

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, December 13, 2009

THE TOP 10 MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT INSIGHTS

Over the course of our rather long and multi-category careers, working with brand-builders both as consultants and teachers, you can imagine that we have been asked many questions...about fundamental marketing concepts such as Brand Positioning, Marketing Strategy, and (always) Consumer Insights. Invariably, these questions call for an opinion-response, as opposed to a factual one. Because the subject of Consumer (or, for drug and medical marketers, Customer) Insights remains such a hot topic, we thought we would end this year's *Dispatches* series with a compilation of the questions about insights that we have been asked time and again. And, although we admit our answers are opinions, we also cannot resist saying that our opinions follow from the many experiences we have had as brand-builders ourselves.

Q1. "What's an Insight (really)?"

- A. There are just about as many definitions of an insight as there are marketers you ask for one. And, in truth, we have continually tinkered with our own definition of what makes for an insight. But, if pressed for a sure-fire simple answer, we would offer this one: *"An Insight is the **discovery** of a previously unknown, overlooked, or under-appreciated **attitude & behavior** of the Brand's Target Group...which, when exploited, leads to a real or perceived advantage for the Brand."* Accordingly, whenever we are asked to review or to articulate an insight, we always seek the attitude and behavior that has been "discovered."

Q2. "How do I improve my odds of 'discovering' one (or more)?"

- A. The best way to accumulate a number of potential insights is by consciously implementing an on-going Insights Discovery Process. Practically speaking, this means assembling a multi-functional team (Market Research, R&D, Sales, Agencies) that will regularly review the latest consumer/customer data and verbatims, identify hypothetical insights, and set methods for confirming their hypotheses. It also means conducting a number of different research techniques—from quantitative studies to qualitative interviews, social media interactions, and ethnographic observations—as an on-going effort. As such, an Insights Discovery Process is the opposite of many marketers' usual (non-productive) approach: scrambling at the 11th hour to find a much-needed insight via two or three focus groups.

Q3. “When should I be looking ahead—for potential new insights?”

A. Constantly. Always. Non-stop.

Q4. “What’s the biggest barrier—besides poor or minimal effort research-- to getting good insights?”

A. This is an easy one. Without a doubt, the most common reason why brand teams fail to find good, productive insights is that they do not really know the Target Group. They settle for broad, virtually nondescript Targets of “Moms, 25+ with kids.” And that’s the extent of what they know, which is to say they know next to nothing about which segment of the Target represent the most likely prospects for the Brand, what their psychographic profile is like, what their driving attitudes are, and what dissatisfactions they may be experiencing with the category or the Brand. No team should embark upon an Insights Discovery Process without first assembling a *Strategic Target* (including: Demographics, Psychographics, Driving Attitudes, Current Usage/Non-Usage and Dissatisfactions, Telling Behaviors, and Rational/Emotional Needs).

Q5. “How do you know if you have an insight that might work for the Brand?”

A. We like to assess any hypothetical insight against two dimensions for potential: *Legitimacy* and *Productivity*. In our books, an insight is only *legitimate* (as in, it’s actually an insight) if it falls into one of three classifications: (1) it expresses a real or perceived weakness of competition; (2) it expresses a barrier to overcome regarding the Brand; and (3) it expresses an untapped, compelling consumer/customer belief about the category. Once we have a legitimate insight by virtue of its falling into one of these classic classifications, we then must determine if it’s an insight our brand can exploit—through a real or perceived advantage that leads to the behavior we seek (our Marketing Objective). Of course, satisfying even these two dimensions will not guarantee the success of an insight; it also helps to conduct some research with the Target to gauge an insight’s true potential.

Q6. “What’s the role of an insight in the brand’s positioning?”

A. Honestly, if you’re talking about the positioning of an established brand, we have no idea. From time to time one of our clients will insist upon including “the insight” as an element of the brand’s positioning—along with the other essential elements like Target, Competitive Framework, Benefit and so on. But then, when you examine what they are calling the positioning insight, you invariably see nothing more than an expression of the primary *need* that led to the original development of the product. And needs are a part of the Target. So, we are often baffled by the inclusion of an insight in a brand positioning statement. For brand new brands, an

insight element might make some sense. But by and large, the positioning insights we have seen don't bring much to the party.

Q7. “What’s the role of an insight in the Creative Brief (for communication development)?”

- A. There is only one reason why an insight is a part of any Creative Brief, and it's an important one: to facilitate the creative teams' efforts in coming up with potential, compelling Big Ideas...ways to connect with, to motivate, to change the dialogue with, to hit a nerve with the Target. No insight (or no *legitimate* insight) in the brief? Expect no or very weak ideas.

Q8. “In most Creative Briefs what do you see under the ‘Insight’ label?”

- A. What we see in Creative Briefs, probably 75% of the time or more, are not Insights at all but rather one or more of the following: Need-Statements (“*I want a way to remove deep blackheads.*”); Facts (“*45% of consumers say they would like to try a color contact lens for cosmetic reasons.*”); or an Accepted Consumer Belief—something that years ago was probably a legitimate insight but is so well-exploited and known as to no longer be useful (“*When you want to quit smoking everyone treats you like an outcast.*”). These kinds of consumer thoughts are often confused with, but are definitely not, Insights...and they almost never help creative teams in generating compelling Ideas!

Q9. “What’s the best way to articulate or express an insight?”

- A. There are a number of ways that we like to write or say an insight. But the one format we have found most helpful time and again includes 3 parts: The Classification (making it legitimate), The Insight in Consumer/Customer Language, and the Brand Point-of-Difference (typically the Benefit) that will exploit the Insight.

Q.10 “Are there such things as global insights?”

- A. Yes, there are. But like global anythings, they are pretty rare. The MasterCard “Priceless” Campaign is generally thought to be built upon a global insight about what really matters in life. The previous Dove “Campaign for Real Beauty” is also regarded as having had a global insight about how women the world over increasingly resented the “Hollywood/Model” perspective of what beauty was supposed to be. But finding a highly motivating global insight usually requires even a more intensive and disciplined Insight Discovery Process than does finding a single market insight.

Maybe you have some questions about insights that you didn't see here. If so, and you would like our take on any question, feel free to send it on to us. And also feel free to inquire about our popular *Discovering Customer Insights* workshop!

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