the cash register to increase convenience for the in-store shopper.

CHAPTER 3:

Keep Customer Satisfaction High with Qualitative Research



What business doesn't want more satisfied customers?

Satisfied customers are the growth engine that delivers so many benefits, including

- More repeat purchases,
- More recommendations to other purchasers,
- More word of mouth advertising,
- And even a willingness to pay premium prices and ignore competitive offers.

However, improving customer satisfaction takes more than just measuring satisfaction and calculating your Net Promoter Score. You have to understand what satisfies customers and why - and that only comes through qualitative research. If 30% of your customers are very satisfied, and 30% are just satisfied, is that good or bad? More importantly, what should you do about it? Is it smarter to try to address those who showed dissatisfaction, or to try to knock the socks off those who are merely satisfied

Qualitative research can help answer those questions. By gaining a better understanding of the customer satisfaction dynamics of your market, your business, and your brand, you can find the low-hanging fruit to address immediately. And then you can design longer term initiatives to address the more difficult challenges, as well.

ADDRESS DISSATISFACTION

Asking follow-up open-end questions to get at the reasons why respondents rated themselves as dissatisfied with your product or service is a start, but often it will not give you the whole story. If respondents say the reason for their dissatisfaction is "pricing", what do you do about that? The solution might not be decreasing prices; there might be payment plans that are needed, bundled pricing that could address the problem, or even volume pricing that could fit the situation. Without conducting the follow-on qualitative research, you could be leaving money on the table.

Customer dissatisfaction isn't always about pricing. What if they tell you your customer service representatives are rude and unprofessional? Does that mean you need better training, or to change your hiring practices? Alternatively, perhaps it means the respondent doesn't like the answers they are getting from Customer Service, and you need to look at your policies?

In almost any customer satisfaction survey, open-end responses are insufficient to pinpoint the problem and the appropriate solutions.



FIX THE RIGHT PROBLEM

In 2002, Starbucks found customer satisfaction declining. The company determined that the culprit was that customers had to wait too long to get their coffees, and initially decided to spend over \$40 million to increase labor hours in the stores, thus reducing wait time. Before doing that, however, Starbucks looked into the situation further and decided that investment was not necessary. Instead, qualitative research showed that there were less expensive ways to increase satisfaction, including initiatives that were put in place to address the following challenges:

- Customers felt more valued when baristas recognized them personally. However, high turnover among baristas worked against this familiarity, and also led to longer wait times due to lower barista efficiency. Analysis of employment data revealed that, if Starbucks could hold onto a barista for 90 days, the probability of that barista staying three years increased dramatically. The company initiated more training and support for baristas in the first 90 days of employment, increasing the chance that they would stay long enough to become efficient and get to know the regular customers.
- Research also showed that coupons, discounts, and free drinks made customers feel valued and increased their satisfaction. Programs were put in place to reward loyal customers more frequently.

Both of these programs together cost much less than \$40 million and had a significant impact on increasing customer satisfaction. Indeed, listening to the customer has become a standard operating process for all Starbucks stores.

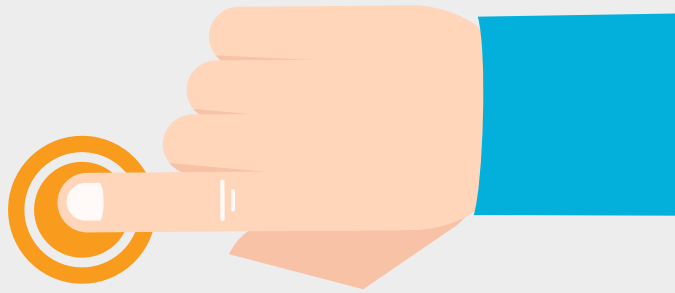
DEFINE EXEMPLARY SERVICE

Often, it is more efficient to move the customer satisfaction needle by raising the merely “satisfied” respondents into the “very satisfied” category. However, what is not easy is determining what makes up exemplary service. Qualitative research can help you understand what actions would get beneath satisfaction to raise your customer experience to delightful. Don’t assume that you know what is needed to create raving fans; sometimes delivering more consistently through small changes in standards and processes is all it takes to raise the bar.

Adding qualitative research to your customer satisfaction research program can drive business improvements that deliver more satisfied customers. Moreover, the benefits of increased customer satisfaction are long-lasting, creating a strong foundation for business growth and success. After all, as Microsoft’s Bill Gates said, “Your most unhappy clients are your greatest source of learning.”

CHAPTER 4:

Qualitative Research Provides a Flexible Platform for Usability Testing



Have you ever tried to figure out a product without the instructions?

Usability testing, according to Wikipedia, is “measuring a human-made product’s capacity to meet its intended purpose.” While we typically think first of websites, software, and technological products when we think about usability testing, just about any product or service could be tested to determine ease of use and whether consumers are able to use them to accomplish the intended tasks.

Therefore, you could use usability testing to evaluate food products, packaging, customer service or ordering procedures, training and documentation effectiveness, in essence, any product or service where there is user interaction.

Usability testing often uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. While the sample is typically small, usability testing often involves recording whether a task is successfully completed by the user and these data are presented quantitatively. On the other hand, usability testing is also interested in the quality of the experience, and collects information on the users’ emotional state, reaction to the process, and comparison to other similar products/services they have used.

However, as the data collection method is usually in-person (although remote tests are sometimes used), this chapter will focus qualitative aspects of usability testing.

Some of the reasons for conducting usability testing include:

- Ensuring seamless, intuitive interaction with the product/service,
- Exposing usability problems before launching the product/service,
- Testing alternative design concepts and comparing design approaches,
- Challenging the design and marketing teams’ assumptions,
- Comparing your product/service to competitive offerings,
- Improving ease of use, documentation and learning,
- Attempting to decrease the need for technical support,
- Saving time and money, and
- Increasing sales!

Typically, a usability study tries to replicate as closely as possible the setting in which the consumer will use the product or service being tested, and identifies several tasks or challenges for the user to accomplish. In addition to tracking whether or not they complete the task and how long it takes, usability testing can also document the typical step-by-step thought process of the consumer while completing the task. Patterns will emerge quickly, but individual variations will continue to appear and are important for developing the best possible product. After the tasks are completed, the moderator will discuss the experience with the respondents. The goals of this discussion are to evaluate the experience in light of other products and services used, in light of how the respondent might plan to use the product, and to generally rate the product in terms of ease of use.

There seems to be a trend among businesses to launch new products and then, at a later date, fix any problems that come up post-launch. This might have been appropriate in the “dot-com 90’s”, but today this is a strategy that can be very damaging to your brand, your customer satisfaction and loyalty, and to your company as a whole. It is far better to invest modestly in usability testing and avoid potential marketplace embarrassment and the cost of new product failure.



IT'S NOT “USER-FRIENDLY” UNTIL THE USER SAYS IT'S FRIENDLY

A manufacturer of HVAC and water heater equipment was developing a new user-friendly programmable thermostat. The only problem was that the engineers and the marketing managers couldn't agree on what design was most user-friendly. Without definitive answers, the engineers argued, they were going to develop the product the way they wanted! The marketing department proceeded to test the product prototype with consumers who had recently purchased a programmable thermostat. Consumers were recruited to a focus group facility, and both the marketers and the engineers watch from behind a two-way mirror as they attempted to solve a set of tasks. (e.g., “Program the thermostat to lower the temperature to 65 when you leave Friday for a five-day vacation.”) Participants talked through their thought process, asking questions and making guesses about what the various icons and symbols meant. The interviews were videotaped using a picture-in-picture technique that showed both the consumer, as well as a close up of the individual's hand on the thermostat touch screen. At the end of the day, both marketers and engineers understood what worked and where their interface had problems and were ready to work together to improve the product before launch.

CHAPTER 5:

Develop Better Concepts with Qualitative Research



You think it's great – but could it be better?

Whether you're coming up with a new brand or marketing campaign, introducing a new product or service, or modifying your current product or service models, getting customer reactions to your new concept is a key step in concept evaluation.

Concept Evaluation starts with writing the concept so that consumers can tell you what they think about it. Do the hard work of thinking about and clearly defining your concept. After all, if you cannot clearly communicate what you want to do, you probably aren't ready to put it in front of consumers for evaluation. Go back to the drawing board and prepare a concept statement that will make your research investment pay off.

So, what makes a good concept statement? The best concept statements communicate the benefit of the new product/service or messaging to the consumer.

1. Benefits drawn from brand equity or the heritage of the brand. Brand equity benefits can be delivered

through the company's experience ("the oldest" or "delivering quality service for over 50 years") or leadership.

2. Efficacy benefits are based in formula or service-based claims. These products and services deliver the benefit better than their competitors.

3. Sensory experience benefits appeal to the consumers' senses of sight, smell and touch. (A laundry detergent delivers a "fresh scent" or "blindingly bright whites" is delivering a sensory experience benefit.

4. Emotional benefits are based on the personal feelings of the consumer. (If you don't buy jewelry gifts at the right store, the recipient will think you are not very savvy or don't care enough about them.) Martha Guidry, the self-proclaimed Concept Queen and founder of The Rite Concept classifies benefits into four categories:

Sometimes it is difficult to define the end benefit. Keep in mind that the concept and the benefit are NOT the

same. To make sure you get to the end benefit, just keep peeling the onion by asking "What's the result of that?" and "What does my target consumer get out of that?" A dipping sauce for chicken is not the benefit. The benefit is preparing nutritious and delicious family meals quickly and easily. It is absolutely critical that your concept statement is built around the benefit your product or service delivers, so make sure you get that right first.

Once you have nailed the benefit, here are some additional tips for writing your concept statement:

Keep it short and simple. Only one benefit per concept. Only one paragraph, with three or four short sentences that clearly describe the idea. People don't read anything carefully in our post-digital society, so use bullet points, bold highlighting, or other tools to enhance readability.

Make sure the concept sounds appealing. Especially if it is a food, be sure to include how it tastes, and who it appeals to.

Match your concept to your target audience. If your concept is a convenience food, don't test it with food snobs! Similarly, don't focus on the aspects that might make a gourmand find the concept appealing. It just won't work.

Include Reasons to Believe (RTB). How are you going to deliver the benefit to your consumer? Give them enough RTBs to answer their questions, and make them confident that the concept is real. But not too many RTBs (no more than the three most compelling) and no self-promotion, please. So for example, for a food concept targeted at working moms with children, the product is chicken dipping sauces, and the benefit is a quick, easy way to give more variety to serving chicken to your family. The RTBs might include that the sauces are brought to you from a brand you know and trust, available in your grocery store and have been "kid-tested."

Use consumer language. If consumers are unfamiliar with the language you use, they will reject the concept, even if they might have liked it if they could have understood what it was. So make sure you use language that is not industry or company jargon, that the "man on the street" (or at least those in your target audience), will understand.

Be realistic. Include information to help consumers evaluate their interest in your concept and whether they might explore purchase. Price, timing, other requirements or commitments to owning and using the product or service should be included to increase the realism of the concept and help consumers accurately assess their potential response.

Be bold; don't sell too hard, and don't be boring. While your concept needs to be realistic, you don't want your research participants to fall asleep over it. So don't forget to give it a little sizzle and excitement, as long as it really will be able to deliver on those positives.

Once you have written your concept statement, edit, edit and edit some more. And when you are done editing, have a colleague look it over. Then take it to a couple of colleagues who are not at all familiar with the concept and get their advice. Then – and only then – are you ready to proceed to testing.

Focus groups and in-depth interviews (either online or in-person) are excellent tools for concept testing. Use qualitative research to determine:

- If consumers understand the concept (and if not, why not),
- To evaluate how appealing the concept is,
- Their interest in purchasing, and
- What questions they have or what obstacles they see to purchasing.

Developing a strong, exciting, compelling concept is the foundation of new product development, and goes a long way to ensuring new product or service success.

NONPROFIT ATTRACTS NEW SEGMENTS OF VOLUNTEERS

A 25-year old volunteer management organization was trying to create volunteer program concepts to attract two new market segments: families with small children and "young retirees" who have professional skills to offer nonprofit organizations. Using a series of focus groups with current volunteers, several new program concepts were developed. In-depth interviews and focus groups with members of the target segment evaluated these concepts. Did retirees want to volunteer on their own, with a group of people they had never met, or with a group of their friends? What requirements did the families with young children have for their volunteer activities? Could activities be outdoors, or was it better to have them indoors? What activities could children of various ages successfully undertake? Did retirees want to be held to a schedule or did they prefer to "drop in and out" as they wanted? Based on the results of this process, the concepts were modified and enhanced to better meet the needs of the target audiences. Quantitative research was then undertaken to identify which concepts had the highest probability of success. Those concepts have been implemented, and the organization is seeing increased numbers of excited volunteers in the two desired target segments.

CHAPTER 6:

Think Outside the Box! Qualitative Research with Your Employees



Who deals with your customers more than anyone else in your company? Your employees, of course!

Many companies conduct an annual survey of their employees to determine satisfaction with working conditions, leadership/management, and compensation and benefits. But your employees have a lot of other information that can be valuable to marketers, especially the employees that interface with customers, including:

Brand Delivery. How well do your employees understand your brand? If they don't know what it is, they won't be able to deliver it. And speaking of brand delivery, do employees have what they need to deliver the brand or is something holding them back?

Customer Satisfaction. Your employees know why your customers are unhappy. They hear the complaints, they deal with the frustration. So what would your employees recommend for improving customer satisfaction?

New Product Development. How are your products working for your customers? Your employees answer

the frequently-asked questions; they explain your product's quirks or your service's special policies. How would they improve current products or services? And what new products do they think you should develop to meet your customers' needs?

Often, employees are more willing to participate in research for marketing than they are in research about employee engagement and satisfaction, because they believe they have a lot to offer. In conducting qualitative research with employees, however, there are some differences with typical consumer research practice that you must consider:

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Employees will be even more concerned than consumers that their information will be held in strict confidence and will be used to better the company. (No one wants to "waste their time" with research that isn't going to be used!) There may also be concerns that what they share in a qualitative research setting may be used against them

if it is not what management wants to hear. Due to these concerns, it is probably best to use an independent third party to conduct the research rather than an in-house researcher.

PARTICIPATION RATES

Participation rates in employee research vary widely, depending on the topic of the research, and the degree of trust the company enjoys with employees. Incentives can be offered to overcome some employee reticence. In customer research, we often hold a drawing for a valuable prize or give a small prize to each participant to encourage response, and these work for employee research as well. However, employee research incentives can also be more inventive, such as time-off for participation, use of a reserved parking place for a week, lunch or dinner with the CEO, or some other attractive perk. Employees should never be "required" to participate in research, but there are many ways to imaginatively encourage their participation.

STRUCTURING THE RESEARCH

Another key concern when conducting qualitative research with employees is who to include. If you are doing focus groups, you want to be careful to have participants who are all the same managerial level. (Obviously, never, ever have subordinates and superiors in the same group!) You might not want to have too many people from the same department or work-group, to encourage fresh thinking. For senior executives, it might be easier to schedule in-depth interviews than to hold a focus group.



SCHEDULING THE RESEARCH

Consider the schedules of the participants in your research before you commit to any particular time or date. Should you avoid end-of-quarter reporting if you need to speak to employees in your Finance or Sales Department? Are there major conferences that take many people away from the office? Do you have remote or virtual employees who are only onsite for limited times? Try to make it easy for employees to participate in your research.

Your employees can be a wealth of information and a great alternative to surveying customers. However, the employee-employer relationship can introduce a bias into the results. So, while employee research will never completely take the place of customer research, it is an important perspective to consider in marketing planning.

BUT CAN WE DELIVER?

The executive leadership of a large U.S. insurer decided upon a strategy that would set them apart from the lower-cost, online insurance companies that were competing so effectively for their business. They would position themselves as delivering superior service. Middle managers were not quite so confident with that positioning, but the organization had already surveyed customers extensively in a short period of time, and had decided to rest on customer research.

Therefore, focus groups were held with employees to determine what they thought about the service they were able to deliver, to identify obstacles in terms of policies, procedures, training or equipment and information that kept them from delivering excellent customer service, and to brainstorm ideas to improve customer service. The focus groups were not videotaped, to

protect employee anonymity, but the results were compelling. Employees complained about the lack of cooperation between departments in resolving claims disputes and talked about the frustration that created for customers, as well as employees. Several of the metrics that were used to evaluate claims performance were identified to be faulty, and probably causing customer dissatisfaction. The results were difficult for executives to hear, but the message was clear: our service is not great.

In addition to postponing the positioning campaign, executives decided to improve customer service by implementing many of the employee suggestions and addressing their areas of concern. They hope to be able to take that brand position in the near future, and employees are delighted to be working on initiatives they know will help their customers.

SUMMARY

Qualitative research provides input into the key functions of any successful business. But before you embark on your next qualitative research project, make sure you have the following:

1. An experienced moderator or qualitative research consultant who will work with you to design and complete the project.
2. The ability to recruit the right people into your project. This is essential for success because if you don't have the right kind of person in your research, you will not get the information you need.
3. The right setting and tools for your project. A professionally designed focus group facility will have spaces specifically designed to make your respondents comfortable and secure, your clients more collaborative and productive, and your moderator more effective.

When all three of these elements are in place and operating at peak performance, you know your qualitative research project will deliver the information and insights you need.

If you're not using qualitative research as an integral part of your marketing research program, you need to reconsider. Take advantage of the rich insight and deep emotional feedback you can only get from qualitative research techniques. Tap into the mind of your consumer in more ways than you ever imagined possible. And say "hello" to greater than ever business success!



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