

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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HOW TO DEVELOP 1001 CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

No marketer would dispute the importance of discovering customer insights. Customer insights are essential to developing successful new products, strategically competitive positioning strategies and leadership communication campaigns to *create brand loyalty*. But customer insights are elusive. They are buried deep in the collective subconscious of the target customer segment. It takes special training and skill to unearth, discover and effectively employ them in winning-over these customers. Unfortunately many marketers and their organizations do not know how to go about discovering customer insights.

The typical approach is to go in search of *a* big insight with emphasis on the “a” as in “one.” Marketing research models would have marketing managers pour over and sift through the same data that is held by competitors in the hope of finding a rare nugget of gold only to be dazzled by fool’s gold - some meaningless fact. Others hope an insight will miraculously appear but, as we know, chance favors the prepared and hoping is an inadequate form of preparation. Praying is an unrealistic option too. With all the suffering in this world who would think that some higher order spiritual being would listen to a prayer for an insight into how we can connect with customers to sell more of our own products? And a blockbuster insight is as unlikely to fall out of the sky as one of our friends says a rock will fall out of a cloud.

The way to start in discovering customer insights is to go in search of a plethora of possible “legitimate” and “productive” insights. We need to diverge well before we converge on that one big insight, which typically turns out to be nothing more than a rationalization for what we think we know. The name of the game in many sports is “shots on goal.” The more shots we take the more opportunity we have to score. It is no different with the discovery of customer insights. We need to develop 1001 potential customer insights if we are to discover a *really* big insight which will have a *really* big impact on delivering *really* meaningful results regardless of whether it is for a new product, positioning or campaign development. Here’s how we can go about developing 1001 potential customer insights for our brands:

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

- 1. Basis for Insight** - Start by exploring each of the three sources for “legitimate” customer insights: *perceived or real weakness of competition; attitudinal barrier to overcome regarding your brand or the category; and untapped compelling belief*. Dig deep into your target customers’ subconscious mind to unearth a potential insight. Don’t settle for digging in just one source area. Explore each one, thoroughly. Also, dig, dig, dig for as many potential insights *as your mind can imagine*. This is a creative pursuit. Try to set a minimum of say 5 potential insights for each source area.

- 2. Strategic Elements** – Forget focusing on executional insights – how we do something. That’s the role of your support team members such as advertising agency creative personnel, promotion development specialists or product development managers among others. This isn’t to say that executional insights aren’t important. They’re critically important. It’s just that they are not what we marketers do. They fall outside our area of expertise and specialty. Moreover, executional insights are nothing without an appropriate strategic insight. It’s our job to discover the strategic insight. As per executional insights, it is our job to recognize them when they are shared with us and, if appropriate, add value to their development to fully capitalize on the potential of the insight and, subsequently, the brand.

Each element of the brand positioning provides an opportunity for strategic insight discovery and gaining an advantage versus competition in motivating customer preference. Our search needs to include but *go beyond the benefit element*. The insight discovery search should cover target segment identification and selection, target needs, competitive framework (particularly perceptual competitive framework), benefit (of course), reason-why support to believe the benefit and, even, brand character. There are six elements in all. Like with the Basis for Insight we should set a goal of identifying “X” (such as 5) potential insights for each element of the brand positioning.

- 3. Approach to Insights** – This is about our way of gaining access to insights within each of the sources of customer insights and strategic elements of positioning discussed in points #1 and 2. It’s about our entry into their discovery. We must certainly approach insights from the perspective of the customer whether it be the consumer, health care professional, patient, authority, gatekeeper – whomever is deemed important to our task of gaining insights that will lead to creating brand loyalty. But there are other approaches to discovering insights. Here are some of the most fruitful:

- ***Product/Brand Investigation*** - One approach we should not ignore is our product and what it can deliver. Another is the brand itself, which gives us even more than the product to work with (since it represents a bundle of values) in our search for insights. The key is to relate the product and brand back to our chosen customer target in both the absolute and relative to competition.
- ***Competitive Analysis*** - Then there are our competitors to consider, current and future. Identify where they play, where they don’t and where they might possibly play.
- ***Company Capabilities*** - How about exploring for insights within the context of our company capabilities? What do we, as a company, do really well? What competencies can we capitalize upon to tap into customer needs and or values that have been either overlooked or better than competition?
- ***Intuition/Experiences*** - And, we should not ignore our intuition and experiences. Get crazy. Dare to hypothesize. Our Tree Model tool is particularly effective in generating and capturing hypotheses.

- 4. Playing the Angles** – While approaches get at entry points *playing the angles* refers to different positions, or ways, of looking at a given point. For example, in a case study product we worked with in conducting two *Discovering Customer Insight* programs in Singapore this past week, one of the key product differences participants identified is that

this new pain relief product triggers the release of the body’s natural endorphins. The perceived benefit of this is that it helps to “overcome depression.” Playing the angles here are some alternatives we were able to generate:

- Boosts mood
- Gives the patient hope
- Helps the body heal from pain
- Enables total pain management – physical and emotional
- Enables a better quality of life
- Encourages better patient compliance
- Restores a feeling of normalcy
- Enables the physician to maintain treatment control (as opposed to needing to refer the patient to another specialty for treatment of pain related depression)
- Avoid the use of, and potential for dependency from, opioids

Including the first angle, overcome depression, there are a total of 10 responses or nuggets from which to extract insights. Let’s be clear. Not all of these will be supportable. That’s not the point! The point is to expand the imagination and go beyond the first expected answer (which is obvious and therefore common) to take more shots on goal in preparing or setting-up oneself to discovering a truly meaningful customer insight for the selected target customer segment.

5. Brainstorm for Insights – The key is to identify as many potential customer insights as possible. Thus we encourage each member of the team to refrain from judging until judgment time becomes appropriate. And, it is not appropriate to judge while participants are attempting to ideate. Nothing will cause the creative pump to seize faster than premature judgment. There will be time for winnowing down the potential insights using the Customer Insight Litmus Tool and any other criteria you deem important. The few that you select can be captured and assessed with customers through marketing research. And, finally, you might want to conduct an adaptive experiment in the market to confirm, reaffirm and/or adapt to optimize the productivity of the strategic insight and its execution. But first develop 1001 customer insights.

If we have done the minimum here’s what we will generate in terms of potential customer insights:

Basis For Insight	Strategic Element	Approach	Angle
1. Perceived or real weakness of competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target Segment • Target Need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer • Product/Brand Investigation 	10 (Taken from point #4)
2. Attitudinal barrier to overcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive Framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive Analysis 	
3. Untapped compelling belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit • Reason-Why • Brand Character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company Capabilities • Intuition/ Experience 	

Assuming we are able to “do” for each of the “basis for insight” areas we would have 3 x 6 (Strategic Elements) x 5 (Approaches) x 10 (Angles) for a total of 900 potential customer insights. Okay, it is not exactly 1001 but it is a hell of a lot more than we typically pursue. (We thought about computing the number of permutations but were not sure that the concept is relevant here and even if it is relevant we no longer know how to compute it. If it were relevant, however, the number would be huge. We know that much.) And, sure, as stated previously, not every one of these is going to be the key to success but each represents another shot at scoring big with customer insights!

Now, take your shots at discovering legitimate and productive customer insights.

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