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Segment: Unleashing the Power of MROCs to Achieve Better Business Insights

Brett Watkins: There it is. Hello everyone, out there. Welcome to our spring webinar. I am excited to have the good folks that we have today that are going to be discussing activity-based research to quote Ray Fisher here with Aha, as the terms that we look to use and how that is involved. Super excited to dive into this subject today and see what brands are really and how research is evolving. It's things that we are seeing and certainly the same things that our partners here at Aha are seen as well. So really excited to share with that community out there, what some of the leading brands are doing and how they're doing it. And then some of the best practices of things and how they how they go together. So really looking forward to jumping into this. A couple of housekeeping things if you would. I want to say thank you to a couple of folks, one would be Focus Forward who is our transcription partner for taking care of this today? Internally, Josh Bradley, who is our videographer extraordinaire and takes care of all the technology in the background, Josh, thank you for all of your help. In fact, Josh is getting ready here to launch a poll here momentarily for you all to keep an eye on. We are looking to just get your feedback as to what do you call this activity-based research? There's a lot of terms that we've heard and used over the years, we're going to dive a little bit into that as far as some of the history and how that's evolved. But tell us what it is that you use to identify some of these solutions? And how do you name it and when you're talking to your clients, exactly how do you describe it to them and the names that you use. As far as St. Melo, there's also some things. Feel free to use the chat function down there to say hello to each other. You also can post questions, we will be monitoring those and answering those at the end of the session. So we promise you if you ask a question and it seems like time is escaping, we promise you we will get to those at the end. If questions continue past the time of this webinar, which will be exactly an hour in respect both you as well as our panelists here today, we will get back to you. We promise there will be an email. There'll be a lot of things that you will see that follow up from this post webinar including, as I said, we have obviously a variety of things, which is going to be the transcript that Focus Forward

provides. Kelli Hammock here, who's going to be talking to us a little bit today, who's our resident expert on the subject matter that we're doing today. She's also going to be providing a summary of that. And in addition, there will be recordings. You can go to our website at leresearch.com and get on our live webinar page and find that out as well. So a lot of different ways that we can provide information to you if for whatever reason you got to cut out a little bit early or some of your colleagues were unable to join us live today. So, let's get into it. Super excited here with Ray Fisher and Paula Kramer and Kelli Hammock. Ladies first as they say. Paula, why don't you introduce us to yourself and all the audience here and tell us a little about you.

Paula Kramer: Awesome. Well, thank you guys so much for having us today. My name is Paula Kramer. I am the vice president of Aha Insights Technology. My roles and responsibilities essentially at Aha are to oversee all of our project management processes. I am essentially the head of operations. So all of our projects and everything that comes through Aha, no matter how it's fielding, no matter which clients we're working with, typically will come through me in some way. And then we have a team of project managers that works, that I work very closely with in managing those projects and ensuring that we, they are completed successfully. I've been with Aha for just over six years. And prior to that I was actually an Aha client. So I actually have quite a bit of experience with Aha and then super proud to be part of the team. And happy to be joining you guys today.

Brett Watkins: Awesome. Thanks Paula. Making the magic behind, making the magic happen behind the scenes, right? Making stuff get done. Kelli.

Kelli Hammock: Hello, everyone. So I'm Kelli Hammock, I work at L&E Research as Brett shared. So thank you for that. I work on the sales side and I help with consultation. So if you're a client coming to us and maybe you need some help bridging gaps or getting the pieces together, I can provide consultation on that. In addition, I also do the in-house, in-house screener development when that service is requested and it is actually something that I take great pride in and really enjoy doing because my background is operational. I started in recruitment, moved into project management. So I have literally read thousands of screeners and literally participated on the operational side of many, many projects. So we are leveraging that expertise to now help our clients. And I also dabble in a little bit of L&E's marketing. So that's been a fun new learning for me. But that's a little bit about me.

Brett Watkins: Awesome. Thanks for sharing Kelli. And glad to have your experience as you've been helping clients along the way. Something I think is very underappreciated in the qualitative research world is the people that see these things thousands of times on and get people to ask questions from as it relates to scrutiny of development. And Ray, the guy who made the magic happen, co-founder, tell us [CROSSTALK]

Ray Fisher: I am Ray Fisher, based here in Detroit. I founded Aha 10 years ago. So we're a decade old, which has been fantastic. Started my research career as a Pepsi brand manager back in the early days, I won't go as far back as that really. You're wise so you can actually calibrate my age there. But tell me, it was a long time ago and I was a focus group moderator for 12 years until we founded Aha. We had one platform before this called Living Diary that wasn't as expansive and as detailed as the Aha platform is. And we had translated that into what this broader more, utilitarian tool is today. And we've been a proud and very thankful client of L&E for the last decade as well.

Brett Watkins: Awesome. Well, I think that as long as, in case I did not mention it, I am Brett Watkins. The CEO at L&E Research. And I'm just here to have conversation with some folks today and have a good time. So let's jump in. The concept of research, it seems to evolve a lot. And I think the term that we were discussing in preparation for today's webinar was hybrid based. So let's talk a little about like how things have changed. I look at it and see it was very project oriented and we now see qual and quant blending together, we see different approaches the speed and agility of things. How does that differ? What changed, right? What changed from the way things were to how things are evolving?

Ray Fisher: Well, I'd say there were a couple of seminal things that have happened. And you've voiced on some qual and some quant that's been kind of common over the last decade of doing online digital stuff, but COVID really changed the game dramatically. Primarily because the live piece, and Brett, you, and Ellen, you know this intimately that in person research virtually went away there for a couple of years, which was amazing you guys survived through that period of time. We were in a good position. We had done the Zoom integration in 2019. The first company to do that in the world, which was very cool, a little feather in our cap. And that allowed us to do the asynchronous work. So three, four, five-day studies and then poll star respondents and then do IDIs focus groups after that. So that was what I think is like the bulk of the hybrid stuff we do, but there is a lot of qual and quant, sometimes using quant sample for simultaneous studies. You may do a qual sample provided online, asynchronous

study for three or four or five days, and then also concurrently run a quant survey. And then you also see a lot of stuff around segmentation where there are qual studies that really inform the quant that follows. And then maybe qual after that and all kinds of different iterations of qual and quant either against simultaneous or sequential.

Brett Watkins: Stay with you right for just a moment. The one thought I had is the why. So tell me what is it that, thinking maybe a step back of, I'm thinking, new researchers out there, new brand leaders are trying to understand these methods, but what business problems are you seeing. Why are they coming to you and, for these evolving platforms?

Ray Fisher: It seems like the most, the common, most common things we're doing are really the digital ethnos where brands are trying to do foundational learning around what makes people tick, what makes them buy, use different products and services, or not use others. And then also concept testing. So some of that digital ethnos stuff does lead into concept work, but I break those out specifically to say, tons of foundational learning so that brands understand where they exist in their ecosystem today. And the concept testing stuff always happens, but we're seeing so much more digital familiarity and comfort levels of end clients with doing digital concept work and doing it on the qual side as well. So qual, quant there. But, again, it's really those two different things, concept development, new product development work, and digital ethnography to get foundational brand learning.

Brett Watkins: Paula, I was thinking of you because the term came up, at least in my head, when I looked at the different methods in the way people are applying was like structured and unstructured. The ability to be actively engaged with participants or are you leaving them to their own devices. Talk a little bit about, what are the different methods and ways that clients are asking you today to gather this information to apply and use in these new hybrid approaches? What's the, what are some of the best practices that you're seeing out there today and what people are doing?

Paula Kramer: I think what's interesting about hybrid approaches is that you can leverage the best of both worlds. I think one of the things that we sort of espoused for years on the technology side of things was that doing asynchronous work and doing work that's live, that's face to face or that's even virtual like we're doing right now, there are potentially very different outcomes from that experience. There are ways to leverage an asynchronous engagement to best get to the digital ethnography piece that Ray was just talking about as an example.

Getting to know somebody and understanding the things that make them tick and what's important to them and how they prioritize their living spaces, the things around them, there are so many ways to get it that in an asynchronous environment that are less intrusive, less invasive, allows the participant to be more open and honest, and also to do things on their timetable. How many of us have all been like, oh, my God, there are too many things on my plate, I'm too busy. I'm in too many meetings, I'm too over scheduled. So if we're asking our respondents to do the same thing, to fit just one more thing in their day, to schedule something on their calendar in between work and all the soccer, running kids to soccer practice and having to deal with all the like the laundry and the cooking and the cleaning and all the other things that you have to do in your day, and then you have to schedule an hour to spend with a person on top of it, that's a lot. So instead, we take people into a community or an asynchronous or an activity-based environment, allow them to complete things where we're getting to know them as people. Having them show us their world, show us around, maybe they take us to the grocery store, maybe there's an opportunity for a shopping trip in there. But it doesn't have to be. And we give them the opportunity to, at their convenience over that specified period of time, really show us around. Then with the hybrid add on of taking people into live work after that engagement, we're able to level up that conversation, you're not starting from ground zero. I remember doing in homes, in person, and going in and taking the first like 15 to 20 minutes of a two-hour interview, just having to kind of build rapport with that person and learn about them and who they are and get them to trust me as moderator. And it took up all of that time. And we had clients with us and I was recording, and there was all these things that were going on. And we were paying this participant for their time when in reality I could have gone in knowing so much about that person and having potentially seen what was in their cupboards or their cabinets or how they took children back and forth to soccer practice. And I can understand that about them already. And the things that drive them. And then that one hour, two hours, however long they have them in person becomes more meaningful.

Brett Watkins: Makes total sense.

Ray Fisher: To add to that too Paula, it's like, and I remember doing in homes as well. And if you think about it, going in with two or three clients, yourself, a videographer, you got five people trampling into somebody's house to do an in-home ethnography. Doing them digitally, it's so much more private, they're not feeling like there's, it's a show, you're not invading their privacy, they're showing you what they can at their own pace, and with their own comfort level. So again, you're not in this artificial five person assaulting the house. Now there are

reasons to do that. And we're seeing more of that come back now kind of post COVID. But I think it's just that artificial five people attacking the house versus somebody in the peace and quiet of their own place using their video recorder on their smartphone, which people are very comfortable doing these days, and sharing with you that way just creates a more unbiased and on sort of saturated with people sort of environment. So better [CROSSTALK]

Paula Kramer: There's also a cost piece to that. So there are, as we do broader and broader research across bigger and bigger teams and there's more and more people involved in the process, this allows that to take place. So you can have more people sort of invested in the research, if you will, because as we just said, there were, there was a point in time where a lot of this was done face to face and in person. And not to say that there aren't benefits to doing that in certain instances, but if you have a team of stakeholders where you have 50, 70, 100 people who you're trying to immerse in this research, you are giving them the opportunity to do so live, real, and impersonal. They can be hands on with the research, watch it field, ask questions as it comes up. And so we're opening up that opportunity to a larger part of the organization by doing it digitally without making it appear to the participants that 50, 70 or 100 people are really invested in what they're sharing with us.

Brett Watkins: And when that would be I think one of the big advantages of what I see in the hybrid approach as well as your ability to immerse yourself into large audiences while also enabling you to get grandly, right?

Paula Kramer: And I think there's an additional benefit. Even before in person research, we just started talking about the idea of in person coming back in a bigger way post COVID, there's more opportunities to sort of meet people either in a facility or going into their homes, whatever it might be, where you're actually face to face with a participant. But there's still these huge benefits of doing this mixed methodology research because of that barrier that gets broken down by doing some sort of digital component ahead of time. We have projects all the time where people are doing focus groups or they're going into a person's home or they're, this is a very real case study by, as an example, going into their backyards to see the different builds that they're hoping to bring into their outdoor space for the summer. But you spend two, three days even just 30 minutes ahead of time with those people on the platform ahead of time, learn a little bit about their goals, their drivers, what's like putting them into this mindset of wanting to make these decisions. And then you have this whole prepared sheet of details that you're walking in with as opposed to, all right, tell

me who you are, let's see your house. You've already done all of those things.
[CROSSTALK]

Ray Fisher: And then the other thing too, Paula, just add to that is that when you do the asynchronous stuff first and then you pull for the live, you grab the star respondents. If you have 36 people in the study, you don't necessarily, you over recruit a little bit, of course, but you don't have to take everybody into IDIs or groups. So you're able to take a subset of them, maybe 10 or 12 people, do three groups or 10 IDIs, whatever it happens to be. And you know everything about these people. So it definitely supercharges groups, people come in kind of knowing the moderator a little bit. Sometimes they may share homework in advance if there's a social activity. So people come in and it is energized and ready to go. It's just so much more connected and electric than having to go through as Paula mentioned, intros and background stuff. And it's really wasted time, you're really diving into the meat of the matter and taking the conversation to another level.

Brett Watkins: Kelli I know, and working obviously, the work that you're doing with brands here at the L&E side, what's resonating with you and what would you add?

Kelli Hammock: So we actually have a client that I'm kind of thinking of that who, they've conducted multiple hybrid research projects with L&E over the course of a few years. The client, basically to tie it all up, this client requests that we build a small panel generally containing maybe 250 participants. And those participants do a 15-minute quantitative survey where that data is collected, then the client gets to choose who they'd like to participate in the focus groups. And they actually happen both online and in person. So perfect example of this hybrid research that we're talking about. But this has been a really successful partnership because their projects are very similar in methodology. So from our perspective, the way they're managed, team L&E has been able to implement short, shortcuts and make the process more streamlined. We also have a really strong gauge on what we can expect and therefore what recruits can expect. And as we communicate that out to them, that leads to a higher rate of engagement due to just setting clear and defined expectations. On our client side, they're getting the quantitative work that they were going to do anyways, but now they get to hand select recruits to participate in their qualitative work, the qualitative work. Recruits are secured for the quant survey via screener, obviously, however, since the client can review their quantitative responses, they can be a little more targeted when selecting participants for the sake of the qualitative. And remember, screeners always need to be short and concise. So using this

hybrid approach actually allows a depth in qualitative, an in-depth qualitative selection that maybe a screener on its own couldn't provide. And then Paula kind of mentioned briefly the cost. While you've got the trifecta of cost, speed, and I'm forgetting the third trifecta, but anyways, this takes [CROSSTALK]

Brett Watkins: Quality.

Kelli Hammock: Quality. Thank you. So I mentioned the quality in my last paragraph, we'll now talk about the cost and the speed. Well, when you've got a panel of people that you know qualify, we can get them scheduled pretty quickly for the next phase of research. And if, again if you're dealing with one large panel, you sort of pay that initial recruitment fee and then you can nitpick and decide where you want to place them and what activities they can do to fulfill those research objectives. So, I've been in the industry for a while that I mentioned, and it all started with a bunch of focus groups or a bunch of IDIs and over the past five or 10 years, things have just exploded and we've got so many more possibilities to provide our clients with various methodologies and on our side we just need to manage the logistical part so that Ray and Paula are getting a really easy respondent experience.

Paula Kramer: Kelli, what you just said is so- you just said something that's so important that, which is having the experience to make recommendations, to say what should happen, like methodological recommendations, how these things should go, what's the best process? Learning from experience. It just speaks to the value of having partners who have done this and been through it. Because there are so many different ways that hybrid mixed method research can be done. But having the experience of people who have been hands-on, who have seen what has worked or what hasn't worked, reinvigorated processes, or reinvented them based on seeing successes and failures, improving things over time, and then also trying to work with the clients to meet those three specifications, right? Speed, quality and then also cost. And I think there are- we get asked now so much so especially with brands being so budget conscious these days, how do we do more with less? And we're getting asked that constantly. And so I think unfortunately, there is a big part of qualitative that often gets sacrificed at the expense of quantitative, because quantitative can be, in most cases, faster, cheaper, you can have a different quality of sample. But the most important thing that I think that we've seen in all of this mixed method research, is that you don't have to sacrifice one for the other. You can do both. It's just about understanding how to apply those mixed methods.

Brett Watkins: Well, Kelli, I think you made a really important point, which unfortunately we're not going to have time to get into today, but we certainly all know the industry has talked a lot about data quality. And I think that there's certain things like panel suppliers lied down research have to work on. These methodologies can really, as you said, go a long way to be a part of a screening process to where you don't have to ask people so many questions on the initial stage. They get to the first cut, and then you can begin to sift them through second cuts and third cuts to see how you- I wish to engage them. And really, in my opinion, get a more representative sample. Let's talk a little bit about because you all started to go with towards this direction anyways, and that is- so now that we've been talking a little bit about, whether it's synchronous or asynchronous that you're doing, video or are you allowing people to do more of what I call bulletin board activities? You mentioned before, Ray, it has capability to have integration within Zoom, which means that you can actually do live video. There's obviously [INAUDIBLE] that you've mentioned before. Talk a little bit about how companies like ours can help make brands successful. What is it that we're- what is it that we can do to help them execute successfully? And you all started going to this anyways at some levels, but just at least at the execution base of the piece, then we'll get to the technology piece in a second. What is it we can do there? Paula, I know that's obviously your cup of tea working with clients, so what is it that we can do to help them?

Paula Kramer: Yeah, I think there are so many things that go into- both parties on this call have very intimate knowledge with this process. Logistics are everything. Having the right partners who understand process and can guide clients through that experience, I think, is invaluable. There are- once you start with, to Brett's point, high quality recruiting and you start with people who have been vetted through this process, you guide clients through creating a short and concise but meaningful screener, in the process of vetting respondents, you're not just hitting target quotas, you're identifying people who are a good fit for the research. You're super clear upfront in what expectations are. You need to tell participants what they're in for, if there's video, if there's photos, if there's things like that. Like helping respondents understand what is going to be required of them is so important. That transparency in our process, both with our clients and with our respondents, I think is vital to the success of any project. And then also transparency between partnerships. So for example, in our work with L&E, we are very fortunate to work with a lot of L&E's project management team who are wonderful, very, very effective. Very, very spot on communicators. And for that reason, they ensure that everything moves through successfully by keeping us in the loop at every stage. And then we are also super transparent in our process.

We give them access to the Aha. conversations platform. They can see things in real time as they're happening. They understand what participants are completing every day and how that works. I think just that openness, that transparency, that communication in that vendor partner funnel, is ultimately what leads to a successful project on the backend. And then also just the respondent quality. Brett, to your point, is invaluable of just making sure you have the right people that they've been screened properly, that you're delivering against that in the methodology for the client. Because it all starts with the recruit. If the recruit is off, the research doesn't matter. We're looking for the right people and so we have to start from the right place.

Brett Watkins: Ray, I definitely want to get to a question for you. Because one of the things that I know that you all have done with the technology that may be lost on folks, but like you mentioned, obviously the first to do Zoom integration. What we see from our end as far as participants in their engagement level often has direct correlation to how easy the tool is to use, right?

Ray Fischer: Yes.

Brett Watkins: Zoom is a very ubiquitous tool; people are very familiar with it. The feedback we constantly get is, I know how to use it, it's easy to use, some ease to that. And I want to get to that as we start talking about the tools in just a moment. But Kelli, as we kinda get back to process, some thoughts came to my mind as well as it relates to, not just obviously beyond obviously, the quality of the recruit piece to it, but tell the audience a little bit about what are some of the common mistakes, the errors, the issues that we are seeing where research goes wrong and why it goes wrong.

Kelli Hammock: I've kind of reversed engineered this into, well what are the best things you can do? Which Paula kind of stole my thunder, but I'm going to forgive her because she's a pal, but she really- everything she said is so important on the supplier side and if you weren't doing these things, then you are doing yourself and your client a disservice. So from process on our side steps, always request a kickoff call. Step number one, the project manager is going to be responsible for coordinating all the moving parts of your multi-phase project. A kickoff call just assures that expectations are appropriately set and all parties know what will be involved and expected. Step number one don't skip the kickoff call. Number two, when possible try to minimize the volume of touchpoint. I previously talked about narrowing that funnel, starting with a basic screener, going through the quantitative and then selecting your qualitative. You

don't need to narrow the funnel, sometimes you're just, here are the phases, I want all people to participate. By minimizing touchpoints, go ahead and schedule them for everything upfront. Because you want to set the expectations that on May 1st we expect this to happen, on May 15th this will be when the next thing happens. As long as you're communicating that, we find that response rate and engagement is stronger. Don't move the goal, that's a big no, is setting research expectations and then changing those, you need to actually set those and stick with them as much as is possible we all know things change. We all know that maybe phase one has some enlightenment, that means you need to pivot phase two, but maybe change your discussion guide and not necessarily the methodology that the recruits are already expecting. In general, humans are fairly resistant to change. So when it comes to completing a research project, if too many changes are implemented, they may become non-responsive and disengaged, feeling that the initial commitment they made is just not worth their time. Be prompt with your communication when recruits complete activities. We send an incentive quickly and on time, recruits are more willing to prioritize the next phases of research. Or better yet, and this again goes back to what Paula and Ray have shared, if using a technology platform, grant access to the project manager. They can keep an eye on participation status, they can follow up as needed, they can chase down the ones who are maybe procrastinating on their activities and need a little nudge. That way Paula doesn't have to ask her project manager to do it. The project manager can take that initiative and handle it. And also when those activities have been completed on the platform, well boom, your project manager has already shared incentives, so that's done and no one has to worry about follow up and back and forth. It just cuts out a lot, with that, allowing the researcher to focus on the research and not on participant logistical demands. That's what we're here for, L&E is here to support that. Paula and Ray need to concentrate on running a successful project for their clients and not dealing with human behavior.

Brett Watkins: The human behavior piece is so true without question. And I think it's something quite frankly that often the research design that we as humans fall short on, which is thinking about it from our perspective and our marker seems without really thinking more about it from the participants' perspective and being respectful of that process without question. Yes, Ray.

Ray Fischer: Raising my hand here. Expectations was great, Paula you said that right off the top and you said as well, Kelli. Setting expectations is critical. And then you did mention briefly Kelli, incentives. I can't tell you how important it is. You've got to calibrate the workload to what you're paying people. And then the other thing that's happened over COVID, no question about it, is inflation in the

real world, but incentives had to go up. The a hundred dollars just didn't cut it for three days anymore. And then how you parse things out when you look at a longer-term community, you talked about your 250-person community, Kelli. You have to really figure out how to make sure everyone's engaged enough and even if it's just a quick call once a month or something, if there's nothing really percolating at the client side, you've got to keep them engaged that way. Communication-wise, weekly notes, here's what's coming, nothing's happening this week, keep up with your diary entry, whatever it happens to be. But whatever that workload is, you've got to make sure you've got your incentives calibrated to match it. Because so many times we've learned so much and early on in the Aha. history. We'd have people come to us with discussion guides, they thought, oh this is like 20, 30 minutes of activity. So you're paying an incentive based on let's say 60 total minutes over three days for instance. And it ended up being, an hour or more a day in the tasks were just overbearing and you had people quitting, just dropping out saying this is not worth it. You're killing me. You said 60 minutes, I've already put in 60 minutes on day one. So that incentive calibration and also being respectful of the fact that, there is inflation and one thing I like to always call out when we quote things is what that incentive level is. And I always want to air a little bit on the higher side, because it may impact the study several hundred dollars, or a thousand dollars. But to have people be happier and more engaged because they know they're getting compensated properly, for their time and their passion about whatever the study is, really makes sense. So expectation setting and incentives to match are super important, both in short and long-term studies.

Paula Kramer: And that's something that we monitor too, because if we have incentives set to a particular level, expectations have been set that it's say 30 minutes a day over three days as an example. If we receive an activity guide and we see that that's going to be exorbitant over and beyond what's anticipated, not like five minutes here or seven minutes there, but like an additional half hour a day or an additional hour. We very quickly call that out and that becomes a topic of discussion because immediately that is a problem point in the research. If you're asking them to do more than expectations have been communicated that drop off factor increases exponentially.

Brett Watkins: I'll add one of the things I know the operations team has shared with me multiple occasions when working with different technologies and so forth. That we all have a tendency to fall in love with, it's kind of the same, and we all have the sound of our own voice or whatever the analogy you want to use with that. It's kind of the same thing we see is that all our technology has- well they can ask on the customer support piece, they can pick a response

or they can- we're responsive in the day whatever else. And I think the biggest mistakes that we see is respondent engagement really declines dramatically with the belief that you can be reactive to participants as opposed to Kelli's point, to be proactive, to, hey, just want to make sure you're still here, you're engaged and what's going on. I haven't noticed you haven't been in in a little while. You could have gone to our app and hit customer service and we would've answered your question. The reality is that, the people that are often doing studies, they don't know the technology platforms. It's easy to get lost when you're building that kind of stuff. But to get lost in the experience of- well I know it because I use it every day, but these people are new to it for the first time, their instant reaction often is just to reach out to us. And if the answer's not quick in terms of response, like what should I do? Anything else, their engagement level drops dramatically and it's easy for them to drop out. And now here we are, you know proverbially chasing our tail from a recruit standpoint. I know a lot of people probably out there going to have, in the limited time we have unfortunately, getting them bored. Talking a little bit about the technology right and what you guys are doing at Aha. and I strongly encourage anybody out there to seek out a demo. Brett and Paula would be happy to give you one so you could see a more in-depth look at the package. But kind of on a high level, can you talk a little bit about what you offer and what people really are leveraging as far as it relates to these hybrid activity in communities that you're seeing the greatest success?

Ray Fischer: Yeah, I would say, one of the big things that- videos become a huge part of what we do, asynchronously and live. Videos been massive and two of the real staple things that we've done over time, is we've had projective techniques. You can ask open-ended questions till the cows come home and it gets kind of boring. You've got to ask, there's certain ones you have to ask, but there's times when you can use projective techniques to get all that information out of people in a much more in-depth way and a couple of those techniques are storytelling and our collage tool that's now called dynamic canvas. Those are creative type tools. Like if you ask somebody to tell you a story and you give them a nice environment within which to write that story, like on a piece of loose-leaf paper digitally of course, with a cool font and you give them the things you want them to include in a story. What, who was with you, how did you feel, what would you do different next time. When you ask them all these different types of questions, you're going to get completely different stories, but you're going to get much more in-depth texture or context around how people think and feel about whatever the task might be, or whatever the product is or product usage category you're talking about. Same thing for collage. If we ask them to grab images that describe how they feel about something, and I frequently use a

topical and somewhat timely thing, and that is working remotely. Grab five images from our gallery that describe how you feel about working at home and they'll grab five images and tell you a story about those five images. Now if you ask just an open-ended question, hey, how do you feel about working from home? And what they'll do is respond in two or three sentences and you'll be like, that really wasn't the depth I was looking for. But by using images to help or storytelling exercise to have them tease out all the emotions and things that are within the context of what happens working at home, how do I feel? Do I miss anything? Is it better? Is it worse? And I'd say in pretty much all cases from everybody I ever talk to, it's mostly better. People do miss some of the human interaction. But at the same time too we're all using tools like this right now. Paula and I talk multiple times every day. The L&E team we're on with you guys all the time and Brett, a lot of times it's a video call versus just a phone call because it's more fun to see people in person. You can live remotely and still enjoy it. Projective techniques definitely come into play to help you get much more into the emotional and attitudinal stuff that they're not going to tell you in just an open-ended response. And one of the other things I could touch on right now would be, what's the future focus right now. We are launching our beta, in fact we did internally to our team this last week. And that is AI. Taking artificial intelligence, we're going to call it Aha. Intelligence, very convenient AI. Our tool is going to be really a research assistant. It's not going to be like the answers, but it's going to give you summaries, it's going to give you insights, it's going to be able to auto tag and give you suggestive tags for the whole study, individual questions, etc. What it's going to do is basically act as an assistant. And the biggest thing we see is if you analyze, we don't think it's going to replace human at any time soon. The human touch is truly what we're all about. But to have that AI assistant that might identify what we call blind spots is super critical. So if you look at a massive data, let's say you looked at 40 storytelling exercises, and you asked for the summary insights, you may get six insights, three you might say, yes that's pretty much what I was thinking too, you may see one that you totally did not think about, we call that the blind spot, and then may be something that's completely erroneous and makes no sense. From that standpoint, AI is going to be a big help to moderators to automate some of the things they do and again, augment their own intelligence and how they look and break down data. That's pretty cool there. And then obviously on the other side of that, that involves you guys too is, we have to police for fraud. We have seen it creep up where we're seeing some ChatGPT responses in some studies, just a few of them. But they were obviously AI driven, they were not personal human responses to questions we asked. We've got some tools that we're implementing in the next two weeks to block copy paste essentially, so people can't go run it question on ChatGPT, copy it, paste it into the platform. So that'll be one way to

kind of police that. And there's also tools that can analyze responses and let you know the propensity or likelihood that they are not artificial intelligence generated. So there's tools in play there. So it's really moderator and participant quality stuff too so it's just going to continue to impact our business more and more as time goes on.

Brett Watkins: Kelli, I know one of the things that you do for us here at L&E is kind of keeping up with some of the latest technologies. Artificial intelligence, of course, is a big subject that I'm glad Ray brought up. As it relates to our discussion today, anything that kind of pops up to mind, that's jumping out at you that you see on the horizon that we all should be paying attention to?

Kelli Hammock: Yeah. So one thing that Ray said here that I thought was indicative of AI is that you can tell when people are using AI to generate those responses. So what I'm seeing on the horizon is researchers kind of panicking, like, ah, is AI going to replace my job? Are we going to need to continue to do research? Everyone's kind of a little afraid of the unknown, and they don't really know if their jobs are going to be replaced. So I've actually done a little dabbling myself in ChatGPT, just for funsies to see what I can come up with, see how it works. And I can tell you from my experience that what Ray just shared is accurate. You cannot just expect it to write something without the need for human touch. There were common grammatical errors in the paragraphs and content that I sourced out of it. A couple of them were straight pulled from someone else's intellectual property. It was from a; it actually had a vendor's name in it as the provider of that content. So as far as I'm concerned, AI is very new and we need to be careful and proceed with caution, but I don't think it's going to be replacing humans anytime soon because it can't even structure a sentence according to best practices for what we all learned in elementary school. I think there's a lot of applications and it's going to be really powerful. And the reason I've been playing with it is I'm exploring ways where maybe it can make me more efficient at my job. It's not replacing me. And you know what, Brett, I'm never going to play with it enough that it gets to a point where it could replace me because I want to be around for team L&E, but I can tell you, there's a lot of human touch with what comes out of it. You really have to adapt it to be good. And it's never just going to be a pop it into chat, pull it out, and boom, here's your final product. That's not on the horizon.

Paula Kramer: One of my favorite things about being a researcher in general is putting the pieces of the puzzle together at the end. You've conducted research, you have all of your insights, and you're getting ready to tell the story to the client. The way that we at AHA are seeing AI is it's going to help you figure out

what those pieces are potentially, but it's not going to help you figure out how they go together. There's an extreme benefit of a strategic experienced person who has worked in the insights industry, who worked with brands, who understands how the world works, and also who understands humanity. We've had this conversation for a long time now. See, the past two, three years have really been focused on this idea of empathy and relaying empathy and the emotions and how our consumers interact with the world and with brands back to clients expecting that a robot can relay that is very aspirational. We might get there. I keep calling tools like ChatGPT and Skynet as a joke. But I think the long-term view is really that while it can help you make sense of vast amounts of data, and to be clear, asynchronous work does produce large waves of data. So anything that can make us more efficient researchers, that can help us get to those puzzle pieces faster is exceedingly valuable, but putting those pieces of the puzzle together ultimately still going to be on you as the researcher.

Brett Watkins: Well, Megan, a little transition here as we get to Q&A, as we get down to our last minutes, I also want to ask Josh how our poll came out. So if he will share the data. So what are people calling these different tools and solutions these days? While he's doing that, however, I'm going to and there we are. Ray, as everyone can see, online bulletin board is still very much a common nomenclature for it. As they say, old habits die hard, right?

Ray Fischer: Well, we have some work to do on activity based. We don't know what the benchmark was two months ago, but hey.

Brett Watkins: It's on the radar now. It's like [CROSSTALK]

Ray Fischer: We'll do it next time too. We'll just have to keep a tracking on that particular question.

Brett Watkins: Many politicians started out at 4% before he ended up winning the election, right? So he or she actually saying.

Ray Fischer: Absolutely.

Brett Watkins: Getting the questions, I was looking at Pamela [INAUDIBLE] asks for the panel for what qualitative tasks will AI be used and do you let your clients know when you've used AI or do you ask permission to use AI in the context of completing a project from your clients? Thoughts?

Ray Fischer: That's a great question. We're launching our beta to a select client team, various clients next week. So a couple things to keep in mind there. Yes, we will let them know that there is an option to use AI, and they also need to know that we're using a closed loop where our AI is not taking their primary research data and putting it out into the intellectual ethernet. So it's not going to escape the platform and go out, it's going to be internal to the platform itself. So I think from a good conscience standpoint, you do have to let them know it is involved in some of that stuff. They can elect to use it or not use it. If they don't want it used at all, that certainly can be the case, but most moderators will probably want to use it again since it's a closed loop and it's not going to be out on the ethernet. This data can be processed internally so yeah, letting them know that's totally fine, but I don't think that's going to dissuade anybody from wanting to use it. We have a bunch of clients that are just every day, like, when's the beta? When's the beta? When's the beta? It's about when we said we would launch it, which is about now. And everyone's excited to give it a go, so we're going to give them on their old studies, turn it on so they could go play around and look at what the insight aggregation is. The tag suggester is phenomenal because now you have to go tag things kind of individually on a human level of course, but if the thing suggests the tags and you've already given your data a little bit of a run, you've looked at it and then you see these tags, it's going to make a lot of sense as to what does and doesn't fit. And you can create tags in advance too, if you're looking for certain things and you can see where the match is and you can curate and collate those tags that auto generates and then figure out if you want to use them or not. And I think the ultimate thing down the road, Brett, just the client side of things, the beauty in AI for them is going to be there will be an auto-reporting function at some point in time. Kelli mentioned it earlier, and I remember a CRC conference insights association in Chicago maybe like five years ago, where somebody from Burke and the client-side person were talking about AI at that point in time, and they said, this thing is in its infancy and it is in its infancy, and you're going to see a lot of players. ChatGPT has gotten all the noise right now, but there's a lot of other sophisticated players that are not ChatGPT. So there's a lot of tools in play and we'll see how all that stuff shakes out. So for anyone to attach themselves to one technology right now, we think is a little bit impulsive. It seems like, yeah, ChatGPT's got all the buzz, but again, all the big players out there already have AI tools that are usable by technical companies or technology companies like ourselves to indulge in. So we're using a smattering, a little bit of a witches brew of different AI tools.

Brett Watkins: Yeah, it's important for people to know out there. And [INAUDIBLE] specifically I would expand on a little bit, is that a lot of the artificial intelligence tools come back to their four or five major houses, and

Amazon, Azure is one of the big libraries. Google is one of the big libraries. Meta is one of the big libraries that are these tools and these software developers then build off of that and other technology platforms that I know out there you could go from what I know that some people are already experimenting today with AI as far as at the recruitment level for actually the actual recruitment process be automated in that front to tools like Remesh that are doing the actual moderating, talking to hundreds of people at a time and doing AI-assisted work in that, to your point, companies that are now taking what I consider to be the analytics and going further and companies like Gavel that are actually generating out reports, right? So as you said, there's a lot of companies out there, they're playing with these different libraries may have in their embassy stages for sure, as you mentioned. But I'm certainly one person who believes that this is just getting started and things are going to get very interesting very quickly. To Paul's point, not replacing what I consider to be more thought-leading sections, but a lot of the, especially some of more junior analytic work that we used to. I can remember back many years ago in my day of reviewing open-ended comments in surveys and stick counting and encoding, things of that nature. Some of that is obviously already well underway. And now the AI is taking it to next levels of recommending concepts, right? Well, here's the words and now I'm putting concepts in you said tags, things that you all are doing with it as well. I think this whole universe piece is just getting started.

Paula Kramer: And I would say anything with the whole approach to AI and the way that we've sort of taken this on at AHA is similar to the entire conversation that we've had today. That the best thing that you can do is to find ways to make your processes and your approach to these things super clear, concise, you're very transparent and straightforward about how things are being used, but then there's also the application of processes, making sure that they're done very intentionally. And so that's how we're looking at AI that again, this is not going to be the thing that replaces market researchers by any means, at least at this point in time. But if there's anything that we can do, Kelli, to your point earlier, to make life a little easier for researchers, because we know we've been there, all four of us on this call have been in research for a long time, and we understand that qualitative can be a heavy lift. Anything that we can do to alleviate that burden in some way, shape, or form, we're going to continue to explore that process and apply it accordingly. Not to replace anyone, but to help ease the load.

Brett Watkins: Yeah. But I will say that one of the things that I think is exciting about this, and for all of us that is immersed in qualitative is, people forget

quantitative was a really crude instrument to try to measure people in a manner that basically could be easily reported. And now we are seeing these tools that allow us to have these really unstructured data sets and aggregate information more accurately than they ever could prior. So that is one of the areas that I think I'm really most excited with, which is asking people surveys and so on, as has already always had a certain artificial element of forced issue element where we using the right words, did the person on the other end really understand? Being able now to ask them in your own words, right? And share those experiences really I think opens up the door tremendously. And I think is why so many people now are seeing such a resurgence and qualitative and these tools that are enabling, I think that to fit in within client's budgets. We've got another question from Michelle Finzel. She asks, is it possible to, or have you ever pivoted a long-term community into a reliable panel as well? Do you recommend doing so? Thoughts?

Ray Fischer: I'll grab that. Yeah, that happens all the time. I mean, and I think if I'm reading that correctly, it's like, Michelle, you might be asking like, did somebody decide to do like a year-long panel and convert it into a reliable panel down the road? And we do that all the time. We've got one fast food client that started with this four years ago, and they started out with, let's do a quarter, and then it became a year, and then they curate it, they refresh it every year. And let's say, I think they have 600 in their panel, Paula, does that sound right?

Paula Kramer: Yep, that's right.

Ray Fischer: So they got 600 people in their panel and every year they'll flush out maybe 100 disappear and 100 just get bounced because they weren't great respondents and then they're refreshed. So they get it back up to that 600 number. So they, they've refined it and made it better year to year, and they've used a lot of best practice stuff that we shared with them to do it and developed their own stuff too. But the cool thing about that is that it was a consumer panel all around some of their people in their member community or people that signed up for their email blasts and whatnot, and they converted that into a panel varying inexpensively. But then they launched an employee panel, so they've got these two sides of the coin. So they've got the user base, the consumer of their product, and then they've got the people that provide the product to that consumer. So they have two separate panels and they do the same thing, 600 people in each and they do a refresh every year. And we've never really had to do it any shorter than that. Part of that too is best practice stuff, there has- to be touchpoints. Even if nothing's happening, you just got to communicate to them so they know they're in a panel and it's cool and the people that are running the

panel like them and they do get incented. So those are all super important things. But yeah, Michelle, we've definitely seen lots of cases where shorter-term things have evolved into longer-term, permanent, but refreshed panels, there's always a need to refresh.

Paula Kramer: As long as people are made to feel important and are compensated appropriately, many times they're firmly happy to sign up for a continued engagement.

Ray Fischer: Right on.

Brett Watkins: Yeah. And I'm glad you mentioned that, Paula, because one of the things, and this is true for employee research that goes back decades and years, compensation was always important, but it was a separate sidebar issue over here that this is like table sticks, right? I have to feel like I'm being fairly compensated. Now, here's what's really important to me. And I feel that in consumer research, patient research, any research obviously typically involves humans, of course. It all is the same, which is that compensation is important, but more important is this something that speaks to me. Am I being engaged? Am I being treated fairly? Do I feel like this is a mutually beneficial situation? Ray, I love the example you gave of fast-food research doing because it enabled both the consumer as well as the employee to see each or for the employee to see with the consumer research and engage at it at some level to, OK, problem solved, really seeing that it's straight from the consumer. This isn't something made up from management that we need to do this. Why is that important? Well, I get to see now, these are actually my customers and these are things that they're saying are important to me and why they're important. And in many cases, as we are all enforced through the trees, we can all fall prey to just missing that because we're so knee-deep in it.

Paula Kramer: And that's that communication aspect that we've been talking about, about communication and transparency. Engaging with these folks on a regular basis oftentimes to Michelle's point, we'll have like a community manager, someone who is responsible for engaging with these folks on a regular basis. Because a, having one person who is the clear point of contact, hey, if I have a question, this is the person I go to. I have a face. I know that this human being is invested in what I'm saying. I have a point person to go to, it's not just an empty help desk. I can't put a face to the name. And then also this person reaches out to me regularly just to say, hey, we don't have anything going on this month, but you're doing a great job. We're glad you're here. Thank you for everything

that you've shared with us. Here's when you expect the next activity. That communication, that transparency keeps them coming back.

Kelli Hammock: And I actually want to throw a quick shout-out to Ray and Paula because the reason that we love working with AHA so much is you guys have excellent customer service. You have excellent customer service that we can share with our clients, and excellent customer service as it relates to the recruits. That's not something you get with a lot of tech platforms. Some tech platforms like to send you to watch a video or send you to a how to instructible, but I know that if my client were having an issue, or I'm sorry, L&E's client were having an issue with the project, they could pick up the phone and call Ray or Paula and you would be able to talk to them and walk them through it, rather than them having some website run around tech problems for a few days, which is a few wasted days. So you guys are fast and you're very responsive. So big props to you guys.

Ray Fischer: We all see our support tickets. I mean, honestly, from day one, I've always said, I want to see every support ticket that comes in. I don't [CROSSTALK].

Paula Kramer: And he does, and he inspects them.

Ray Fischer: The project team- No, I do. Every week we have our team meeting and I have a couple I want to know about, like what happened there, what was going on with that, how did we resolve it? So while the PM team, Paula's team will deal with all those tickets independently, we both look at them just to make sure nothing's off. I can read something after 10 years, really, 17 years of doing online, I can read a support ticket and know if it's a user error or if it's our problem. And we want to take care of both of those, of course.

Brett Watkins: Well, everyone, I should have asked this question out there to our audience but would love if you would take Josh's quick poll and just give us a quick 1-10 score. How did we do and was it helpful to you and in your journey and career, obviously in this industry and understanding online bulletin boards according to the leading poll of what people's answers were most. But obviously an evolving area of research in terms of the technology and what's enabling to do us or for us to do in terms of the industry. Really great stuff and love to see how the industry's evolving. And I think really taking a more agile iterative approach that's enabling clients to, as you mentioned before, Ray and Paula, to really tap into the consumers live at a deeper level, having a more engaging conversation and really enable the brand

leaders that are out there today watching to be able to focus, like you said, on what they do best, which is trying to understand the consumer need and how do they address that with future product and our service development. So all of you, thank you so much for the time. We said we'd keep this in an hour. Want to hold true to our words to all of you as well as our audience out there. Thank you, Ray. Thank you, Paula. Thank you, Kelli. To everyone out there again, we thank Focus Forward, our transcription partner, which has been kind enough to volunteer to do this. We'll be sending out that transcript. As I said, Kelli will also be sending some part of our market communication, basically summary of our webinar and what we heard today. And then finally for those of you out there who have colleagues who wanted to tune in today but we're unable, this webinar will also be posted on our website, leresearch.com, and where you can find our on-demand webinars. So thank you all again, this has been great, and look forward to seeing everybody out there, hopefully for our next webinar coming up. I believe this fall, right, Kelli?

Kelli Hammock: That's correct.

Brett Watkins: More details on that soon to come. So take care, everyone. Look forward to seeing you again soon.

Paula Kramer: Thank you.

Ray Fischer: Take care, buddy. Bye-bye.