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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025
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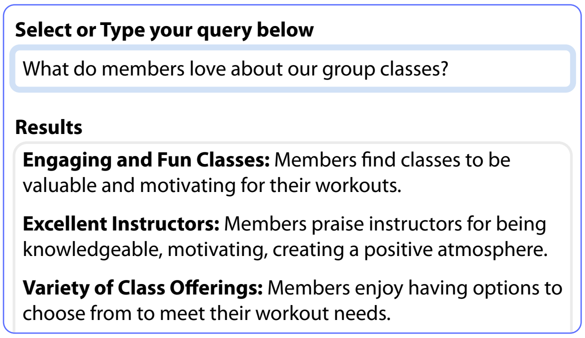

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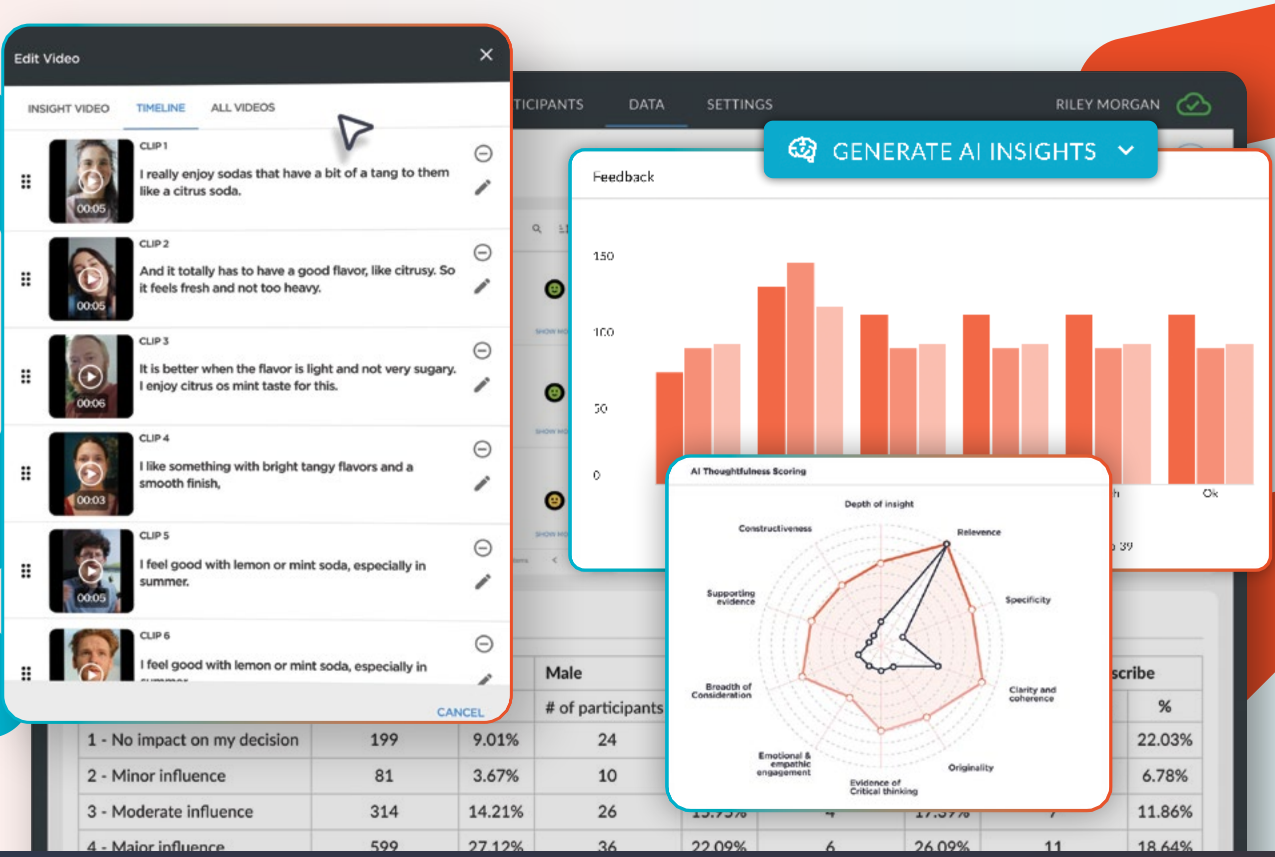
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Supporting evidence
Constructiveness
Male
# of participants
%

CLIP 1
I really enjoy sodas that have a bit of a tang to them like a citrus soda.

CLIP 2
And it totally has to have a good flavor, like citrusy. So it feels fresh and not too heavy.

CLIP 3
It is better when the flavor is light and not very sugary. I enjoy citrus os mint taste for this.

CLIP 4
I like something with bright tangy flavors and a smooth finish,

CLIP 5
I feel good with lemon or mint soda, especially in summer.

CLIP 6
I feel good with lemon or mint soda, especially in

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CONTENTS

ON THE COVER

34

Style points
How to create a research project style guide
By Nancy Cox

FEATURES

40

A healthy dialogue
Strategies for improving the quality and impact of doctor-patient conversations
By Tom Donnelly, Vincent Valant, Barbara Haimowitz, Derek McCracken, Sara Bell, Julie Leonard and Peter Simpson

48

Respondents aren't disposable – and they know it
Repairing the research relationship with health care providers
By Jason Freeman

52

Put data quality at the core
Building resilient research marketplaces through trust and safety
By James Snyder

56

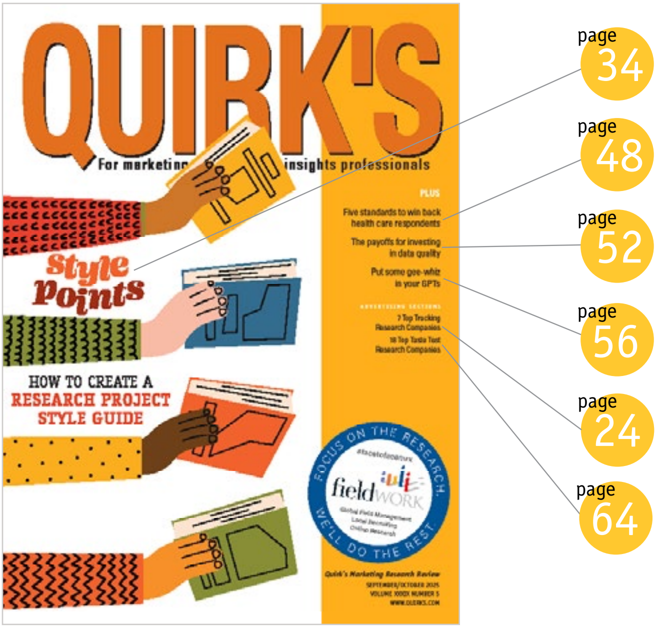
Avoid the AI echo chamber
Turning generic GPTs into game-changing innovation
By Eric Tayce

60

The evolution of the insights professional
Equipping you and your organization for what's next
By Niels Neudecker

CONTENTS

Quirk's Marketing Research Review
September/October 2025 • Vol. XXXIX No. 5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18 Top Taste Test Research Companies
FOCUS ON THE RESEARCH. WE'LL DO THE REST.
fieldwork
page 34
page 48
page 52
page 56
page 24
page 64

COLUMNS

10 Trade Talk
Different customers, different needs, one brand
By Joseph Rydholm

28 Data Use
A more comprehensive analysis of importance: The necessity and sufficiency attribute importance index
By Michael Garver

DEPARTMENTS

6 Click With Quirk's

8 In Case You Missed It...

12 Research Company Profiles

18 Survey Monitor

24 7 Top Tracking Research Companies

64 18 Top Taste-Test Research Companies

70 Quirk's Time Capsule

72 Calendar of Events

74 Index of Advertisers

76 Before You Go...

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4662 Slater Road | Eagan, MN 55122
651-379-6200 | www.quirks.com

Publisher • Steve Quirk
steve@quirks.com | x202

Editor • Joseph Rydholm
joe@quirks.com | x204

Editor • Emily Koenig
emilyk@quirks.com | x210

News and Content Editor • Marlen Ramirez
marlen@quirks.com | x212

Audience Development • Ralene Miller
ralene@quirks.com | x201

Magazine Production • Sarah Freske
sarah@quirks.com | x216

Directory Sales • Ilana Benusa
ilana@quirks.com | x213

V.P. Sales • Evan Tweed
evan@quirks.com | x205

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FOCUS ROOM POWERED BY FUEL

As we continue to gather in-person at industry events, I think about the idea generation that happens just in our casual moments together. A lot of value comes from in-person research, including the collaboration behind the mirror. Watching consumers almost always leads to great ideas.

Merrill Dubrow, CEO of M/A/R/C Research

Clients and respondents are relishing being back in person. We have been thrilled to help researchers get close to the customer in a rich environment that facilitates high engagement, instinctive responses, product interaction, visual cues, and ease of conversation flow.

Steve Schlesinger, Executive Chairman of SAGO

I'm thrilled when I receive positive feedback from our clients regarding successful in-person research. If there was ever a time to directly explore how your brand is received by your audience, it is now.

Sarah Kotva, Executive Vice President of Fieldwork

The variety and nature of in person research covers all industry sectors with healthcare, medical UX and automotive along with consumer product testing being particularly strong. The viewing back room is pleasingly vibrant with corporate clients hugely enthused with immersion in person research allows.

Bob Qureshi, Managing Partner of iView London

In-person research, by far, is an effective, relevant, diverse and inclusive way of getting that deeper level of understanding of how we, as humans, are evolving.

Roben Allong, President of QRCA

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Online research methods will never replace the experience of immersing yourself in a culture or city. The benefits of in-person research start well before any interviews begin; realized by the delivery of rich insights by humans through the nuances of language and movement that are infinitely more challenging to capture digitally. As brands continue to navigate global unknowns, in-person methods remain fundamental to our success as storytellers and data translators and will continue to deliver key insights for better business outcomes.

Kristin Luck, President of ESOMAR

As research teams emerge … they need to know how and why consumer opinions, habits and preferences have changed. In-person research has always played a critical role in developing deep understanding of people and change.

Melanie Courtright, CEO of Insights Association

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Join fellow researchers from the comfort of your home or office on November 18-19 for Quirk's Event – Virtual Global! Attendees will gain insights on a range of topics during sessions presented by industry experts. This year the 2025 Marketing Research and Insight Excellence Awards celebration will take place on day two of the virtual event! Watch live as the best in the industry are recognized for their contributions. Register now at TheQuirksEvent.com/Virtual-Global-2025.

Save the dates for the 2026 Quirk's Events

The Quirk's Event is looking forward to 2026! Quirk's will mosey on down to Dallas in March for the 2026 Quirk's Event kickoff before heading to our flagship locations. While a new year might bring change, one thing will always stay the same – Quirk's will provide four insightful and fun events for researchers!

Save the dates:

- Dallas: March 10-11
- Chicago: April 15-16
- London: May 6-7
- New York: July 29-30

// E-newsworthy

What makes a survey irresistible? The psychology of engagement

Can AI turn customer surveys into meaningful conversations?

The GLP-1 effect: Rethinking demand spaces is no longer optional

Tips for bringing pricing intelligence into the modern era

Work and Play: World travel and immersion

Old way vs. new way – how the hiring process has evolved

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// Noted Posts

Quirk's Blog

Leading with insight: Mentorship and the future of marketing research
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Inclusive approach to transport safety: How one agency was able to make an impact on the safety of autonomous vehicles
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International research firm prioritizes a unified, blended team
https://bit.ly/45oTWYq

Research Industry Voices

Session roundup: Focusing on present, the value crisis and changes to market research
https://bit.ly/4fpvI5f

AI and the future of multicultural market segmentation
https://bit.ly/45n3q6x

The future of screener writing in the marketing research industry
https://bit.ly/40VzX2t

Research Careers Blog

Looking back after retiring
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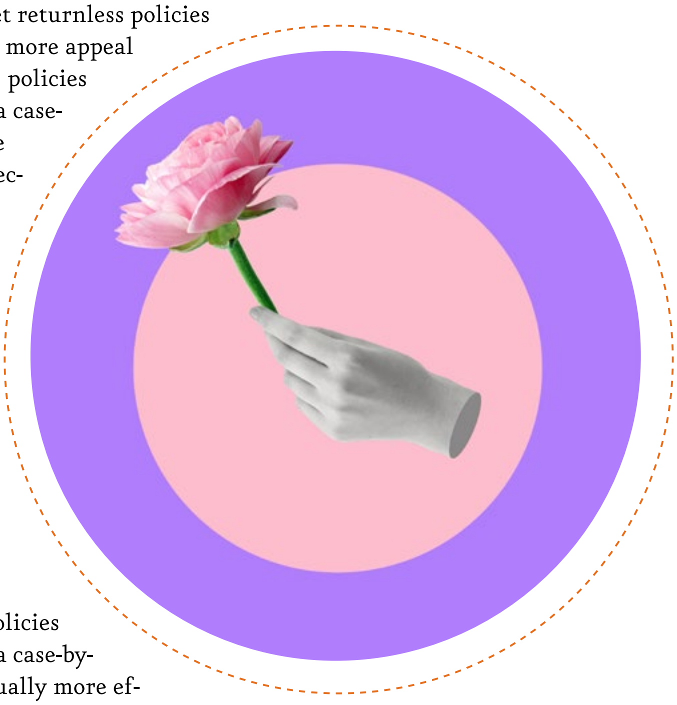
Retailers reap goodwill from returnless returns

As some online retailers explore instituting returnless return strategies, a recent study shows that they can pay off in the form of increased loyalty and good feelings toward the brand.

Outlined in the Journal of Marketing Research article, "Just keep it: When and why returnless product returns foster brand support," study authors found that while blanket returnless policies may seem to hold more appeal for the consumer, policies implemented on a case-by-case basis were actually more effective – thanks to the interaction they require.



"Drawing from our theory that offering returnless product returns boosts brand support because they increase brand warmth, we find that returnless policies implemented on a case-by-case basis are actually more effective for a couple of reasons," says co-author John Costello, assistant professor of marketing at Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business. "The consumer feels they are getting special treatment. Also, because they are getting human interaction rather than an automatic e-mail, the customer feels additional warmth toward the brand. So, increasing the level of 'humanness' in digital interactions has proven beneficial."

Suggesting that customers donate the kept product also boosts perceived brand warmth and support, as does providing reasons that articulate the brand's desire to put the customer first in its product return processes.

••• food research

Price powers acceptance of plant-based meat

A study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, "Substitution patterns and price response for plant-based meat alternatives," found that the price of meat alternatives is the most decisive factor for their acceptance, while similarity to meat did not matter that much.

In experiments with 2,100 U.S. consumers, the researchers found that when meat and non-meat options are priced at parity, price has little influence on choice but when meat substitutes were significantly less expensive than their animal counterparts, they observed a noticeable change in consumer behavior. Lowering the price of the analogue burger by 10%, for example, led to an expected 14% increase in sales. If the alternatives were about half of the price of the meat burger, the number of people opting for a plant-based alternative would double.

Interestingly, even though men are the more dedicated meat eaters, the online survey found that an attractive price makes them more willing than women to change their behavior. Even those who had never tried a meat substitute before would opt for it if they could benefit from a price advantage.

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Trade Talk

By Joseph Rydholm, Quirk's Editor

Different customers, different needs, one brand

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Joe Rydholm can be reached at joe@quirks.com

For brands, the constant pressure to find new customers no doubt competes with the equally important work of satisfying current ones. But what happens when a new group of users doesn't neatly mesh with the longtime faithful? That's one of the questions driving the new book "The Growth Dilemma: Managing Your Brand When Different Customers Want Different Things" (Harvard Business Review Press).

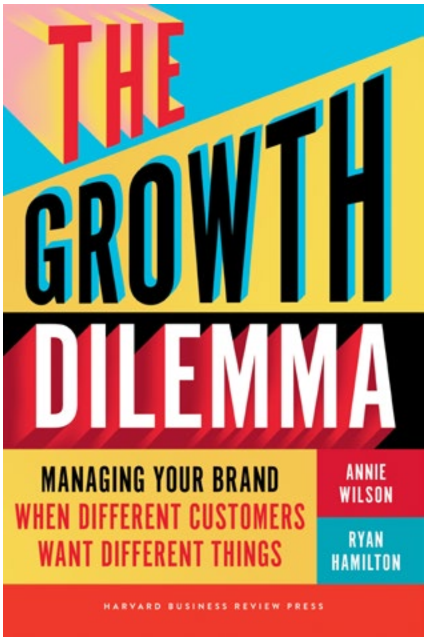
In it, Annie Wilson, a senior lecturer of marketing at the Wharton School of Business, and Ryan Hamilton, an associate professor of marketing at Emory University's Goizueta Business School, explore the idea of segment relationship management – the act of examining and managing how various customer segments "create and destroy value for a brand's users because of how they relate to one another."

A rubric of four customer relationship types – Separate Communities, Connected Communities, Incompatible Segments and Leader-Follower Segments – is used as framework for exploring a host of corporate triumphs and failures at dealing with harmonious and conflicting segments.

For example, Separate Communities – which, as the name implies, are groups who want different things from a brand and are unaffected by the existence of others – are sometimes serendipitous. LEGO, for instance, discovered and then somewhat grudgingly acknowledged the existence of AFOLs (adult fans of LEGO) who love the building bricks as much as kids do. Others spring from more concerted efforts after new groups are identified for targeting, like food and beverage container brand Stanley marketing to on-the-go moms with its bicep-straining Quencher bottles.

There's more to it than just discovering that these groups are out there. You then have to look at how (and if!) they coexist and what that means for your brand and its marketing. Do you gently ignore the differing customer types? Do you playfully play them off of each other? Do you slam them together and hope for the best?

The answers to those questions, as the book so entertainingly explains across myriad examples, are almost never the same from brand to brand. Work-boot maker Timberland was initially unsure how to react when rappers and hip-hop artists started wearing and rapping about its footwear. How would the company's core construction worker segment react to and feel about that? Turns out, the two groups can peacefully coexist and Timberland maintains separate social media accounts for each and also markets and advertises differently to each.



But things don't always go so smoothly and so a main theme here is conflict – what happens when your brand or its customer groups (new or old) or the cultural zeitgeist are suddenly at odds? Some of the book's most useful portions are about avoiding and escaping conflict and one key is answering questions such as: Where do your brands sit in the relationship rubric? Are you trapped between seemingly disparate user segments? Are you at risk of alienating your core customer in pursuit of a shiny new group of buyers?

The perils of not answering them are illustrated in the book's instructive, if somewhat harrowing, recaps of brand and marketing disasters like Ron Johnson's destruction of JCPenney by disappointing both the bargain-hunting middle-aged women who long formed its core audience and the trendy, label-conscious shoppers whose interest he was desperate to capture.

For researchers, of course, the challenge is figuring out which tools can get the brand the guidance it needs in order to navigate potentially dangerous waters. But as the book shows, if you're able to uncover or foster new customer segments, it doesn't have to matter (and in fact it may be beneficial!) if they are incongruous or incompatible with your existing consumers. A deft approach to marketing and advertising – hopefully fueled by data and insights – can make two dissonant notes come together to make beautiful music.

RACE AROUND THE WORLD FOR EDUCATION

MREF Marketing Research Education Foundation

The insights industry joined the Marketing Research Education Foundation (MREF) to race around the world for education. Together, we logged **63,884 miles** and raised **$52,000** to promote educational opportunities for children.

Congratulations to our top finishers!

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1. **Chris Hammack**, *Decision Analyst*, 260 miles
2. **Sarah O'Mara**, *CMB*, 235 miles

Biking:

1. **Cheryl Muldoon**, *Sago*, 1215 miles
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Walking:

1. **Mark Bushey**, *Qlarity Access*, 402 miles
2. **Justin Moyer**, *Olson Research*, 323 miles

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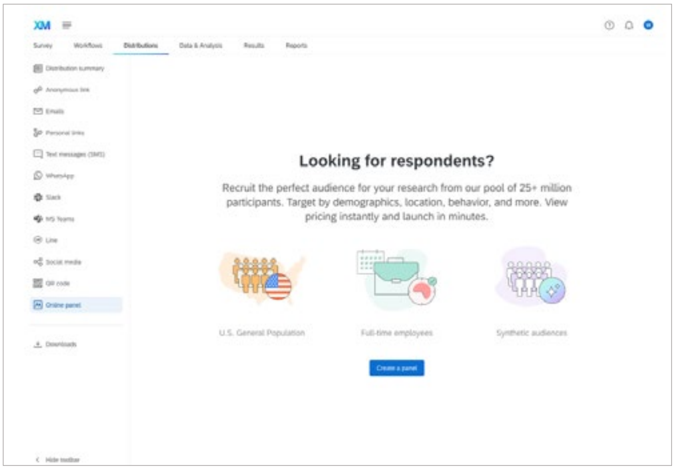
At the heart of this change is AI, which is supercharging research at a scale never seen before. AI enhances prediction accuracy, boosts team efficiency and refines user experience strategies in ways that are faster, smarter and agile. And we see research teams investing in AI capabilities: 83% of researchers plan substantial investment in AI and 71% believe synthetic data will comprise over half of data collection within three years.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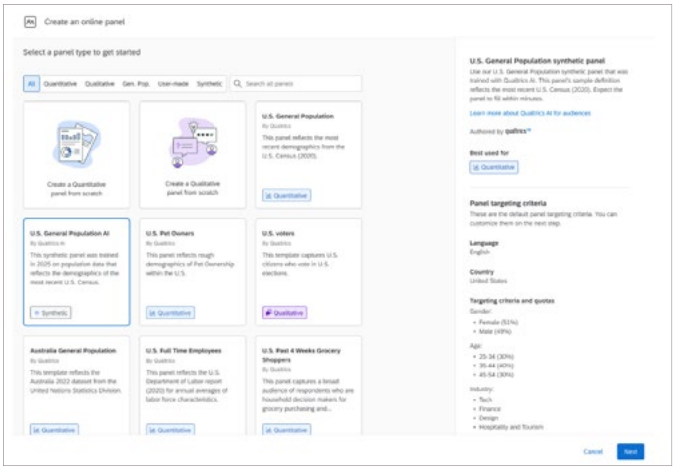
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Qualitative
Gen. Pop.
User-made
Synthetic
Search all panels
Create a Quantitative panel from scratch
Create a Qualitative panel from scratch
Quantitative
Synthetic
Qualitative
Cancel
Next

Select a panel type to get started

U.S. General Population

This panel reflects the most recent demographics from the U.S. Census (2020).

U.S. General Population AI

This synthetic panel was trained in 2025 on population data that reflects the demographics of the most recent U.S. Census.

U.S. Pet Owners

This panel reflects rough demographics of Pet Ownership within the U.S.

U.S. voters

This template captures U.S. citizens who vote in U.S. elections.

Australia General Population

This template reflects the Australia 2022 dataset from the United Nations Statistics Division.

U.S. Full Time Employees

This panel reflects the U.S. Department of Labor report (2020) for annual averages of labor force characteristics.

U.S. Past 4 Weeks Grocery Shoppers

This panel captures a broad audience of respondents who are household decision makers for grocery purchasing and...

U.S. General Population synthetic panel

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Panel targeting criteria

These are the default panel targeting criteria. You can customize them on the next step.

Language: English

Country: United States

Targeting criteria and quotas

Gender:
- Female (51%)
- Male (49%)

Age:
- 25-34 (30%)
- 35-44 (40%)
- 45-54 (30%)

Industry:
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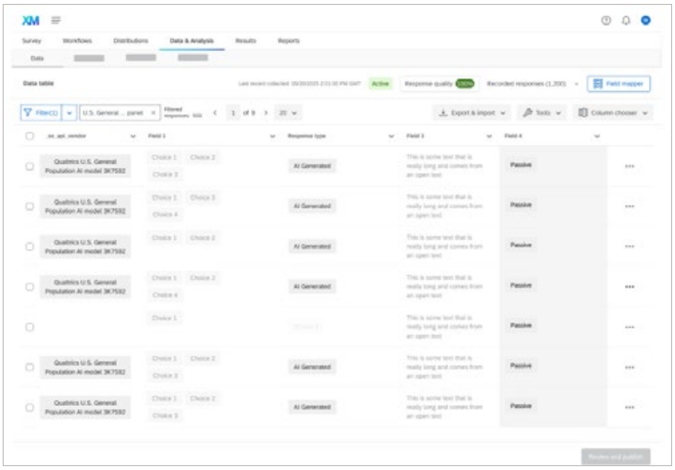
- Design
- Hospitality and Tourism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PROFESSIONAL INSIGHTS COLLABORATIVE

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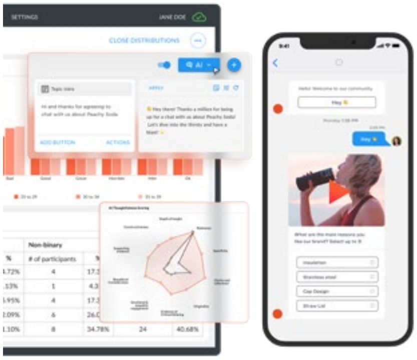

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REACH3

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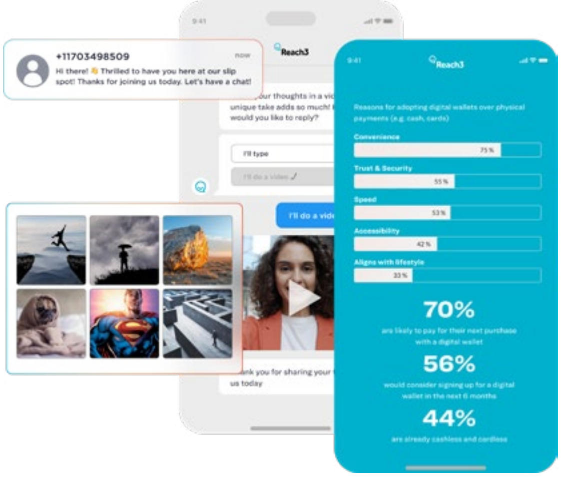

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Reasons for adopting digital wallets over physical payments (e.g. cash, cards)

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Trust & Security 55 %
Speed 53 %
Accessibility 42 %
Aligns with lifestyle 33 %

70%
are likely to pay for their next purchase with a digital wallet

56%
would consider signing up for a digital wallet in the next 6 months

44%
are already cashless and cardless

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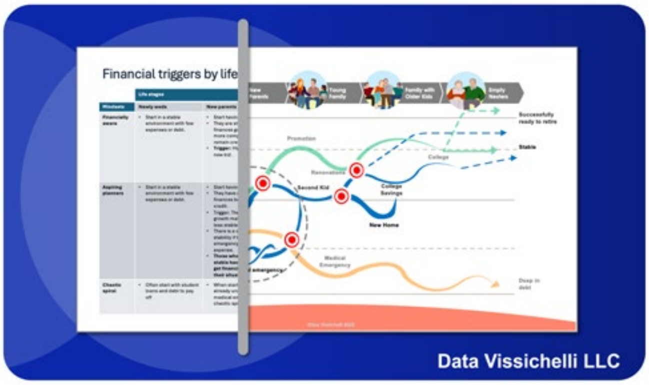

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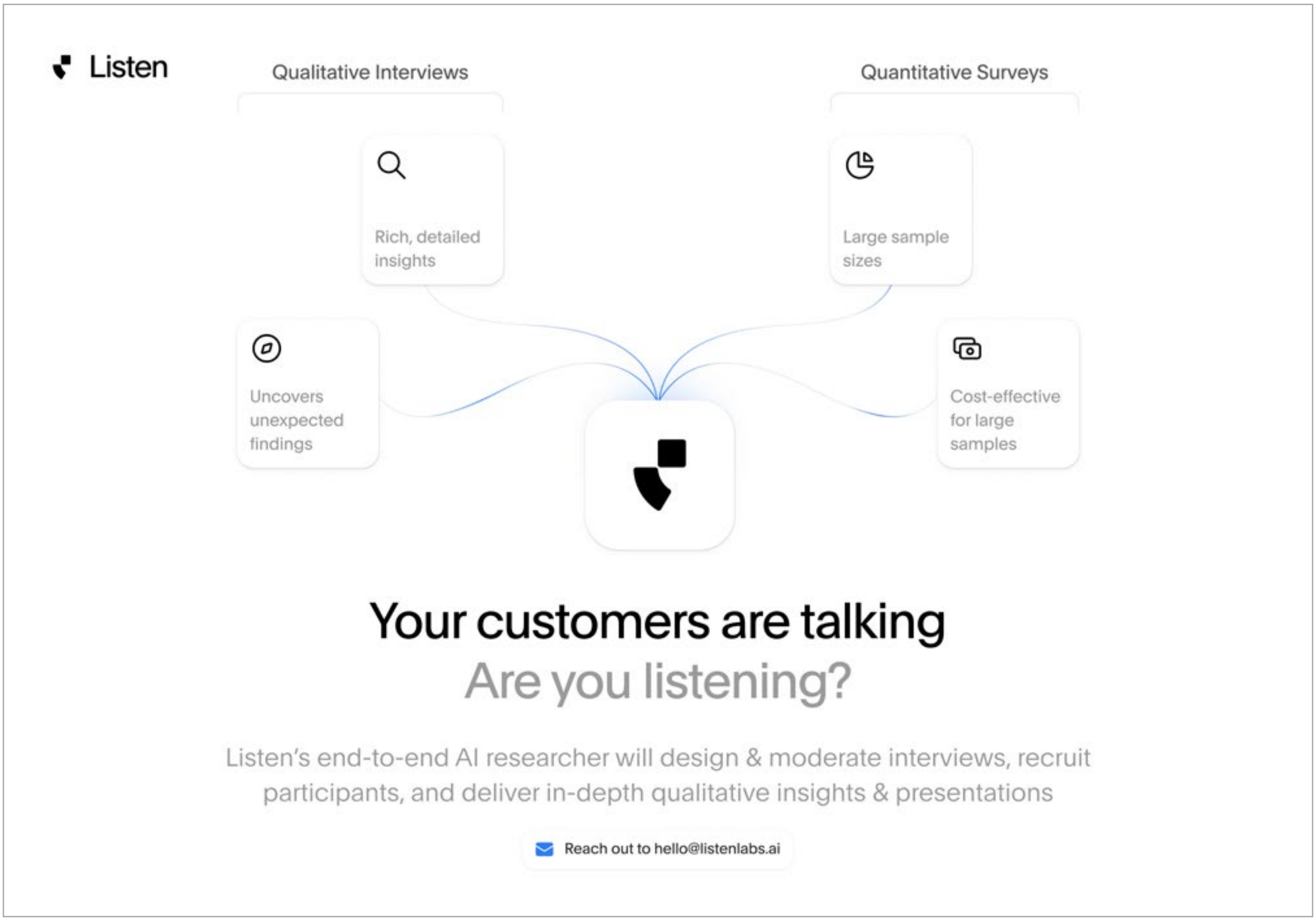

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QUIRK'S IN FOCUS

A digest of survey findings and new insights for researchers

••• shopper insights

Splurging on mini moments

Stressed Europeans indulge in self-care

Despite continuing to be frugal with everyday purchases, European shoppers are splashing out on joy – turning to mood-boosting foods, stress-releasing toys and nourishing beauty products for comfort amid a backdrop of global conflicts, climate concerns and ongoing economic pressures that now shape daily life.

Circana's Eat Play Love report finds that consumers across Europe are prioritizing purchases that give them more control over their lives and offer "mini moments of bliss." As European consumers become more selective about what they buy, they are channeling their money into luxury experiences, products and brands that deliver clear value, meaning or emotional return.

Bite-sized is the new normal as food is snackified: Snacks are no longer just eaten between meals but alongside – and instead of – a traditional breakfast, lunch or dinner. Thirteen percent of Europeans say they eat snacks instead of a main meal and 28% consume them alongside their main meal. Four out of 10 snack products consumed outside the home are now eaten at lunch or dinner. Nearly three-quarters of consumers snack while watching TV or browsing online, with almost half viewing it as a form of self-care. Spend on "snacking meals" is up 5% in food service outlets and up 10% in retail food service (a combined total of €64 billion).

Doggy bags are going mainstream with 20% of European consumers saying they now take leftovers home – citing saving money as the main motivation for requesting a doggy bag. The desire to reduce food waste also plays a role. Twenty percent of restaurant guests see taking leftovers home as an act of sustainability and a further 19% would like to see leftovers donated to charities. Twenty-six percent of consumers prefer environmentally friendly options and 27% are drawn to socially responsible brands.

There has also been a rise in secondhand toys and bargains. Parents are becoming more careful with what – and how much – they buy amid concern about the cost of living and the desire to be less consumerist. While toy sales are down, secondhand buying is on the rise. Fifty-one percent of European consumers say they've purchased "pre-loved" toys last year and the percentage keeps increasing. Many consumers are looking for a bargain when buying toys and online marketplaces like Temu and Shein are booming as a result. Thirty-two percent of European consumers say they bought a toy from a Chinese marketplace at least once during the second half of 2024. For 18-to-34-year-olds, the percentage increases to 58%.

Toys provide stress relief for big kids and little grown-ups. Play is now about emotional release and creative fulfilment, whether it's intricate Lego Botanical sets, Jellycat plushies or Pokémon cards, consumers are spending on toys that bring out their inner child. Toys for ages 12+ now make up 31% of all European toy sales, worth €4.6 billion in sales – double their share from a decade ago.

In the age of "brain rot" and "zombie scrolling," Europeans of all ages are rediscovering board games as an antidote to excessive screen use. Whether it's trading cards, jigsaw puzzles or spending the weekend in a board game cafe, consumers are turning to games for a much-needed opportunity to take a digital detox through play. Sales of card games were up 12% in 2024 and adult games increased by a staggering 22%.

As a confidence booster or a means of relaxation, smelling nice is essential to many consumers' sense of well-being. Sales of fragrances costing €150 or more were up 32% in 2024 to €653 million (compared to +8% growth for total fragrance). The lower end of the market is also doing well as budget-conscious shoppers look for more affordable alternatives as the sales of body sprays doubled in 2024.

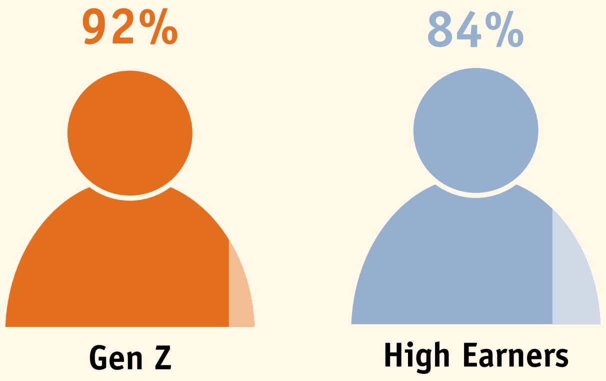
This report draws from Circana's coverage of European food retail, food service, prestige beauty and toys covering sales of consumer goods in categories and SKUs across the U.K., France, Italy, Spain and Germany. Food retail covers six countries with additional data from the Netherlands.

••• brand research

Show me you love me

Gen Z want personalized videos from brands

Consumers want more video from brands

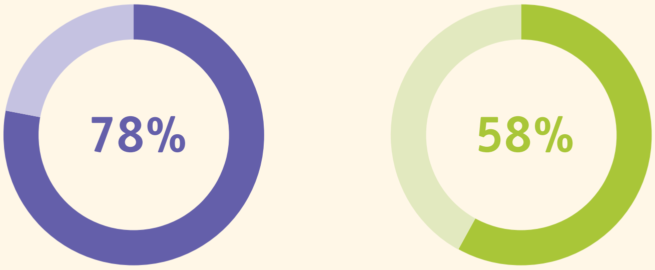


While 78 percent of consumers want brands to use video more, brands are falling short. The 2025 State of Video Technology report shows a very high demand for next-generation video, including videos that are personalized, interactive and AI-generated. The preference for next-gen video is strongest among younger, higher income and digital-first consumers.

Brands aren't using video nearly enough in customer communications. Consumers are 58% more likely to buy from businesses that use next-generation video in their communications. Gen Z and Millennials are 20% more likely to see brands who use video as customer-focused and high earners are 13% more likely than low-income earners to feel the same. Nearly eight out of 10 consumers want more video and more than four out of 10 say they never get videos from brands they do business with, depicting a clear gap that brands need to fill to meet consumer expectations.

Personalized video drives loyalty. As in past years, personalized video is 4x more likely to make someone feel valued by a brand and 3.5x more likely to make them become or remain a customer. People punish brands when they don't personalize. A sizable 44% of all consumers report that they get upset when communications are generic. This percentage jumps to 51% for Gen Z – 80% of whom also want communications to be more personalized in the future.

Brands draw consumers through video



78% of consumers want brands to use video more

Consumers are 58% more likely to buy from business that use next-generation video in communications

Consumers want AI videos from brands, especially when it makes things easy on them. They're two times more likely to want an AI video generated from a document rather than the document itself. Younger consumers, high earners and those more comfortable with digital technology are the most interested in next-gen video. Gen Z leads the curve with a staggering 93% wanting personalized and interactive videos from brands. Right behind them are high earners (86%-88%) and digital-first consumers (85%-86%).

While consumers do want more video, the video quality is important. Nearly eight out of 10 feel more valued when a brand invests in high-quality communications. This jumps to 88% for Gen Z, 86% for high earners, 85% for Millennials and 83% for digital-first consumers.

Idomoo commissioned Atomik Research to conduct an online survey of 2,005 consumers in the U.S. and the U.K. from January 20-February 5, 2025.

••• health care research

Americans trust doctors, not AI

Generations unsure of health data collection

While 69% of Americans are comfortable sharing their health data to improve their own care, only 40% are comfortable sharing that same data with tech companies for AI-driven products. Despite growing AI integration in health care, data integration company Qlik found that only 28% would accept a prescription written solely by AI, highlighting deep-rooted trust concerns.

When asked to choose, more than twice as many Americans would rather donate blood (52%) than donate their health data (24%). This stark gap highlights just how deeply concerns about privacy and control shape attitudes toward health care innovation – even as AI continues to advance.

People love data for their own care but hate it for corporate AI. Comfort sharing data drops nearly 30 points – from 69% for personal care to only 40% for commercial AI. This sharp divide highlights public concern around privacy and profit motives, with one-third explicitly uncomfortable with commercial data use.

Trust goes to doctors, not AI alone. While nearly 71% reject medicine prescribed exclusively by AI, acceptance climbs to 63% when human clinicians oversee the process, emphasizing the essential role of human judgment in driving public acceptance of health care technology.

Gen Z trusts the government with health data yet seniors are skeptical. Over half of Gen Z adults (50%) are comfortable with the government using their health data for policy, while only 36% of seniors agree, revealing stark generational differences about trust and oversight in digital health care.

Most believe insurers use their data but doubt AI's value. Though 41% think insurers already leverage their data, only 34% see current AI-driven care improvements, pointing to a disconnect that could slow down broader acceptance of health-focused AI initiatives.

With nearly 60% of Americans saying they'd share health data if compensated, it's clear that trust and value must go hand-in-hand. Real progress demands more than promises – it requires new models that respect individual control and offer tangible benefits. The health care industry has a rare opportunity: reward patients for their participation, build true transparency and ensure AI drives outcomes that people believe in.

The Qlik AI in Healthcare Survey was conducted by Censuswide Research among 2,002 employed U.S. respondents 18+ between April 17-23, 2025.

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QUIRK'S MEDIA

••• shopper insights

Selectively spending

Financial pressure leads to budget reevaluations

Sustained inflation, supply chain challenges and global tariffs are influencing grocery spending and broader consumer behavior across generations and regions. Blue Yonder found that 85% of overall respondents are concerned about inflation's impact on grocery prices, illustrating consumer unease and clear changes in purchasing decisions across the world.

Nearly half (49%) of all respondents believe newly introduced global tariffs are the leading factor behind inflated grocery prices, followed by increased costs for raw materials (42%), increased labor costs in manufacturing and food processing (39%) and increased profit margins for brands and manufacturers (33%).

The perceived top factor driving inflated grocery prices differs across regions. Consumers in the U.S. (65%), the U.K. (56%) and the Middle East (50%) feel global tariffs are the leading cause of rising prices. Consumers in New Zealand (50%) feel that increased profit margins for brands and manufacturers is the top factor for inflated prices, while consumers in France (48%) and Germany (47%) believe the increased cost of raw materials is the leading cause of grocery inflation.

There is also a generational divide. Baby Boomers uniquely believe that increased labor costs in manufacturing and food processing are the leading cause for grocery inflation (52%), whereas all other generational groups believe global tariffs are the top cause of inflated prices.

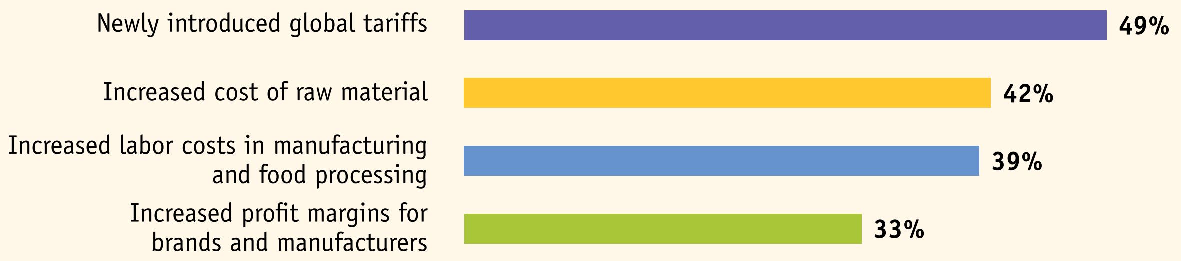
Inflation's grip on grocery bills is triggering global concern from consumers. Almost two-thirds of consumers (65%) report they would buy fewer grocery items across categories to cope with price increases, while 42% would shop at discount and wholesale stores. In addition, approximately one-third would prefer shopping based on promotions and discounts (36%) and switching to private-label brands (34%). Alcohol is facing the biggest budget cuts compared to other grocery categories, with one-third (33%) of consumers saying they would reduce alcohol purchases in response to inflation price increases.

To offset high grocery costs, many consumers noted they would be willing to cut back on discretionary spending. More than half (56%) of respondents are willing to cut back on clothing and footwear; this was also the top response by generations and regionally. Other top categories consumers are willing to cut back on include consumer electronics (46%), streaming/gaming subscriptions (43%), personal care and beauty (36%), appliances (33%) and automotive purchases (28%). Only 7% of respondents were not willing to reduce their other retail spending to offset grocery costs. Generationally, Baby Boomers are most likely to scale back on clothing and footwear (63%), compared to Gen X (59%), Gen Z (53%) and Millennials (50%).

Globally, consumers in New Zealand are the most likely to reduce spending on clothing and footwear (67%), followed closely by the U.S. (62%), the U.K. (61%), France (49%), Germany (49%) and the Middle East (47%). The next top category varied by country, with New Zealand (60%) and U.K. (54%) consumers most likely to reduce spending on streaming and gaming subscriptions, followed by Germany (42%), the Middle East (40%) and France (39%) willing to reduce spending on consumer electronics. These two categories – subscriptions and consumer electronics – were tied for U.S. consumers (54%).

The Blue Yonder 2025 Global Consumer Sentiment on Grocery Inflation Survey was fielded by a third-party provider in May 2025 with over 6,000 consumers across Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), France, Germany, the Middle East, the U.K. and the U.S.

Consumers identify top factors driving inflated grocery prices



••• pet care research

Pets over people

How animals help decrease stress and screen time

If you would rather hug your pet than talk to your partner after a stressful day then you're not alone. A new global survey of over 30,000 pet owners, commissioned by pet care business Mars and mental health company Calm, found that most pet owners (58%) prefer to spend time with their pet when feeling stressed – more than those who would choose their partners (32%), family (23%) or even children or friends (both 18%). In fact, 83% of people surveyed believe their pet has positively impacted their mental well-being.

The global survey across 20 markets highlights the powerful ways our pets improve our mental health and well-being. From encouraging us to switch off in our day-to-day with breaks from screens, work and chores, to offering silent comfort when words feel too much, the findings paint a striking picture of how pets are helping millions of people around the world find peace in an always-on world.

Sometimes, it's not what pets do, it's just that they are there. More than half of pet owners (56%) say their pets provide company without the need to talk during stressful times. While others find chatting to their pet helpful – with nearly a quarter (23%) saying their pet provides a space for them to express worries or concerns without expecting a response. A huge 84% of pet owners say the simple presence of their pet is relaxing, offering a sense of calm that doesn't require words or actions.

The survey also reveals how our pets' behaviors give us daily nudges towards better well-being habits. They are reminders to step away from the daily grind. Almost eight in 10 (78%) say their pet reminds them to pause and take a break from work, chores or tasks, with 50% saying this happens daily – a gentle reminder to stop, breathe and reset. Pets calm the mind with 73% of owners say their pet encourages them to stop overthinking or worrying – helping them feel calmer and more centered.

Seventy-three percent of pet owners say their pet encourages them to spend time outside. Even screens take a backseat when pets are around. Seventy-seven percent say their pet encourages them to take a break away from screens – and for half (50%) it's a daily reminder to unplug, a vital counter to constant scrolling and digital burnout.

The research was conducted by YouGov Plc on behalf of Mars. The total sample size was 31,299 adults across 20 markets. Fieldwork was undertaken between February 19-March 31, 2025.

••• employee research

Workers take stealth vacations on the company dime

Good luck explaining that sudden tan

In a survey commissioned by ResumeBuilder.com, 41% of workers surveyed said they have engaged in “quiet vacationing” this year – that is, they have taken time off without officially requesting it, often continuing to work or maintaining the appearance of working while away. A further 39% planned to do so this summer.

Gen Z workers are the most likely to engage in the practice, with 66% saying they've taken time off without notifying their employer. Quiet vacationing is also more common among executives (65%) and fully in-person workers, all of whom reported taking a secret vacation in 2025. "Executives often have the flexibility to step away discreetly, while Gen Z workers are more likely to find creative ways to stay connected while traveling or taking time off," says the firm's Chief Career Advisor Stacie Haller. "Many employees feel they don't receive enough vacation days and want to save them. In-office workers may also be quiet vacationing as a way to push back against the lack of remote or hybrid options."

Among those who quiet vacation, the primary reasons include saving PTO for another time (33%), fearing they might look less dedicated (14%) or not wanting to use PTO at all (13%). Others cite being paid out for unused PTO (12%), anxiety about asking (8%), having a request denied (8%) or concerns about layoffs if they take time off (7%).

The survey also found that 75% of quiet vacationers maintained the appearance of working a full day. Many answered e-mails (69%), responded to instant messages (60%), took calls (54%), attended virtual meetings (49%) or met deadlines (41%) while away. Some used tools to bypass monitoring software (32%), relied on AI to boost productivity (28%) or had co-workers cover for them (26%). Nearly two-thirds of workers who joined virtual meetings during a quiet vacation used a virtual background to hide their location.

Few workers faced serious consequences for quiet vacationing, though 37% say their employer found out. Of those, 30% were denied a promotion, 29% lost out on a key project, 27% were denied a raise and 16% were fired. More than half of quiet vacationers say they don't feel guilty about it.

This survey was commissioned by ResumeBuilder.com and conducted online by the polling platform Pollfish in July 2025. The survey included 1,200 full-time U.S. workers.

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Lynnette Leathers, CEO
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A more comprehensive analysis of importance: The necessity and sufficiency attribute importance index

| By Michael Garver

abstract

Traditional key driver analysis only tells half the story of what customers value. A new attribute importance index combines both nice-to-have and must-have attribute importance to give researchers and marketers a more complete picture.

The logic is simple and widely accepted: Managers should focus on and allocate more resources to the product and service attributes that are important to their customers. In CX research, best practice suggests that key driver analysis (KDA) is the best way to get this information. But what if key driver analysis only provides half of the attribute importance story?

For quite some time, researchers have classified attribute importance from at least two different perspectives. For example, the Kano model put forth must-have and one-dimensional attributes, where must-have attributes are those necessary prerequisites or must-have levels of performance to achieve overall customer satisfaction. In contrast, one-dimensional attributes have a linear relationship with overall customer satisfaction, whereas as higher/lower performance in a one-dimensional attribute will lead to higher/lower performance in overall customer satisfaction. In a similar vein, statisticians refer to these relationships as either a necessity or sufficiency relationship. The necessity relationship is like Kano's must-have, whereas the sufficiency relationship is like Kano's one-dimensional attributes. Key driver analysis only provides information on the sufficiency relationship and ignores the necessity or must-have relationship.

Dul (2016) created necessary condition analysis (NCA) to statistically detect must-have or necessity relationships and researchers suggest that NCA should be implemented as a complementary analysis to key driver analysis and importance-performance analysis. For example, Garver (2025a) recently put forth the necessity and sufficiency attribute importance index (NSAII), which is created from the results of NCA (necessity) and key driver analysis utilizing relative weight analysis (sufficiency). NSAII provides both sides of the attribute importance story, providing a more comprehensive perspective of attribute importance.

The purpose of this article is to put forth NSAII and to demonstrate this technique for market research practitioners. To accomplish this purpose, fundamentals of key driver analysis utilizing relative weight analysis will be discussed, followed a discussion of NCA. Then, conceptualizing NSAII

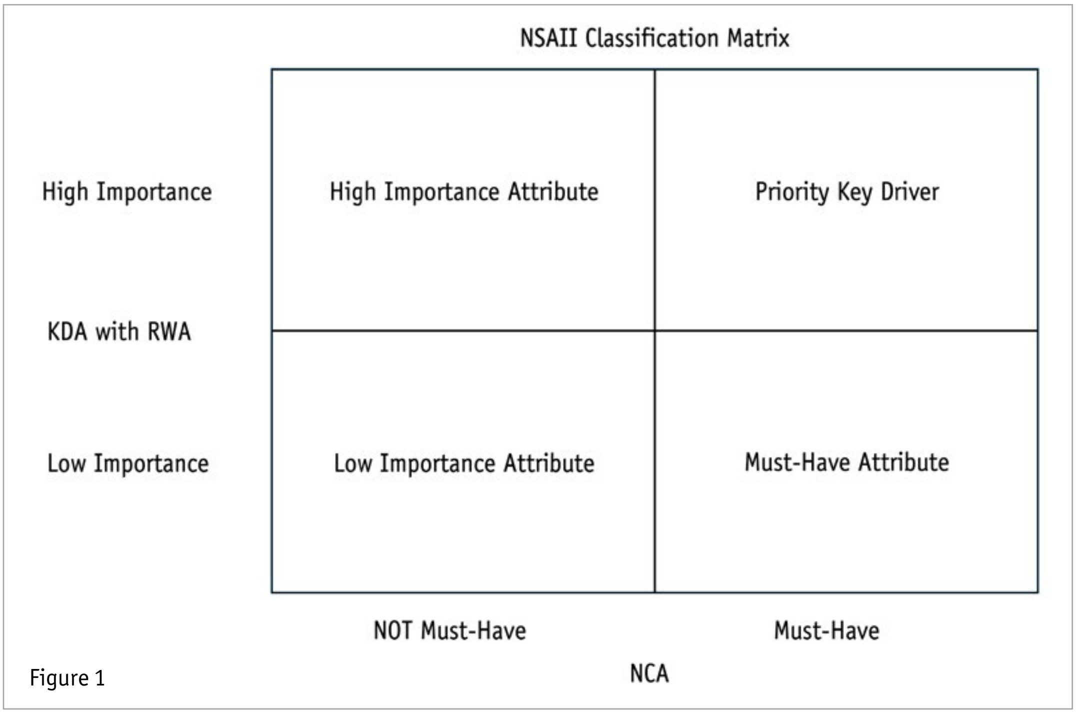


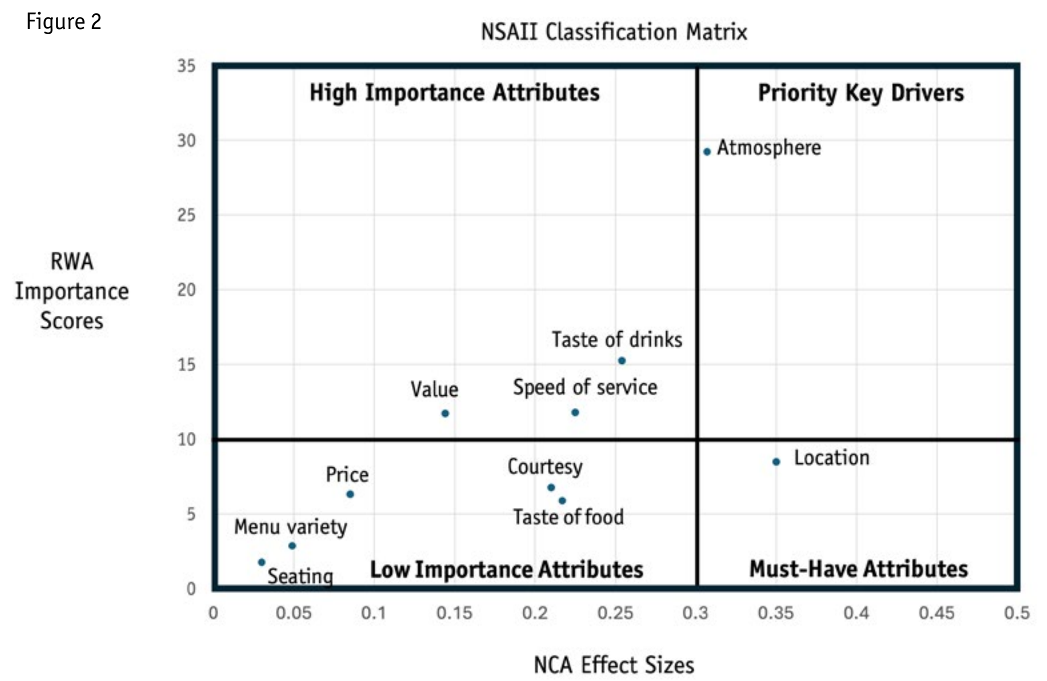
Figure 1

along with details of calculating this metric will be discussed. Finally, NSAII's role in importance-performance analysis will be put forth.

Key driver analysis with relative weight analysis

Key driver analysis is an important tool for market researchers, as it delivers critical information surrounding the importance customers place on product and service attributes or features. KDA refers to statistically inferring the importance of attributes that influence a dependent variable (overall customer satisfaction, loyalty, etc.). Over the last two decades, most of the research attention has examined different statistical tools to determine the most valid method for conducting KDA. KDA is often implemented with a large number of attributes that are highly correlated (i.e., high levels of multicollinearity). In this situation, multiple regression can deliver biased results, so researchers suggest that relative weight analysis (RWA) is the most valid and feasible statistical tool for this task. Yet, RWA assumes a sufficiency logic, only providing half of the attribute importance story.

Figure 2



To implement RWA, some researchers use the RWA package within R, an open-source and free software. An easy-to-use alternative is RWA-Web (www.scotttonidandel.com), which is a free online statistical tool created by leading RWA researchers. For more information on implementing RWA via RWA-Web to conduct KDA, the interested reader should see two articles listed in the references section: Garver and Williams 2020 and Garver and Williams 2024.

Results from RWA include an R^2 for the model as well as raw and rescaled weights for the attributes. The raw weights are an additive decomposition of the R^2, meaning that their summation equals the R^2 of the model. The rescaled weights are based upon the raw weights yet are rescaled so that summing these weights would equal 100. Based on this property, the rescaled weights are more intuitive and easier to understand and researchers recommend these to represent attribute importance scores.

Necessary condition analysis

NCA employs a necessity or must-have logic, where the analysis identifies a level of performance in the attribute that is necessary (i.e., must-have) to achieve a certain level of customer satisfaction. NCA identifies non-compensatory relationships, suggesting that if an attribute's level of performance is not met, then another attribute cannot make up the difference to achieve this level of satisfaction. NCA is a bivariate technique, thus it does not suffer from problems associated with multicollinearity.

Most NCA applications have been utilized as a complement to traditional path modeling techniques (multiple regression, PLS-SEM, etc.). Results suggest that an attribute can be a significant predictor yet not a necessary condition. In contrast, an attribute may be an insignificant predictor yet represent a necessary or must-have relationship. Implementing NCA to assess attribute importance provides a more comprehensive story of total attribute importance.

NCA may be utilized within SmartPLS 4, R or even an online NCA calculator. SmartPLS 4 has an easy-to-use graphical interface and can be used to perform NCA as well as many different statistical techniques. Within R, there is an add-on package (https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/NCA/index.html) that can be accessed to run NCA. The NCA online calculator (https://www.erim.eur.nl/necessary-condition-analysis/software-and-calculator/) is a free, easy-to-use website designed for less complex analysis and reporting.

While NCA delivers a range of different results, the most relevant results to create the NSAII are NCA effect sizes. Effect sizes evaluate if and to what level a necessary condition is present. General guidelines suggest that large effect sizes are over .3 and represent must-have relationships, while medium effect sizes are from .1 to .3, and effect sizes below .1 are considered small.

Necessity and sufficiency attribute importance index

The necessity and sufficiency attribute importance index combines attribute importance scores from KDA with RWA (sufficiency) with attribute effect sizes (necessity) from NCA. The NSAII produces two different types of results, which include a classification matrix of attributes as well as a specific metric to quantify an attribute's total importance.

To classify each attribute's total importance, NSAII input scores (necessity and sufficiency) are plotted on a 2x2 classification matrix (see Figure 1). This matrix has four different quadrants which include priority key drivers, high importance attributes, must-have attributes and low importance attributes. Priority key drivers are those attributes that are relatively high in importance and have large NCA effect scores (i.e., must-have). High importance attributes have relatively high importance scores but are not classified as must-have attributes. Must-have attributes have relatively low importance scores but have large NCA effect scores (i.e., must-have). Low importance attributes have relatively low importance scores and are not classified as must-have attributes.

To calculate the NSAII, the importance scores from KDA (i.e., rescaled weights from RWA) are multiplied by a

Table 1: Key Driver Analysis with RWA (Sufficiency)

Attributes	RWA Rescaled Importance Scores
Atmosphere	29.25
Taste of drinks	15.25
Speed of service	11.78
Value	11.71
Location	8.47
Courtesy of employees	6.75
Price	6.31
Taste of food	5.87
Menu variety	2.86
Seating availability	1.76

Table 2: NCA Effect Scores (Necessity)

Attributes	Effect Scores
Location	.350
Atmosphere	.307
Taste of drinks	.254
Speed of service	.225
Taste of food	.217
Courtesy of employees	.210
Value	.144
Price	.085
Menu variety	.049
Seating availability	.030

"relative" effect score from NCA. More specifically, we need both inputs to NSAII to be on the same scale. The importance scores from KDA are already relative in nature with all attributes sharing 100 points. Thus, we need to calculate a relative effect size from NCA effect sizes where the attributes would share 100 points. To accomplish this goal, we sum the effect sizes for all attributes. Then, each attribute's effect size is divided by this sum. This number is then multiplied by 100 to obtain a relative effect size. Now that both inputs are on the same scale (0 to 100), we then calculate a mean score between these two inputs to determine the NSAII. This provides equal weighting between the two methods. The main benefit of NSAII is that it is one number that combines and summarizes the attribute's total importance (sufficiency and necessity), with a larger NSAII representing a higher priority for researchers.

Case study

To empirically demonstrate the NSAII, CX survey data for a local coffeehouse was collected and analyzed. The coffeehouse is next to a college campus and its targeted customers are college students. The dependent variable was an index created by combining the Net Promoter question with the best-ever scale and stated improvement scale put forth by Garver (2024). The survey implements 10 product and service attributes that were created and refined by doing qualitative interviews with current customers. After data cleaning, a final convenience sample consisted of 131 respondents.

KDA WITH RWA

RWA-Web was implemented to conduct KDA with RWA. Given the nature of the data, the RWA Shiny app for multiple regression was selected. The dependent variable index described earlier (Net Promoter question, best-ever scale and stated improvement scale) was selected as the criterion and the 10 product and service attributes were selected as the predictors implementing listwise deletion. The number of bootstrap replications was set to 10,000 with an alpha level of .05.

The R^2 of this model is .54, suggesting a reasonable amount of variance is explained in the dependent variable. The rescaled weights from RWA will serve as the importance scores, which can be seen in Table 1. For this sample of coffeehouse customers, atmosphere (29.25) is the most important attribute followed the taste of drinks (15.25), speed of service (11.78) and overall value (11.71). These four attributes account for almost 68% of the importance.

NCA RESULTS

Examining the effect scores from NCA, location (.35) has the largest effect size followed by atmosphere (.307), with both effect sizes being classified as

Table 3: NSAII

Attributes	RWA-Rescaled Weights	NCA Effect Sizes	NCA Relative Effect Sizes	NSAII	NSAII Classification
Atmosphere	29.25	.307	16.4	22.8	Priority key driver
Taste of drinks	15.25	.254	13.6	14.4	High importance
Location	8.47	.350	18.7	13.6	Must-have
Speed of service	11.78	.225	12.0	11.9	High importance
Value	11.71	.144	7.7	9.7	High importance
Courtesy of employees	6.75	.210	11.2	9.0	Low importance
Taste of food	5.87	.217	11.6	8.7	Low importance
Price	6.31	.085	4.5	5.4	Low importance
Menu variety	2.86	.049	2.6	2.7	Low importance
Seating availability	1.76	.030	1.6	1.7	Low importance

large effect sizes (i.e., must-have attributes). Taste of drinks (.253), speed of service (.225), taste of food (.217) and courtesy of employees (.21) have medium effect sizes. Menu variety and seating available have the smallest effect sizes, which are also statistically insignificant.

NSAII CLASSIFICATION MATRIX

Plotting attributes in the NSAII classification matrix, RWA importance scores are on the vertical axis, while the NCA effect scores are on the horizontal axis. The crossbar for the RWA importance scores is the average importance score, which is 10 in this example (100 divided by the number of attributes). The crossbar for the NCA effect size is .3, which is the guideline for classifying large effect sizes (i.e., must-have).

Examining Figure 2, the NSAII classification matrix, atmosphere is a priority key driver because it has a relatively high importance score and a large effect size. Location is a must-have attribute because it has the largest effect size with a relatively lower attribute importance score. Taste of drinks, speed of service and value are high importance attributes because they have relatively higher attribute importance scores with smaller effect sizes. Finally, courtesy of employees, taste of food, seating availability and price are low importance attributes because they have relatively lower importance scores with smaller effect sizes.

NSAII

Table 3 contains all the inputs for NSAII. To calculate NSAII, we first need to calculate a relative effect size where the attributes share 100 points, so that it is on the same scale as RWA-rescaled weights. To accomplish this goal, the NCA effect sizes for all attributes are summed and then each attribute's effect size is divided by this sum. This number is then multiplied by 100 to obtain a relative effect size. The NSAII is calculated by taking a mean score of the RWA-rescaled weight and NCA relative effect size.

Atmosphere has the largest NSAII (22.8) followed by taste of drinks (14.4), location (13.6) and speed of service (11.9). As a result, these attributes would be prioritized.

The NSAII results share similarities with the KDA results, yet different and more insightful than KDA alone. For example, both NSAII and KDA suggest that atmosphere and taste of drinks are top priorities. NSAII highlights location as a top three priority, which contrasts with KDA alone (fifth priority). Location has lower than average importance from KDA but has the largest effect size from NCA, making it a must-have attribute and third in priority from NSAII. From KDA alone, value has a much higher importance score than courtesy of employees and taste of food, yet these attributes all have similar NSAII scores due to value having a much smaller NCA effect size. These added insights demonstrate the benefit of implementing NSAII as a metric of total attribute importance.

Next steps with importance-performance analysis

Typically, KDA importance scores are used as an input into importance-performance analysis (IPA) to prioritize improvement opportunities. We suggest that market researchers also use NSAII attribute importance scores as an input to IPA. Because NSAII represents both sides of the attribute importance story, we feel it is a more complete representation of total attribute importance and should be incorporated into IPA.

NCA has been proposed as a direct complement to IPA to better prioritize improvement opportunities (Hauff et al., 2024; Garver 2025b). NCA results typically include bottleneck tables, which deliver the level of performance necessary to obtain a desired outcome as well as the percentage of customers who do not meet this level of performance. When NCA is being used with IPA to identify improvement opportunities, critical information from NCA is the percentage of customers who do not meet the necessary condition. If an attribute's necessary level of performance has already been achieved by a large percentage of customers, then improving this attribute may not be a priority. If an attribute's necessary level of performance has NOT been achieved by a large percentage of customers, then improving this attribute becomes a top priority. For more information on this process, see the above articles.

Deliver both sides

NSAII combines attribute importance scores from KDA with RWA (sufficiency) with an attribute's effect size (necessity) from NCA to deliver both sides of the attribute importance story. From this analysis, the NSAII classification matrix will identify four different types of attributes, which include priority key drivers, high importance attributes, must-have attributes and low importance attributes. The main benefit of NSAII is that it is one number that combines and summarizes the attribute's total importance (sufficiency and necessity), with a larger NSAII representing a higher the priority for researchers.

Michael S. Garver is a professor of marketing at Central Michigan University. He can be reached at garve1ms@cmich.edu.

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Style Points

HOW TO CREATE A RESEARCH PROJECT STYLE GUIDE

STYLE GUIDES HELP RESEARCHERS STAY ALIGNED ON TERMINOLOGY, TONE AND STAKEHOLDER PREFERENCES FROM THE RFP TO THE FINAL PRESENTATION.

By Nancy Cox

"Your research was critical to our recent success. Your report 'speaks our language' and that really helps!"

What a great in-box message for any researcher to receive! The first sentence says "research goal achieved" and the second sentence reveals a key clue to achieving that goal: The researcher's writing style matches the stakeholder's style – it speaks their language.

How do you achieve this? There is a writing craft secret that researchers can borrow from the publishing industry: the style guide. A style guide serves two main purposes: It aligns all writing consistently across an organization and saves precious deadline time for every writer by providing a quick reference. You likely encountered a style guide in college when a professor insisted upon using APA-style footnoting. Or have seen aspects of a style guide when a stakeholder insisted acronyms must be spelled out in every report mention.

In this article, you'll learn how to quickly put together a project style guide, a one- to two-page quick-reference document that will guide you from RFP to follow-up presentation. The good news is you are not creating this guide from scratch. Instead, you are gathering and assembling, like a very simple jigsaw puzzle that has only a few large pieces.

Risks without a style guide

Without a style guide, two of the biggest risks are what this author calls style collide and style slide. Style collide is when your writing style doesn't jibe with the stakeholder's taste. For example, say you used contractions in a discussion guide but your stakeholder firmly believes contractions and other aspects of a more conversational style have no place in business writing and she sends it back to you with a scolding note. That's style collide. No matter how you resolve this language conflict, avoid style collide by making note of it in your project style guide before you write the report.

Style slide is that inadvertent inconsistency that can creep into a project over time. For example, between crafting slide 24 and 25 for Stakeholder A, you were interrupted by two days of solid meetings with Stakeholder B. Returning to write slide 25, you use the term "Latinx market" (the preferred term of Stakeholder B) which in slide 1-24 was "Hispanic market" (the preferred term of Stakeholder A). Then as you cut and paste, slide 28 flips back to "Hispanic market." This inconsistency can create a cognitive speed bump that shifts stakeholder focus to language choice and away from key findings. It's similar to when you're watching a movie and you notice the villain flashing a sizable ruby ring in one scene, only to have it disappear in the next. This continuity problem disrupts your attention and makes you miss critical dialogue.

A style guide will help avoid style slide. You'll develop the quick habit of reviewing your styles before diving back in, reacquainting yourself with the correct terms for this project. You'll avoid having to make some fiddly corrections before submitting your findings and, more importantly, save yourself from the embarrassment of having to explain the mixing of demographic terms during the presentation.

Three easy pieces

Here are the three pieces you need to assemble your project style guide: your stakeholders' project-specific keywords; links to stakeholders' existing organizational style guides (if any); links to existing foundational style guides preferred by stakeholders (the Associated Press Stylebook, the Chicago Manual of Style, etc.).

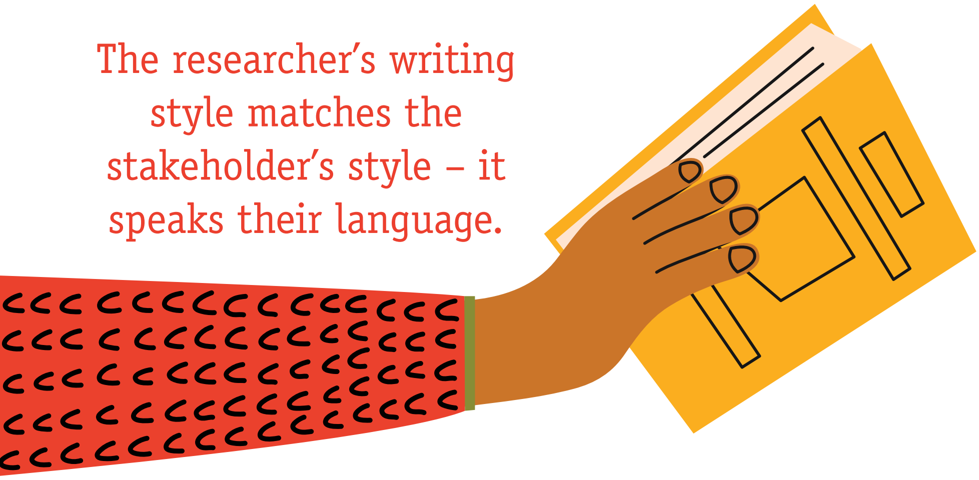
Wait, you may think, there are two existing guides? Why not skip creating a project style guide and just use those existing guides? Well, the existing guides are broad and, in the case of foundational guides, can be quite sweeping (as in, the Chicago Manual of Style's 1,192 pages). You won't need all those entries, just a link for reference. Similarly, the organizational style guide won't be solely focused on your project.

PIECE #1: PROJECT-SPECIFIC KEYWORDS

You're already using project-specific keywords in the RFP phase. Simply create another document, Project XYZ Style Guide, and list those keywords – the products and services, campaign names, business categories, channels of distribution, touchpoints, KPIs, etc. Be sure to include how the stakeholder refers to their industry such as using wellness industry vs. health care industry. Keyword alerts include capitalization, unusual spellings, trademarked words, abbreviations and acronyms.

Having the project-specific key terms in one handy style guide saves critical time in every phase. When you finally get RFP approval, the style guide helps you pick right up on using keywords. When it's late at night and you want to double-check if this stakeholder uses "click-thru rate" or "click-through rate," you won't have to search through project e-mails – none of which have "click-thru rate" in the subject line. Or worse, sift through meeting transcriptions, which are notorious for misspellings. Or ask AI, which wants

The researcher's writing style matches the stakeholder's style – it speaks their language.



to be helpful by serving up even more spelling options. You can simply refer to your style guide.

Don't hesitate to ask questions about keyword or style preferences.

- **Ask if your stakeholder has an organizational style guide.** (See the next section on how to find that guide if your stakeholder is unsure.)
- **Ask if there are any words or phrases they often correct or may even be forbidden to use.** Stakeholders will often have a ready list including: brand confusion (Supergoop! vs. goop); misspellings (stationary instead of stationery); misused terms (referring to all members of the military as soldiers although only a member of the Army is a soldier); genericizing brand names (remember the "lawyers of Kleenex" campaign?); policy dictates such as using crash instead of accident (adopted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration since the 1990s and subsequently adopted by many other traffic safety and department of transportation agencies).

Yes, some stakeholders do have style guides. But you typically have to ask.

One question that can save a lot of report-revising time is asking for stakeholder agreement on how to attribute respondents' quotes. For some projects, this may be overtly evident when each focus group is a distinct segment such as Holiday Baker, Everyday Baker, Reluctant Baker, etc. For other projects, each respondent may carry a long trail of demographic, behavioral and attitudinal attributes just from the screener. Ask your stakeholder for agreement on up to three critical attributes for the quotes. Generate some example quotes with your proposed attribution including any capitalization, punctuation or abbreviations. Better to hash out before report writing if it should be Spanish-speaking or Spanish speaking vs. noticing you have inconsistently used both in the report.

Gaining agreement on the attribute wording may also reveal which attributes stakeholders have predetermined are the most critical. Example: In a driving safety study, rather than the age of the driver, your stakeholder may prefer seeing the differences between newly licensed drivers vs. drivers licensed more than three years. With people waiting longer to obtain licenses vs. the traditional 16-year-old's rite of passage, the stakeholder may feel that age is no longer a proxy for driving experience. Asking this question early in the research could even influence the study design and analysis.

PIECE #2: STAKEHOLDERS' EXISTING STYLE GUIDES

Yes, some stakeholders do have style guides. But you typically have to ask. Even if you are within the organization, you might be surprised that style guides exist. Be aware that style guides are called various things: brand guidelines, media guidelines, communication manuals, communication style guidelines and/or glossaries.

Style guides may live in different departments: media relations, human resources/training development (part of onboarding), marketing/branding (parent brands and sub-brands), even in an organization's marketing/advertising agency. Wording preferences and guidelines may also be embedded in an organization's templates.

If you are directed to an existing guide, great! Just put a link to that guide in your project style guide. If you are told there is no guide, don't give up hope – your stakeholder may not be aware of organizational style guides. Do an online search. Try the various terms above. You may unearth some guides. Always check the publication date then verify with your stakeholder that any guide you discover is relevant. For example, a researcher testing a new ad campaign finds the current campaign style guide, which clarifies that the jingle is never referred to as a jingle but instead is "sonic branding." That's a wording difference that this researcher needs to confirm with the stakeholder.

An example of a detailed style guide is the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). WSDOT states that this guide augments its use of the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook. (More on the AP Stylebook in the next section.) The WSDOT augmentation is critical. Without this handy guide, a researcher would likely use the common term "bicyclists" or even "cyclists." WSDOT style is people-first, which means the preferred term is "people using bicycles" – an example of how everyday language could style collide with the stakeholder. And while the AP Stylebook is also people-first, it still recommends using bicyclists. Again, the augmentation is critical.

Using the WSDOT guide, the researcher can use the correct term in the RFP (signaling diligence and alignment), project communication and the final report. The researcher is proactively alerted to ask permission to use “bicyclist” or “cyclist” on a screener, survey question or discussion guide, demonstrating knowledge and respect for the stakeholders’ preferences or mandate. Diligent, aligned, knowledgeable and respectful – desirable perceptions to cultivate!

If you are directed to an existing guide, great!

PIECE #3: FOUNDATIONAL STYLE GUIDES

There is no need to get into the grammatical weeds in your project style guide. There are three foundational guides in the U.S. that can help align your grammar and level of formality with your stakeholders. Once you’ve determined the stakeholder preference, you can link to that style guide in your project guide.

Two broadly used style guides are the Chicago Manual of Style (often shortened to Chicago-style, Chicago or CMOS) and the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA). Both the CMOS and APA have fairly robust free online search functions on their websites. Example: Does the abbreviation PhD require periods? Both say no.

A third style guide is the Associated Press (AP) Style Guide. This guide offers a very limited online search function. If you are writing about breaking current events the AP sometimes publishes publicly available topical reference guides as was done for terms used during the papal conclave in 2025. AP style can vary dramatically from CMOS and APA. Example: AP style retains the periods in Ph.D. but the preference is to not abbreviate and instead describe the person as holding a doctorate in a specified field. You can see how this explanation slants toward news reporting.

Three ways to determine your stakeholder’s preferred foundational style:

- **Ask directly.** This works very well if you are engaged with a stakeholder related to producing content – a marketing agency or an organization that publishes regularly in industry journals.

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A splash of Quest Security
Garnish with Transparency & Trust
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There is no need to get into the grammatical weeds in your project style guide.

- **Refer to an organization's published style guide.** Some, like WSDOT, state up front which guidelines they follow.
- **Diagnose it yourself.** There are marked differences in the level of formality across these three guides. Most project stakeholders have a preference: the higher-level formality of science research-rooted APA; the mid-level formality of the literary and university press style of the CMOS; or the AP's least-formal, journalistic style.

While not comprehensive, a guide's stance on the use of contractions is a key formality "tell." Contractions are easy to spot in the published writing of your stakeholders – press releases, published reports, items in industry journals, leadership speeches (style is often top-down in organizations). Scan for the most commonly used contractions, the personal pronoun contractions: they're, we're, it's, you're, etc. The absence of contractions reveals APA style as APA prefers to avoid contractions except in specific situations such as direct quotations from research participants. Mixed use of contractions may indicate Chicago style as the CMOS states "…any rule against using contractions works against writing that sounds natural and is therefore easy (or at least pleasant) to read." Liberal use of contractions suggests AP style, which allows for contractions found in the dictionary. Note: the preferred dictionary of all three foundational guides is Merriam-Webster's Collegiate.

Both CMOS and APA offer free access to common questions on their style guide websites. The CMOS also offers a free 30-day trial for its complete online version. At the time of this writing, CMOS has partnered with PerfectIt software to provide a style-check tool. Use of this tool requires a subscription to both the CMOS and PerfectIt. APA's full guide is currently only available in a print edition. APA does list a handful of proofreading/editing services that offer discounts to APA members but does not endorse any service. The online version of the AP Stylebook requires a subscription. Since AP updates much more frequently to incorporate more pop culture words and trends than the other guides, it may be more beneficial to use the online subscription over the print version. AP offers a free Stylebook newsletter that might help you determine if the AP is a relevant guide.

Before any purchase, check for access through institutions and organizations. For example, an adjunct professor may secure guides for free or at a discounted rate. Organizations with corporate communications or media relations departments may have institutional subscription access. Local library systems typically have print editions of these manuals. Some tools such as Grammarly include both APA-style and Chicago-style checks even if not endorsed by either style guide.

Books on writing more effectively, such as Strunk and White's "Elements of Style" or Constance Hale's "Sin and Syntax," are not comprehensive style guides. Their advice and topics may overlap with style guides but they are not regularly updated and not cited as style guides by organizations. Sometimes you may see a stakeholder refer to "The Gregg Reference Manual" but it has not been updated since 2010 (about when the iPhone became popular). If a client references Gregg, consider using the APA style guide with its similar level of formality.

Contradicting beliefs

Throughout this article, a style guide is defined as a guide. Just as the pirate's code in the "Pirates of the Caribbean" films is described as "more like guidelines than rules," with five generations in the workplace, you may encounter firmly held yet contradicting beliefs about language use and grammar.

For example, which phrasing is correct: "over half of the respondents" or "more than half of the respondents"?

The answer? Either is correct. (See? Guidelines.) Anyone who took a journalism course before 2014 was rigorously taught that the only correct wording is "more than half of the respondents" and that you would only use "over half of the respondents" when describing something physically over the respondents such as "a tent was over half of the respondents."

While the AP Stylebook of 2014 set off a firestorm when it stepped back from adherence to "more than" (based on an 1800s-era personal preference of William Cullen Bryant, editor of The New York Evening Post), it's not your goal to ignite a style firestorm. Rather, it's to respect and use the style preference of your stakeholders.

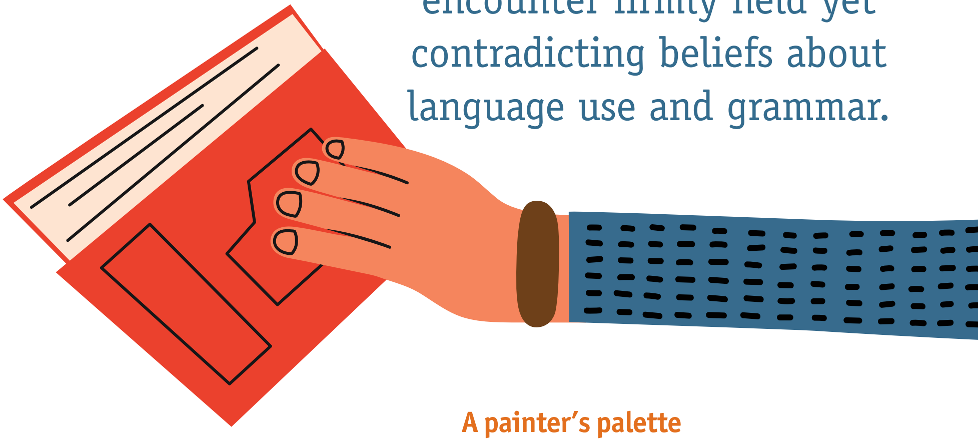
The hottest debate may be between Team Oxford Comma and Team No Oxford Comma. Not just debated in academic corridors but also on LinkedIn with some proclaiming their Oxford comma allegiance or lack thereof in their LinkedIn headline. The Oxford or serial comma is the comma that hangs out before "and" or any other conjunction in a series of three or more items such as "Tom, Dick, and Harry." APA and CMOS are on Team Oxford Comma. AP is not – AP style is "Tom, Dick and Harry." *[Quirk's too! - Ed.]* Adding to the Oxford comma confusion, there is no right answer or rule. Furthermore, most British style guides don't recommend using Oxford comma (except for the University of Oxford Style Guide, of course). What to do? For business formality's sake, consider defaulting to using the Oxford comma. But, prepare to be corrected by a stakeholder to NEVER use this comma. Note and respect their preference in your project style guide.

Ready for action

Congrats! You've put together your style guide with three pieces: key project words and stakeholder preferences including quote attributions; link(s) to existing stakeholder and stakeholder-related style guides; and a link to foundational style guide.

Beyond helping you to speak your stakeholder's language from RFP through post-reporting follow-up, your style guide:

- **Helps onboard** other research team members including platform provider programmers, moderators, etc.
- **Provides keywords** for automated or human transcribers. (Use case: an infection control study included questions on hepatitis which was abbreviated as "hepi" in the brief. Respondents did use "hepi" in their video answers. This keyword was provided to the transcriber since it is not only an uncommon word but it sounds remarkably like "happy" when spoken. Alerting the transcriber resulted in more accurate quotes and avoided potential confusion in the analysis.)
- **Makes colleagues proofreading or reviewing the project aware** of stakeholder preferences.
- **Generates a keyword glossary** you may choose to include in the report for future readers.
- **Reorients you** (and your stakeholder) when working on follow-up research even if several years later – although check to see if there have been style changes in the interim!
- **And yes, prevents style collide and style slide.**



> In the workplace, you may encounter firmly held yet contradicting beliefs about language use and grammar.

A painter's palette

While this article has emphasized the style guide's role as a trusty companion, it may also help to think of it as a painter's palette, preloaded with the colors for each canvas so there's no need to fumble around for that tube of Prussian blue. Your style guide is already outfitted with keywords and links, ready for use in your own art – the art of research. Q

Nancy Cox is the founder of Research Story Consulting. She can reached at nancy@researchstoryconsulting.com.

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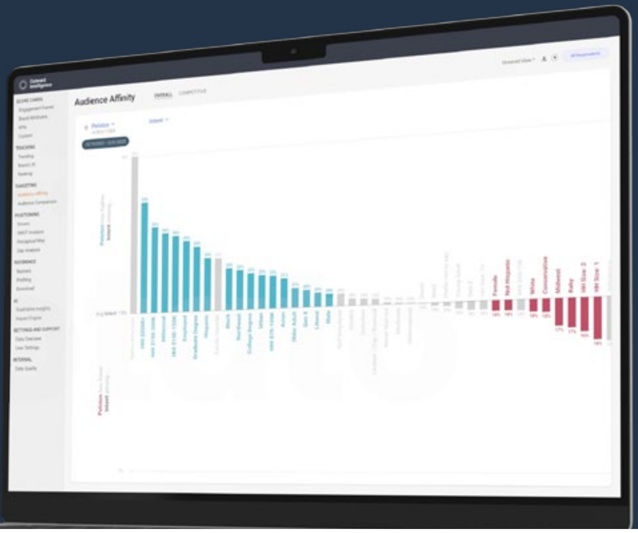


••• health care research

A healthy dialogue

Strategies for improving the quality and impact of doctor-patient conversations

| By Tom Donnelly, Vincent Valant, Barbara Haimowitz, Derek McCracken, Sara Bell, Julie Leonard and Peter Simpson

abstract

Learn how effective health communication during medical appointments can drive treatment adherence and patient satisfaction, with tips for pharma marketers, insights teams and providers to apply clear health communication principles in real time.

The medical appointment is where marketing to the health care provider (HCP) meets direct-to-consumer marketing, as well as where key health care decisions are made. Understanding the dynamics of these interactions is critical to meeting brand objectives and improving patient health outcomes. It is widely recognized that there is room for improvement in these conversations. (October has marked Health Literacy Month since 1999.) How might they be improved? How can health care manufacturers and insights professionals help?

In this article, we present several vignettes that include unique, de-identified patients with varied disease states in conversation with different types of HCPs. We show some of the pitfalls and roadblocks HCPs and patients can encounter in conversations that make it harder to connect with and understand each other and decide on the final direction for future care. This triple threat may have repercussions for patient health outcomes and hinder treatment progress. This article also amplifies the role of the translator, the importance of staying close to what is being said in the dialogue to avoid misinterpretations and speaking out of turn.

Outcomes are more successful

During a dialogue with a patient, it is critically important for the HCP to fully comprehend the patient's perspective and ensure that any information shared is clear, relevant and tailored to the patient's ability to understand and use it effectively. When conversations have a foundation in clear health communication (CHC) principles, comprehension and patient outcomes are more successful. Strong CHC practice includes using everyday words, short sentences, simple visuals and teach-back techniques.

In our foundational research,[1] we validated that refining written resources (e.g., booklets, patient package inserts, flyers, etc.) with CHC best practices improves comprehension for individuals at all levels of health

literacy. This means providing a basic explanation at a uniform level to all patients initially rather than attempting to tailor the information based on assumptions of a given patient's health literacy level.

This is confirmed in our follow-up study,[2] in which we found that HCPs are often inaccurate in identifying the health literacy levels of their patients. The need for CHC is important in the typical medical office setting but is even more important in the emergency room (ER). This is especially relevant for patients with limited English proficiency. In our recent research,[3] we found that it takes about 11 minutes until language assistance arrives for these patients. That is much too long for an urgent situation in the ER. Even more alarming is that the wait time increases to almost 45 minutes in low-resource areas (commonly faced with high levels of health disparities). Outside the ER, natural language processing has been used to detect patient-spoken language in home health settings, potentially translatable to ER documentation.[4]

Using CHC approaches ensures that the HCP-patient dialogue is effective, that their limited time together is well-spent and that patients and HCPs understand each other. This collective success bridges language barriers, increases patient adherence and ultimately improves patient health and satisfaction with their health care experience. This need conflicts with the fact that providers are trained to use precise and often Latin-based language, as well as to maintain a professional distance between themselves and patients. This training can conflict with the process of establishing rapport, building trust and making emotional connections with patients. Clear health communications help providers step outside of this traditional training and connect with patients on a different level. This co-created approach is exactly what is needed to change the narrative.

What are the characteristics of an impactful dialogue?

- The patient feels understood, heard and believed in their description of symptoms.
- The HCP is clear and believable in their analysis of the patient's concerns.
- The HCP provides reasons why the patient should begin a treatment plan, stay on the current treatment path or change to another path that is perceived as more efficacious.
- When a patient feels the HCP has their best interests in mind, they place greater trust in subsequent follow-up steps. If this sense of trust is absent, the patient is less likely to come to a consensus with the HCP or adhere to treatment recommendations.

Different types of conversations between an HCP and patient demand unique adaptations to achieve ideal outcomes. To support the health care industry in improving future HCP-patient dialogues, it is important to examine real-world conversations and offer potential optimizations to meet these adaptation needs.

Learning from HCP-patient dialogues

Our capturing of HCP-patient dialogue includes several steps to ensure the research follows and adheres to industry guidelines and local laws (see Figure 1, courtesy of ZoomRx). When the patient arrives at the health care site, they are asked if they are interested in participating in the research. If so, the appropriate consent forms are reviewed and signed. The dialogue is recorded, the patient is provided with an incentive (not a direct payment) and the recording and other anonymized patient chart information is shared with the research agency.

HCP-patient dialogue research offers an insight-provoking format that provides several unique benefits: it allows researchers to better understand the patient experience through the words that they use; it shows how patients articulate what is most important to them; it uncovers how HCPs engage with patients in the exam room and identifies what information is shared and how patients engage in the discussion.

While reviewing such dialogues, researchers should consider: What is clear or unclear

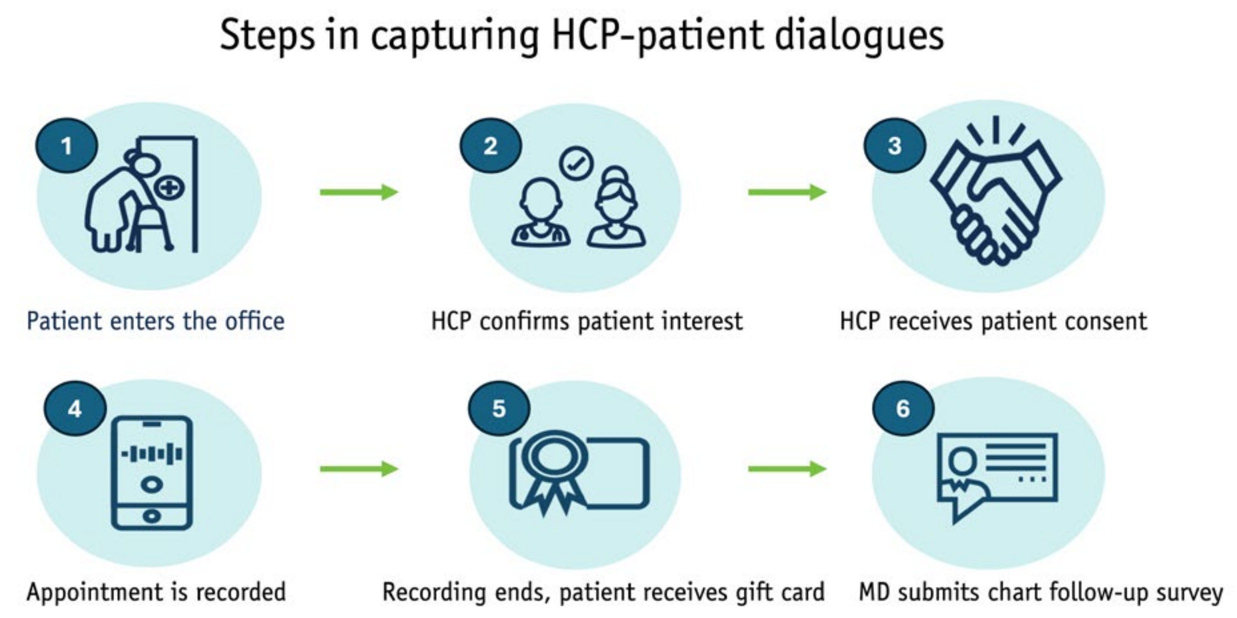

Steps in capturing HCP-patient dialogues
1
Patient enters the office
2
HCP confirms patient interest
3
HCP receives patient consent
4
Appointment is recorded
5
Recording ends, patient receives gift card
6
MD submits chart follow-up survey

Figure 1

about the communication? How are the specific word choices of HCPs and patients aligned (or misaligned)? What is communicated well? What elements could be improved?

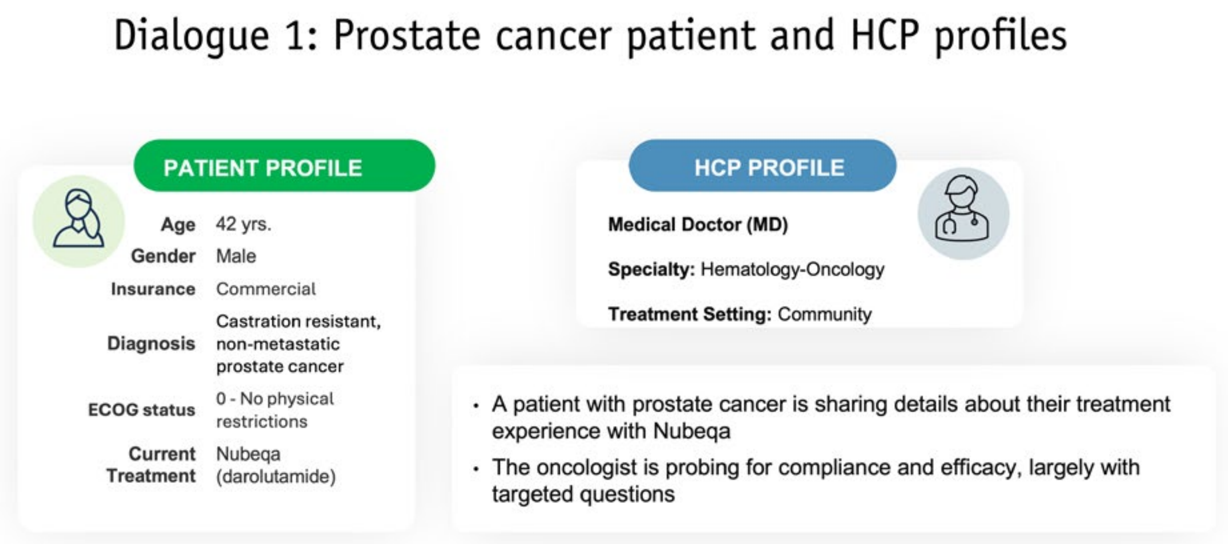
Three HCP-patient dialogues were analyzed through a CHC lens to provide suggestions for pharmaceutical manufacturers, health care practitioners and insights agencies. In particular, the examples highlight: open- vs. closed-ended questions; probing questions that require a creative, engaging response; and challenges inherent to translated conversations.

Dialogue 1: Prostate cancer patient

This first example conversation is from a prostate cancer appointment with a 42-year-old patient sharing details about their treatment experience with Nubeqa (see Figure 2 for details about the HCP and patient). The hematologist-oncologist is having a check-in with their patient after starting their first treatment, probing for compliance and efficacy, largely with targeted questions.

> MD: The reason why we chose darolutamide is because you are a very young patient and you are still working full-time, of course, and you wanted to have a treatment which would not cause too much fatigue or cognitive dysfunction. How have you been doing with the darolutamide? How do you take it?
>
> Patient: I don't have any problems.
>
> MD: Do you take it after food?
>
> Patient: I do not feel anything.
>
> MD: Do you take it after food? I'm just checking to make sure that, you know, you're taking it correctly.
>
> Patient: Yes, that's what I do.
>
> MD: Ok. And you're taking it twice a day?
>
> Patient: Yes, uh huh, just like you told me.
>
> MD: Ok, so I'm just checking because some patients take it on an empty stomach. So you have to take it with

Figure 2


Dialogue 1: Prostate cancer patient and HCP profiles

PATIENT PROFILE

Age	42 yrs.
Gender	Male
Insurance	Commercial
Diagnosis	Castration resistant, non-metastatic prostate cancer
ECOG status	0 - No physical restrictions
Current Treatment	Nubeqa (darolutamide)

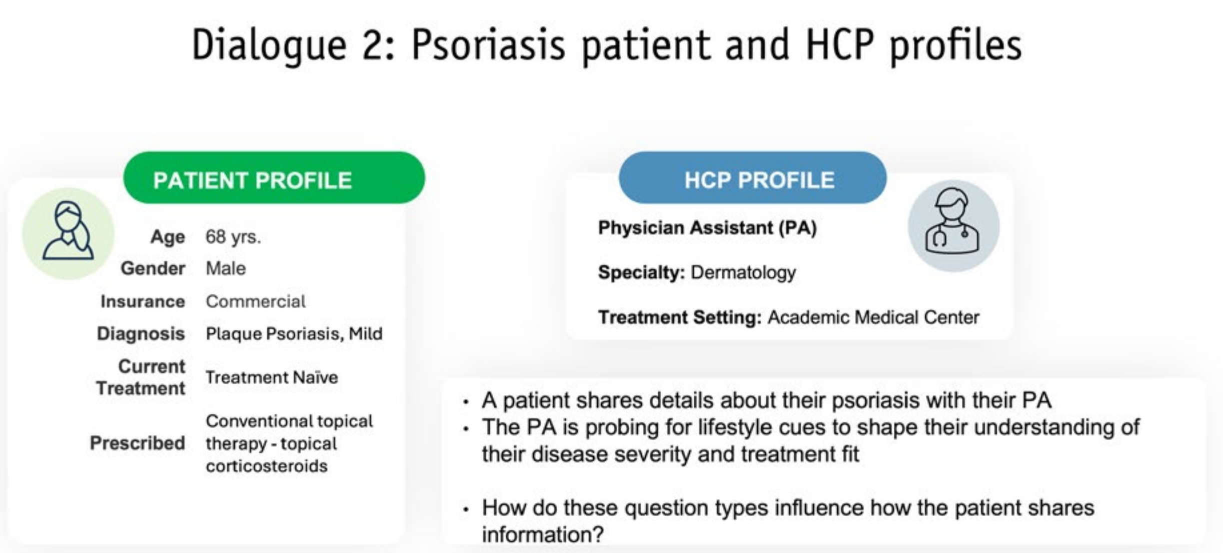
HCP PROFILE

Medical Doctor (MD)

Specialty: Hematology-Oncology

Treatment Setting: Community

- A patient with prostate cancer is sharing details about their treatment experience with Nubeqa
- The oncologist is probing for compliance and efficacy, largely with targeted questions



Dialogue 2: Psoriasis patient and HCP profiles

PATIENT PROFILE

Age	68 yrs.
Gender	Male
Insurance	Commercial
Diagnosis	Plaque Psoriasis, Mild
Current Treatment	Treatment Naïve
Prescribed	Conventional topical therapy - topical corticosteroids

HCP PROFILE

Physician Assistant (PA)

Specialty: Dermatology

Treatment Setting: Academic Medical Center

- A patient shares details about their psoriasis with their PA
- The PA is probing for lifestyle cues to shape their understanding of their disease severity and treatment fit
- How do these question types influence how the patient shares information?

Figure 3

food. So you're saying that you have not noticed any side effects so far?

Patient: No, no.

MD: Okay, that's amazing. That's very good, that's very, very good. So are you able to concentrate, you know, as usual and work as usual?

Patient: Yes.

MD: Do you feel tired or no?

Patient: Not really, I feel better. I feel like I have more energy.

MD: You feel better? Oh, Okay.

The team's analysis

The HCP shares the context behind his questioning and normalizes any patient-made mistakes such as forgetting to take it with food. He then goes on to relate potential side effects to what he knows about the patient. The HCP continues to use closed-ended questions for most of this discussion but was able to get the patient to open up. Notice that the HCP is quite interrogative and it is possible that continued probing on the same point may feel pushy to a patient. In addition, the HCP makes assumptions that were more difficult to objectively verify, such as asking about his ability to concentrate at work.

Looking at the patient's part of the conversation, the patient does not give the HCP much to work with, saying "I don't have any problems," which closes the conversation off. This could have been an opportunity for the HCP to insert some broader and open-ended questions such as "Describe for me how and when you're taking the medication." While this may seem challenging given typically short appointment times, the HCP could likely have elicited more detail in a shorter time with open questions and better understood the patient's experiences.

Dialogue 2: Psoriasis patient

The second conversation features a 68-year-old male with psoriasis (treatment-naïve), meeting with a physician assistant (see Figure 3 for details about the HCP and patient).

Physician assistant (PA): So, tell me what bothers you about your psoriasis? I see it on your head, do you have it anywhere else?

Patient: Yeah, it's really bad on the head right now if you look. And then, if you look at my nails on my hands, you can see it on both hands. It's just bothering the heck out of me.

PA: Okay. Have you tried anything? Does the doctor give you anything to put on it?

Patient: They tried to put me on some oral medication that works in my whole body but I'm not a big fan of that.

PA: I understand. Do you have any stiffness in your hands? I see the nails here as I'm looking, do you have any stiffness when you wake up in the morning?

Patient: Yeah, a little bit.

PA: Does it last more than an hour or less than an hour?

Patient: Less than an hour.

PA: Once you get moving, it's okay?

Patient: Yeah, definitely.

PA: Okay. Tell me about the shampoo that you have used for your scalp, has anything helped?

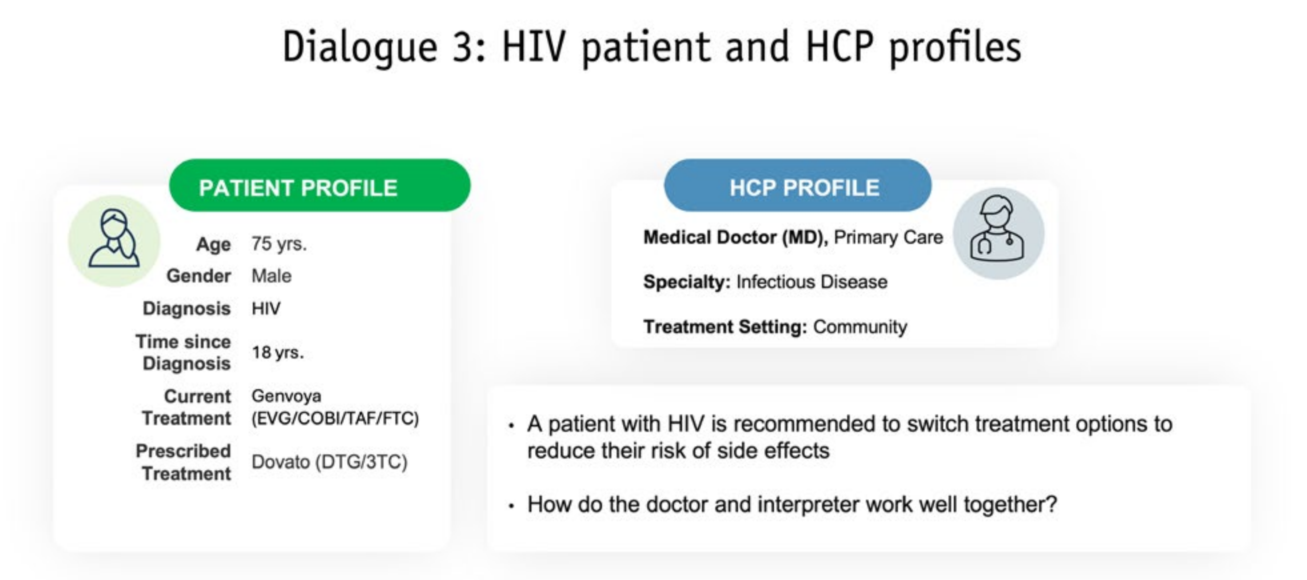
Patient: Not so much, but you know what I want to ask you like you could suggest any creams or anything that I could use. I really don't want to get on more pills at this point in my life.

PA: I understand.

The team's analysis

Immediately, the PA starts with open-ended questions to get a sense of what the patient is experiencing. After that, however, the PA uses closed-ended questions to obtain targeted information before reversing course and opening up the conversation to ask about past treatments. The PA's questions are mostly surface-oriented, asked in rapid-fire sequence and related to history-taking. There are opportunities for the PA to utilize more observational techniques and to probe more in-depth into the patient's experiences and to gain understanding of the patient's hesitation to use oral medication to treat. The patient, ultimately, does not get their needs met; the PA offers no solution.

Dialogue 3: HIV patient with an interpreter



Dialogue 3: HIV patient and HCP profiles

PATIENT PROFILE

Age	75 yrs.
Gender	Male
Diagnosis	HIV
Time since Diagnosis	18 yrs.
Current Treatment	Genvoya (EVG/COBI/TAF/FTC)
Prescribed Treatment	Dovato (DTG/3TC)

HCP PROFILE

Medical Doctor (MD), Primary Care

Specialty: Infectious Disease

Treatment Setting: Community

- A patient with HIV is recommended to switch treatment options to reduce their risk of side effects
- How do the doctor and interpreter work well together?

Figure 4

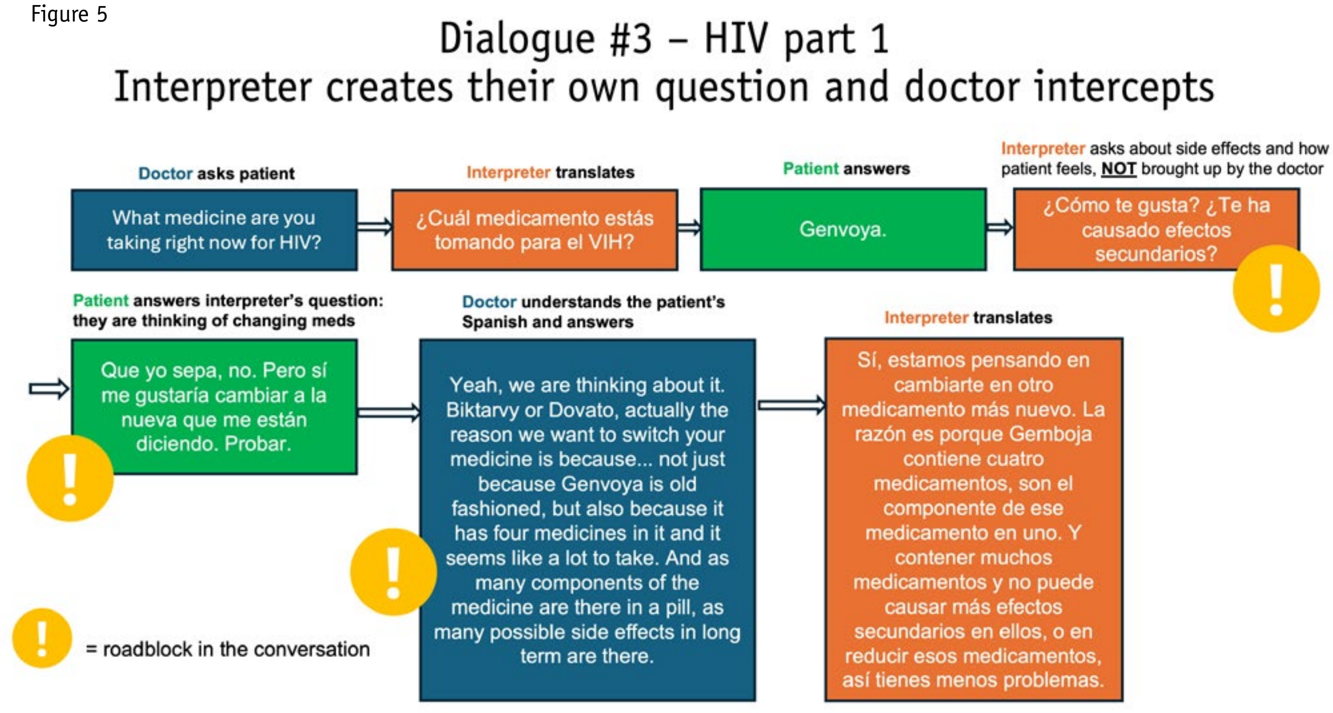
In the third example, there is a three-way conversation involving an HCP, an interpreter and a patient. This conversation captures a discussion with a 75-year-old non-English-speaking patient who has had HIV for 18 years (see Figure 4 for details about the HCP and patient). The patient has been treated with Genvoya for a while and is having a regular check-in with his HCP. Given the complexity of the dialogue, we break it into four parts.

PART 1: INTERPRETER CREATES THEIR OWN QUESTION AND HCP INTERCEPTS

The team's analysis

In this conversation (Figure 5), the HCP introduces a few new treatment options and explains the rationale for suggesting a switch. The interpreter does a good job at capturing most of the context without modifying it much and the HCP does well to pause frequently enough to allow the conversation to flow appropriately. The conversation is significantly slower than the other two HCP-patient dialogue examples (and takes twice as long to cover the same amount of information). The HCP also does well, pausing at the end of each segment and checking in with the patient. However, there are some areas where one of the parties in the conversation creates a roadblock. For example, the interpreter asks about side effects and how the patient feels, which is not initiated by the HCP; consequently, the patient answers the interpreter's question. The HCP understands the Spanish and intercepts the discussion.

Figure 5



Dialogue #3 – HIV part 1
Interpreter creates their own question and doctor intercepts

Doctor asks patient

What medicine are you taking right now for HIV?

Interpreter translates

¿Cuál medicamento estás tomando para el VIH?

Patient answers

Genvoya.

Interpreter asks about side effects and how patient feels, NOT brought up by the doctor

¿Cómo te gusta? ¿Te ha causado efectos secundarios?

Patient answers interpreter's question: they are thinking of changing meds

Que yo sepa, no. Pero sí me gustaría cambiar a la nueva que me están diciendo. Probar.

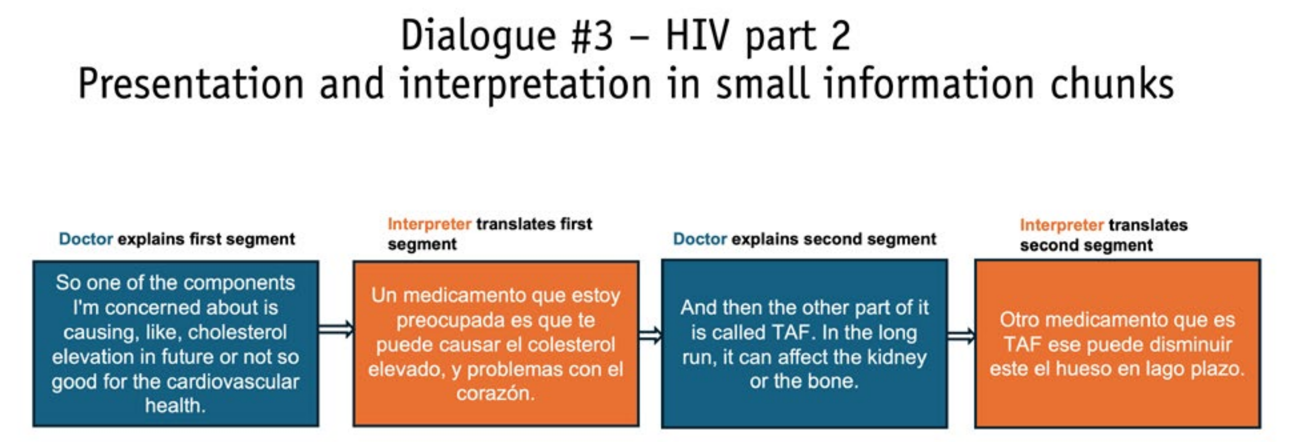
Doctor understands the patient's Spanish and answers

Yeah, we are thinking about it. Biktarvy or Dovato, actually the reason we want to switch your medicine is because... not just because Genvoya is old fashioned, but also because it has four medicines in it and it seems like a lot to take. And as many components of the medicine are there in a pill, as many possible side effects in long term are there.

Interpreter translates

Sí, estamos pensando en cambiarte en otro medicamento más nuevo. La razón es porque Gemboja contiene cuatro medicamentos, son el componente de ese medicamento en uno. Y contener muchos medicamentos y no puede causar más efectos secundarios en ellos, o en reducir esos medicamentos, así tienes menos problemas.

! = roadblock in the conversation



Dialogue #3 – HIV part 2
Presentation and interpretation in small information chunks

Doctor explains first segment: So one of the components I'm concerned about is causing, like, cholesterol elevation in future or not so good for the cardiovascular health.

Interpreter translates first segment: Un medicamento que estoy preocupada es que te puede causar el colesterol elevado, y problemas con el corazón.

Doctor explains second segment: And then the other part of it is called TAF. In the long run, it can affect the kidney or the bone.

Interpreter translates second segment: Otro medicamento que es TAF ese puede disminuir este el hueso en lago plazo.

Figure 6

PART 2: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION IN SMALL INFORMATION CHUNKS

The team's analysis

This approach (Figure 6) is great for working with an interpreter. It provides small information snippets ("chunking"). However, chunks that are too big are often not shared word-for-word, not always translated properly and thus are not effective.

PART 3: PATIENT DOESN'T UNDERSTAND AND INTERPRETER TRANSLATES INCORRECTLY

The team's analysis

This (Figure 7) is a quintessential example of an HCP effectively using teach-back ("What do you understand so far?"). Since the patient does not understand the bone loss component associated with the drug, the HCP explains it in more detail; however, the interpreter translates the HCP's comments incorrectly.

PART 4: HCP TRANSLATES ON THEIR OWN

The team's analysis

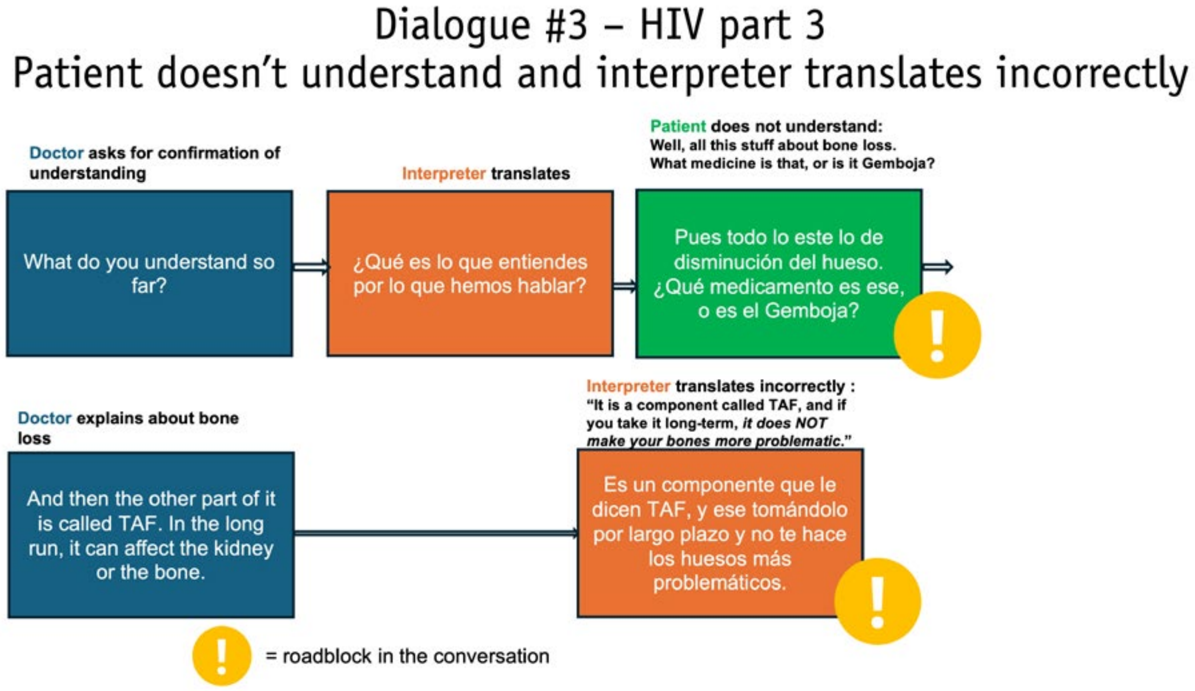
Because the HCP understands Spanish (Figure 8), they translate the patient's response on their own, with the interpreter then translating the HCP's response.

Recommendations

In a health care setting, time is limited, urgent and chronic issues are presented and the patient's emotional state may be heightened. Meanwhile, the HCP needs to be calm, clear and decisive. To achieve the best health care outcomes, the HCP-patient dialogue should:

- Use broader, open-ended questions strategically.
- Avoid using surface-oriented, closed-ended questions that can come across as a rapid-fire approach to capturing patient history.
- Use probing questions that invite a detailed, engaging response from the patient.

Figure 7



Dialogue #3 – HIV part 3
Patient doesn't understand and interpreter translates incorrectly

Doctor asks for confirmation of understanding: What do you understand so far?

Interpreter translates: ¿Qué es lo que entiendes por lo que hemos hablar?

Patient does not understand: Well, all this stuff about bone loss. What medicine is that, or is it Gemboja?

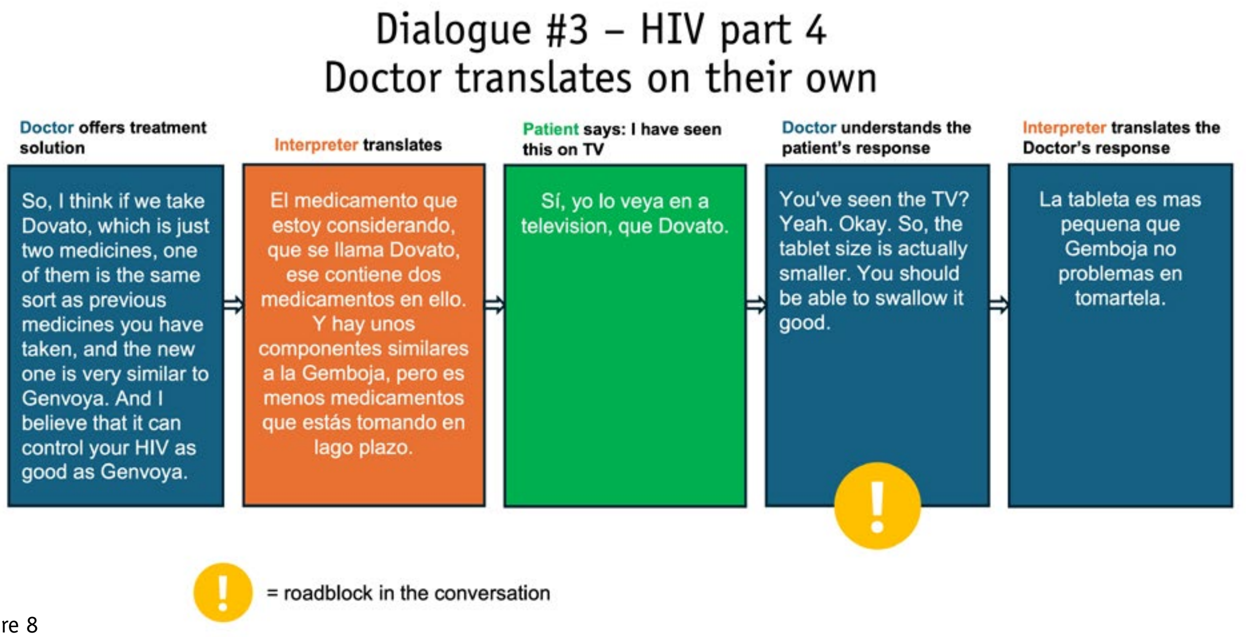
Pues todo lo este lo de disminución del hueso. ¿Qué medicamento es ese, o es el Gemboja?

Doctor explains about bone loss: And then the other part of it is called TAF. In the long run, it can affect the kidney or the bone.

Interpreter translates incorrectly : "It is a component called TAF, and if you take it long-term, *it does NOT make your bones more problematic.*"

Es un componente que le dicen TAF, y ese tomándolo por largo plazo y no te hace los huesos más problemáticos.

! = roadblock in the conversation



Dialogue #3 – HIV part 4
Doctor translates on their own

Doctor offers treatment solution

So, I think if we take Dovato, which is just two medicines, one of them is the same sort as previous medicines you have taken, and the new one is very similar to Genvoya. And I believe that it can control your HIV as good as Genvoya.

⇒

Interpreter translates

El medicamento que estoy considerando, que se llama Dovato, ese contiene dos medicamentos en ello. Y hay unos componentes similares a la Gemboja, pero es menos medicamentos que estás tomando en lago plazo.

⇒

Patient says: I have seen this on TV

Sí, yo lo veya en a television, que Dovato.

⇒

Doctor understands the patient's response

You've seen the TV? Yeah. Okay. So, the tablet size is actually smaller. You should be able to swallow it good.

❗

⇒

Interpreter translates the Doctor's response

La tableta es mas pequena que Gemboja no problemas en tomartela.

❗ = roadblock in the conversation

Figure 8

- Use observational techniques to aid in deeper probing.
- Use teach-back methods to ensure the patient's understanding.
- When working with an interpreter, "chunk" information into smaller communication building blocks so that the three-way conversation is clear and reflects what the patient and HCP are trying to convey, with a clear endpoint in mind that results in optimal understanding of the situation and next steps for treatment.

Enhance the impact

Based on our research in health literacy and the HCP-patient dialogue, we have suggestions for the health care industry to help enhance the impact of the HCP-patient dialogue.

Health care providers

- Make efforts to see the whole person and meet them where they are physically/emotionally/mentally.
- Consider the patient journey pain points and touchpoints.
- Use open-ended and probing questions to elicit deeper sharing.
- Practice "teach-back/show me" techniques to confirm full comprehension

Pharmaceutical manufacturers

- Lead the industry promoting the use of CHC principles across all health communications including product advertising/marketing messages, clinical trial communications and in sales force training.
- Commission research to understand nuances of communication around their specific treatments/conditions and use the findings to create materials to support effective conversations. These may include unbranded quizzes and information to provide patients with effective language to describe symptoms, "how to talk to your doctor" materials and key communication points for HCPs that include common patient language and clear terminology to use in discussions.

Insights agencies

- Incorporate CHC principles into market research projects with a focus on understanding the HCP-patient dialogue.
- Understand emotional barriers and drivers associated with uncomfortable or embarrassing conversation topics and provide effective tips for initiating those discussions and maintaining their intended flow.
- Recognize and retrieve patient-friendly language (mirroring words, themes, values, analogies) from research for providers; include a lexicon.
- Build tip sheets for talking to patients and "how to talk to your HCP" resources (such as, "10 topics to discuss with your HCP during your next visit").

Tom Donnelly is senior vice president of iMarketResearch. He can be reached at tom.donnelly@thinkimr.com. Vincent Valant is product manager at ZoomRx. He can be reached at vincent.valant@zoomrx.com. Barbara Haimowitz is president of The DataMine Inc. She can be reached at barbanalysis1@gmail.com. Derek McCracken is co-founder of Narrative Mindworks. He can be reached at derek.mccracken@narrativemindworks.org. Sara Bell is senior manager at ZoomRx. She can be reached at sara.bell@zoomrx.com. Julie Leonard is vice president of qualitative research at MarketVision Research. She can be reached at jleonard@marketvisionresearch.com. Peter Simpson is managing partner at Sarasota Ventures. He can be reached at peter.simpson@sarasotaventures.com.

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Respondents aren’t disposable – and they know it

Repairing the research relationship with health care providers

| By Jason Freeman

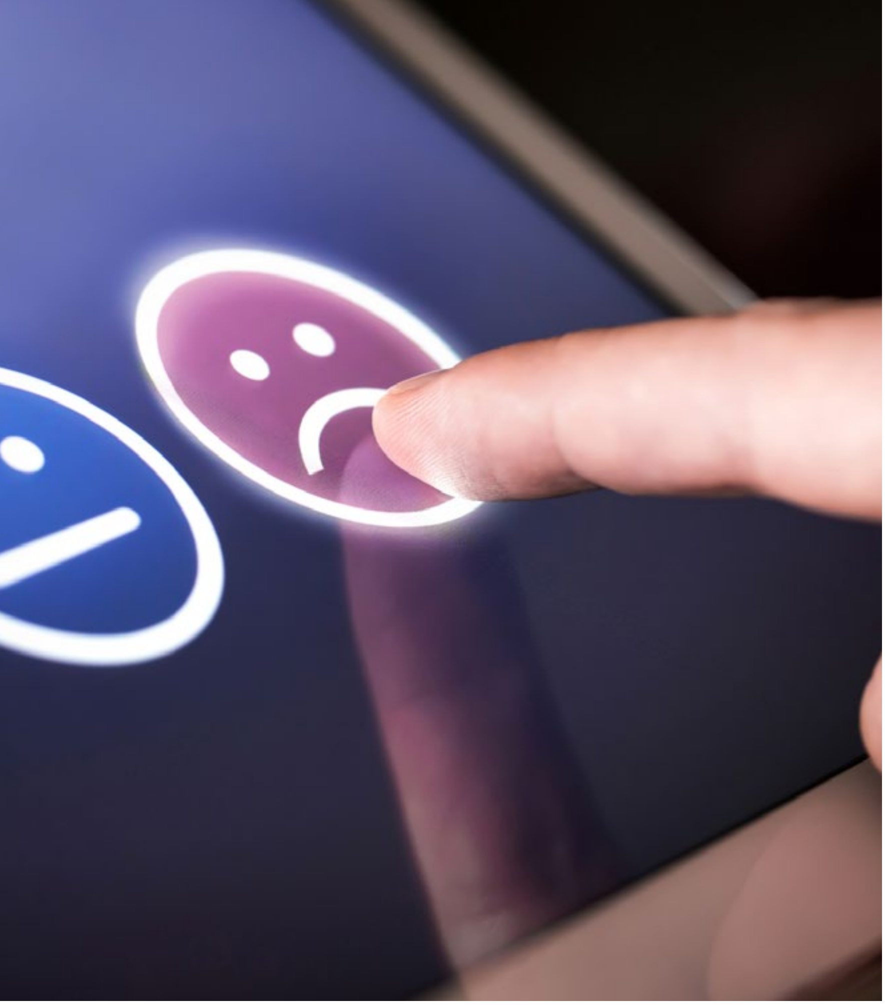
abstract

Online complaints reveal what’s pushing health care professionals away from surveys and what we can do to win them back. Here are five standards to commit to today.

During my two decades in the health care market research industry, it’s become harder and more expensive to recruit studies. A common culprit I hear discussed over and over at conferences and at meeting tables is respondent attrition. Fewer and fewer health care providers are participating in market research. So it’s not surprising that we’re increasingly seeing projects not delivered in full, delivered well past fielding timelines and/or blowing budgets in order to eke out those last completes. ATUs have become especially challenging, with studies getting fewer completes from the same list with each successive wave. And of course, low participation rates are especially problematic for research in hard-to-reach therapeutic areas with already tiny provider universes.

But why are we losing so many potential respondents? My company recently conducted an informal review of public Reddit and Quora comments posted by HCPs about health care market research – the results weren’t pretty. Of the 185 total comments we found, nearly half (86) were complaints, with many providers concluding that surveys were just “not worth” their time. Maybe worse, they were warning others not to participate, commonly citing payment issues, unfair screeners, bad communication and generally poor treatment by panel companies. Clearly, as an industry, we are (mis) treating our respondents like they’re disposable; they feel we don’t value their time or appreciate their efforts. So it’s no wonder that they’re walking away from market research and advising their friends and colleagues to do the same.

Negative respondent experiences are an important but often overlooked cause of declining HCP participation and it’s a problem we can solve. I founded my panel company three years ago knowing that I wanted to address some of my frustrations with how our industry treats respondents. Not only did this feel like the right thing to do, I also hoped that it might combat some of the challenges with recruitment that our industry was experienc-



ing. My model was based on a very simple principle – the golden rule: Treat respondents like we would like to be treated, even if that sometimes meant increasing incentives or extra work on our end. But I didn't know if the model would work. Would it really improve panel engagement and participation? Would it cost too much to be viable?

What I've found is that treating our panelists like they're as important as our clients pays off. It's vastly expanded who we can access and increased participation rates, without increasing overall costs. I know there is often a lot of pressure on market research companies to get leaner, so it might seem like investing in recruiting and retaining respondents is unrealistic. But I would argue that it's essential. If we want our studies to remain feasible, as an industry we have to double down on the respondent experience (and it doesn't have to break the bank). Whether you run your own panel or hire companies that do (or both), we need to work together to develop and adhere to standards that prioritize respondents. Below, I argue for five standards we need to set across the industry, including why they're so important and how they work in practice.

Standard #1: Make payments transparent and immediate

What HCPs are saying. In our review of public online comments about health care market research, problems with getting paid were some of the most common. One HCP wrote, "The surveys are legit but sometimes you have to e-mail them to get payment." Another said, "I've completed several surveys and I haven't been paid for them. It's frustrating to feel like I'm just donating my time." These sentiments were echoed again and again.

Current industry standards. Unfortunately, when respondents complete a survey, they often have to jump through hoops to get paid. Currently, our industry's standard payment model is to require at least one additional step beyond survey completion. Payments are rarely immediate or automatic and the process can be opaque. Redemption accounts are common, including redemption thresholds that withhold payment until respondents have completed enough surveys. Some companies may even "find money" by removing funds from a redemption account if a respondent has not remained active with them. In addition, payments are often delayed for weeks or even months after a survey.

Rethinking it. Instead of incentivizing health care providers to participate in studies, this payment model almost seems designed to disincentivize them. We need to think of respondents like employees. This is a side gig that they are doing for us. If you had a job with a company that withheld payment, would you keep showing up for work? Probably not. By the same token, why would you participate in a follow-up survey if you still haven't been paid for the first?

Recommendations. Our industry needs to adopt an alternative model: 1) be clear about how and when HCPs will be paid; 2) make payments automatic, with no additional steps beyond completing the survey; 3) pay for each survey as it's completed instead of using redemption accounts; 4) if possible, use instant services, like Venmo or PayPal, to provide payment immediately upon survey completion. (I recognize that this fourth step may require some upfront investment by panel companies, but in my experience, that investment pays off quickly.)

Standard #2: Pay termination fees (they're not as expensive as you think)

What HCPs are saying. We all know that our industry rarely pays respondents for their time if they terminate during a screener. But getting disqualified from studies without being compensated or shown appreciation may be one of the most common reasons that HCPs stop taking surveys. One provider complained online, "What made me stop completely was when they would ask 15 minutes' worth of questions about your practice, then tell you you were ineligible." Or consider this complaint: "I never qualify after answering a million prescreen questions. It's infuriating and I've mostly stopped responding."

Current industry standards. Part of our industry's pitch to HCPs is that they have valuable opinions that can help us improve patient outcomes. But then, when they're disqualified after a sometimes-lengthy screening process, we turn around and tell them that we actually don't want their opinions after all. Some may be experts in their field – heck, they could have invented the therapy for a condition – but then disqualify because they didn't treat enough patients last year. This can be incredibly frustrating for them, so when we don't at least compensate them for their time and effort on a screener, it's unsurprising that they feel disrespected and unappreciated.

Rethinking it. Let's consider again: How would we think about this if our respondents were our employees? Imagine asking an employee to show up for an extra shift (especially one they don't really need!) and putting them to work for 10 to 15 minutes, only to tell them that they actually aren't required and won't be compensated for their time. Who would want to work for a company like that? No employer would retain good workers if they did business that way. We can't expect to either.

Recommendations. Our industry's payment model should include termination fees, even if it is only a token amount. My company pays $5 (sometimes more for especially long or complex screeners). It's not just about dollars and cents; it's about expressing our gratitude and saying, "We value your time and genuinely appreciate your effort, so here's a coffee on us." Even more important, our industry should always make over-quota payments. If a respondent is terminated from a survey before reaching the end because the quota was reached, that person must be paid in full.

I commonly hear that termination fees are a good idea but that they're too expensive. But I've found that this doesn't have to be the case. My company bakes the fees into our pricing model by not charging honorarium processing fees or project minimum fees, for example. We find that discounting in other ways pays off in the end, both for panelists and for us. If our industry wants to retain respondents, such as respondents who may have terminated in early waves of an ATU but might not in subsequent waves, then we must show that we value their time and effort, regardless of whether they qualify.

Standard #3: Offer fair compensation

What HCPs are saying. Another common complaint among HCPs online is that compensation for surveys is not worth the time and effort. One provider wrote, "When I have qualified, it's been a lame amount of money … not worth it." Another said, "It's not worth it for a $50 Amazon gift card."

Current industry standards. Standard practice in our industry is to set honoraria as low as possible. Then, they are raised only when the incidence rate is low or there's a mad rush for last-minute completes. But cheaper is not always better.

Rethinking it. Any employer looking for expert talent will tell you, you won't find it without offering a competitive salary.

Recommendations. Respondents often know that they are high-value targets. They may be KOLs in their field or work in rare specialties or do procedures that are particularly high-paying. So let's set compensation that fits the situation and actually incentivize them to participate. I recommend that our industry set honoraria as close as possible to HCPs' hourly rate from the start of a study, rather than waiting to increase payment until respondents have decided that not only this study but all studies are not worth their time. We can determine fair compensation by using Medical Group Management Association data for accurate information about how much physicians are paid. Compensating fairly isn't a luxury; it's a necessity if we want to retain respondents.

Standard #4: Create a positive, user-friendly survey-taking experience

What HCPs are saying. The three standards I recommend above center on compensation but this is just one side of the equation. Survey design is an often-overlooked factor in whether HCPs will continue to participate in market research. But complaints online suggest that it may play a larger role than our industry has considered. One provider states that, "Questions are often unclear and I'm not sure what they're trying to get at. I think the surveys should be better designed." Another writes: "The surveys can be incredibly long and tedious and I often feel like I'm wasting my time when I have other important work to do."

Current industry standards. In our industry, there is not always a lot of thought put into the user experience. Surveys often include unnecessarily long screeners, screeners that terminate respondents at the end even if they disqualified earlier, time-consuming screener questions (including open-ended questions) that aren't really needed, poor programming or confusing and hard-to-follow question order.

Rethinking it. Again, if we think of our respondents as employees, it's unlikely that they would choose to work in a frustrating or painful environment for long if they have other options available.

Recommendations. Our industry needs to put more time and thought into the survey-taking experience. When testing a survey, my company looks for anything that might be a pain in the butt and then we recommend changes before going to field. Based on panelist feedback, I can say with confidence that they notice and care about what might seem like minor (but often easily implemented) survey adjustments.

My advice:

- use intelligent programming;
- ensure that question flow is logical;
- design a layout that is user-friendly;
- only ask absolutely necessary screener questions;
- avoid open-ended screener questions if at all possible; and
- don't wait until the end of a screener to terminate respondents who disqualified earlier.

If a screener must be long, I suggest paying a little bit extra for the respondent's time. As an additional consideration when designing screeners, I highly recommend our industry begin with screening requirements that are as wide as we're willing to accept, instead of relaxing them as we move through the project. Only about 60% of the time will respondents attempt a survey again if they've already been disqualified the first time.

Standard #5: Provide five-star help-desk support

What HCPs are saying. My final recommendation applies specifically to panel companies like my own. Part of giving respondents a user-friendly experience is making sure we're available to answer questions and address concerns. But consider this online complaint (one of many like it): "They promise compensation for things, then refuse to answer any e-mails. Then when you contact [them] by phone, they feed you some lies and gather more 'information' on you. Then they ignore you some more."

Current industry standards. Judging by both public posts online and private correspondence I've had with respondents, I know that many feel that it can be difficult to get in touch with panel companies and that issues are not resolved (or not in a timely fashion). These concerns are often closely tied with opaque payment processes or poor survey design, both of which I've discussed above. But when these are not addressed upfront, they can cause problems – sometimes in the midst of a study – that need immediate responses.

Rethinking it. Having an unresponsive or unhelpful system for addressing concerns is a bit like not having a functioning HR department. No sizeable company can retain employees without one. Similarly, panel companies should maintain a first-rate help desk to retain respondents and address concerns that come up in the midst of surveys. After all, if you're halfway through a survey, have an issue and then can't get in touch with anyone about it, will you come back and finish it days later, when you finally get support? In many cases, the answer is no.

Recommendations. Instead, panel companies should commit themselves to five-star help-desk support for respondents. This means clearing all help-desk tickets as soon as possible or within 24 hours and setting system alerts to detect problems before even getting a complaint. That way, if someone is kicked out of a study for being over quota or is flagged by a client for potential removal, we can be proactive about reaching out to respondents. And if we can't resolve a problem for them, we're sure to pay them for the time they've put in.

It matters how the sausage gets made

I've found that by adhering to the five standards outlined above, my company has expanded our reach, with high respondent participation, all while staying within budget. And there's a less obvious benefit to treating people right: quality. Our respondents are more engaged, with negligible removal rates, because they are less likely to speed, quit partway through the survey or give lazy open-ended answers. We're also seeing growth instead of attrition on our panel, with providers returning e-mail invites thanking us for the opportunity and referring friends and colleagues to us.

We all know the saying (and the subject of many memes), "You don't want to know how your sausage gets made." If we're getting the n-size we need at the budget we want, it's easy to avoid thinking too hard about what's going into the final product. But when the quality of that product is eroding and we're not fully recruiting studies anymore, we all need to care about what's going into our sausage. This means having standards and processes for how we treat our respondents and hiring vendors who adhere to them.

It might only take one bad experience for someone to decide they won't participate in market research anymore. And it only takes one bad review (whether online or via word of mouth) to turn off dozens more potential participants. But it's possible to remodel our industry so we're not only retaining respondents, we're attracting more of the 95% of HCPs who currently don't participate in market research at all. To me, that figure suggests a huge opportunity to grow.

As an industry, we need to shift gears. In my experience, whether you are a panel company or a full-service market research agency, whether you are recruiting respondents, designing surveys and screeners or setting honoraria (or hiring companies that do), we all need to come together to ensure that the standards above are implemented across the board. Not only do we have a responsibility to our respondents to treat them as we would want to be treated, we have an obligation to our industry to keep our studies viable. We need to start caring how our sausage is made and do something about it.

Jason Freeman is founder/CEO of Enos. He can be reached at jason.freeman@enosanswers.com.

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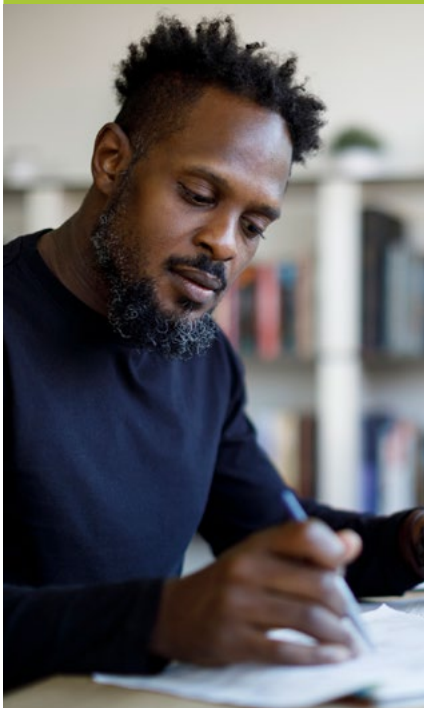

••• the business of research

Put data quality at the core

Building resilient research marketplaces through trust and safety

| By James Snyder

abstract

Learn why proactive, cross-functional fraud prevention is essential in today's research ecosystem and how the right people, tools and culture can prevent wasted budgets, reputational damage and flawed business decisions.

In today's research ecosystem, the stakes for data quality have never been higher. As digital methodologies scale and evolve, so do the risks from online survey fraud, compromising data quality. Bot activity, survey manipulation, biased sampling and increasingly sophisticated forms of fraud have made trust and safety no longer optional but essential. The platforms, partners and practitioners who succeed in this new environment are those who embed quality not as a one-time check but as a living, breathing principle that guides how teams operate and collaborate.

There's a tendency to think of fraud as a fringe issue, something that can be addressed with stronger tools or better audits. But in reality, fraud and data integrity failures are systemic. They exploit gaps in communication, process design and incentives. And as research becomes more programmatic, more automated and more dependent on data flowing across multiple layers of vendors and platforms, those gaps multiply.

In this context, traditional quality-control measures are no longer sufficient. Spot-checking results after the fact or relying on historical benchmarks to validate sample integrity can create a false sense of security. The challenge now is to build systems and cultures that assume fraud is inevitable and that are designed to catch it before it causes harm.

Reactive to proactive

One of the biggest shifts I've seen in successful trust and safety practices is the move from reactive to proactive. Historically, many research teams treated quality as a final step, a box to check before delivering data to a client. But that approach is fundamentally misaligned with how today's fraudsters operate. To be effective, trust and safety must

be embedded upstream – in how sample is sourced, how platforms are architected and how data flows are monitored in real time.

This requires building cross-functional workflows that enable early detection. For example, operational teams need clear processes for flagging anomalies and escalating concerns. Engineering teams need visibility into how users interact with systems, not just from a product standpoint but from a behavioral and integrity perspective. And client-facing teams need to be empowered to explain quality trade-offs and mitigation strategies transparently.

It also means investing in tooling and data architecture that allow for more granular insight. For example, centralized identity graphs or real-time traffic validation tools can surface patterns that fragmented systems often miss. When tools, vendors and workflows are disconnected, it becomes exponentially harder to detect early signals of fraud. To be effective, data needs to be clean, connected and centralized, not manually reconciled across silos.

Buy-in from every part

Operational changes will only take you so far if your organizational culture treats quality as someone else's job. One common barrier I see is the siloing of trust and safety work and relegating it to compliance, legal or operations. But building a resilient research ecosystem requires buy-in from every group in the organization.

Quality should be part of the way sales talks about value. It should influence how product managers prioritize features. It should be top of mind when customer success teams are navigating tough client conversations. And it should be celebrated when teams catch something early that prevents a downstream issue, not treated as a disruption or delay.

Fostering this mind-set takes more than a mandate. It takes leadership that's willing to model transparency and accountability. It takes cross-team communication that goes beyond issue escalation and into knowledge sharing. And it takes a willingness to treat quality as a core value, even when it means making hard choices, like rejecting easy revenue or extending timelines to get things right.

A recurring theme in my work has been the realization that data quality can't be retrofitted. Once bad data enters a system, it's almost impossible to unwind the consequences. It may lead to flawed strategic decisions, biased product development or wasted media spend. And often, the reputational damage – to researchers, platforms or clients – is far greater than the short-term gains from cutting corners.

That's why prevention is so much more powerful than correction. Catching a botnet before it skews a tracker or intercepting a fraudulent sample before it reaches a client's dashboard can save not just time and money but trust – in your platform, your people and in the research itself.

Building prevention into workflows means rethinking how performance is measured. Instead of just focusing on volume or speed, teams should also be rewarded for raising quality concerns, flagging anomalies and taking the time to investigate. These behaviors need to be seen as a sign of maturity not inefficiency.

Consequences are very real

One of the reasons trust and safety work is often undervalued is because its ROI can be difficult to quantify, especially when it's working. It's easy to measure efficiency gains or cost reductions but harder to account for the value of crises that never materialize or reputations that remain intact. And yet, the financial consequences of compromised quality are very real. Cleaning bad data often means rerunning surveys, reanalyzing results and reassessing vendor relationships – costly steps that drain time, budget and trust. It can also trigger investments in third-party tools

and protective systems to avoid repeat failures. One of the most infamous examples was Coca-Cola's New Coke launch in 1985. Based on flawed taste-test data that failed to consider brand loyalty and emotional connection, the company introduced a new formula that triggered public backlash and cost millions to reverse. The lesson: When quality is compromised, the ripple effects extend far beyond the research team.

> “When our shared goal is protecting the legitimacy of the research industry, our differences become less significant. We all benefit from trustworthy data and we all suffer when it's compromised.”

Low-integrity data doesn't just affect research accuracy, it erodes confidence in business decisions, strains client relationships and creates downstream operational waste. When marketing teams base campaign strategy on flawed insights or when product teams launch features based on skewed user feedback the impact can ripple across quarters. In regulated industries, the stakes are even higher, where bad data can lead to compliance violations or legal exposure.

Understanding these broader consequences can help reframe trust and safety as not just a technical function but a business-critical one. It's not just about preventing fraud, it's about protecting the long-term viability of platforms and the credibility of the insights they produce.

People are at the heart

Too often, when we talk about quality, we focus on tools and frameworks, but people are at the heart of successful trust and safety initiatives. Behind every flag, escalation and early intervention is someone with the right instincts and training to spot anomalies that machines might miss.

That's why recruiting, training and retaining talent in this space is so important. Teams need people who understand both the technical mechanics of data and the human behaviors behind fraud. And they need to feel empowered, with the authority, incentives and support to take action when something doesn't look right.

Upskilling also plays a critical role. As fraud tactics evolve, so must the strategies used to detect and prevent them. That means investing not just in technology but in continuous learning: workshops, cross-training and knowledge-sharing forums that help teams stay sharp and adaptive. In a world where trust is constantly under attack, human judgment is still one of our most powerful defenses.

Four practices for strengthening marketplace integrity

If there's one thing I've learned, it's that no one has all the answers. But there are a few practices I've seen make a real difference – regardless of company size, platform model or vertical:

Embed fraud detection into platform design. Don't rely on external vendors or post-hoc reviews alone. Build fraud resistance into your product architecture – through traffic validation, behavioral monitoring and rule-based triggers. The earlier fraud is caught, the easier it is to act.

Create feedback loops between teams. Often, the insights needed to improve quality are already within your organization, they're just not being shared. Encourage client-facing teams, data scientists and product engineers to regularly sync on what they're seeing. Cross-pollination surfaces trends faster and helps close blind spots.

Educate and empower clients. Clients are your partners in protecting quality. The more they understand how fraud manifests and what trade-offs exist between speed, cost and integrity, the more constructive and proactive those conversations become. It's not about fear, it's about partnership and clarity.

Design thoughtful, respectful surveys. Buyers, those designing surveys, also play a key role in data quality. While not directly tied to fraud, a strong respondent experience leads to better engagement, more thoughtful answers and, ultimately, cleaner, more reliable data.

Industry-wide collaboration

While individual organizations can do a lot, lasting change requires a broader commitment across the research ecosystem. Fraudsters don't respect company boundaries and neither should our defenses. Sharing tactics, collaborating on standards and advocating for transparency will benefit the entire industry, not just individual players.

That collaboration extends to how we treat competitors as well. I've had some of the most productive conversations about quality with others in the industry, even those from competing organizations. When our shared goal is protecting the legitimacy of the research industry, our differences become less significant. We all benefit from trustworthy data and we all suffer when it's compromised.

As research becomes more automated, more dynamic and more deeply embedded in how decisions are made, the importance of trust and safety will only grow. We can't afford to think of it as a support function or a cost center. It's a strategic imperative, one that touches every part of the value chain.

The organizations that thrive in the years ahead will be those that understand this and act accordingly. They'll treat quality as a competitive advantage, not just a requirement. They'll build systems that are resilient by design. And they'll foster cultures where doing things the right way is the default, not the exception.

Trust and safety isn't a checkbox. It's a commitment. One we make every day, in how we build, how we respond and how we lead.

James Snyder is vice president, trust and safety at Cint. He can be reached at james.snyder@cint.com.

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••• ai and marketing research

Avoid the AI echo chamber

Turning generic GPTs into game-changing innovation

| By Eric Tayce

abstract

Learn how to combine proprietary insights, strategic frameworks and AI's efficiency to create an innovation advantage your competitors can't match.

The internet democratized information. And misinformation.

Now AI is democratizing thinking. Or at least a confidently mundane, poignantly unoriginal substitute for thinking. And as AI inevitably trickles into the realm of ideation and innovation, we face a disconcerting reality: AI is so adept at making the status quo sound good, we don't feel compelled to push beyond it. Thus, the line between hackneyed drivel and insightful ingenuity has become dangerously thin – because AI so deftly retorts, recycles and recreates established norms.

For instance, feed ChatGPT a prompt about snack innovation and you'll get ideas remarkably similar to what your competitors generated yesterday. Ask it to explore trends and you'll receive the same recycled insights available to every brand manager with an internet connection.

But the problem isn't the technology. It's that AI models trained on publicly available data can only recombine what already exists. When inputs aren't grounded in something unique, you don't get innovation, you get noise.

The solution? Supercharge AI with what only you know.

Roles and limitations

Before we discuss how to make AI genuinely innovative, we need to define the role that AI can (and should) play in the innovation process. The secret isn't just knowing when to use AI – it's knowing how much creative freedom to give it at each step.

Imagine AI as a dial with three clear settings:

Assistant: Perfect for executing specific tasks like reformatting data, generating variations of existing concepts or creating visuals from clear briefs. For instance, AI can quickly churn out dozens of

social media post variations from a single idea, saving human teams hours of tedious work.

Collaborator: Becomes your thought partner, spotting patterns in complex data, finding hidden connections and helping frame strategic challenges. An example here might include using AI to analyze thousands of customer feedback comments to uncover hidden pain points.

Co-creator: Takes the reins to suggest new solutions, mix concepts unexpectedly and explore beyond typical boundaries. Imagine AI suggesting entirely new product categories by combining seemingly unrelated market trends, such as sustainable materials and tech-enhanced apparel.

Teams that succeed don't just pick one setting. They continuously adjust the dial, aligning AI's level of creativity with each task's demands (Figure 1). This dynamic approach ensures maximum value from both human intuition and AI efficiency.

However, clear guardrails are essential. Risks range from data privacy issues and bias propagation to generating ideas that sound impressive but aren't commercially viable. For example, AI might suggest a product concept that's compelling but impossible due to regulatory constraints or technological limitations. Setting up thoughtful boundaries makes these risks manageable and strengthens your overall innovation process.

The 3 Cs: coverage, curation, context

At their heart, AI tools like LLMs are stochastic models – they generate outputs by predicting what should come next based on patterns in their training data. In other words, they're extraordinarily fancy fill-in-the-blank machines.

This foundational fact carries profound implications for innovation teams: the uniqueness and quality of what comes out is mathematically limited by what goes in. Feed it generic prompts, you get predictable outputs based on established ideas and known constructs derived from the internet.

But if you fuel it with proprietary insights your competitors cannot access, suddenly you find yourself in an entirely different probability space. This is precisely why strategic rigor matters: without deliberate methodology, even the best AI tools default to generic outputs.

To ensure consistently high-quality results, we have developed a simple but effective three-layer framework – coverage, curation, context – that can transform scattered data into innovation fuel. Each layer serves a critical function in terms of ensuring that your AI inputs lead to impactful outputs. Master all three and you transform AI from a generic idea generator into a precision innovation instrument.

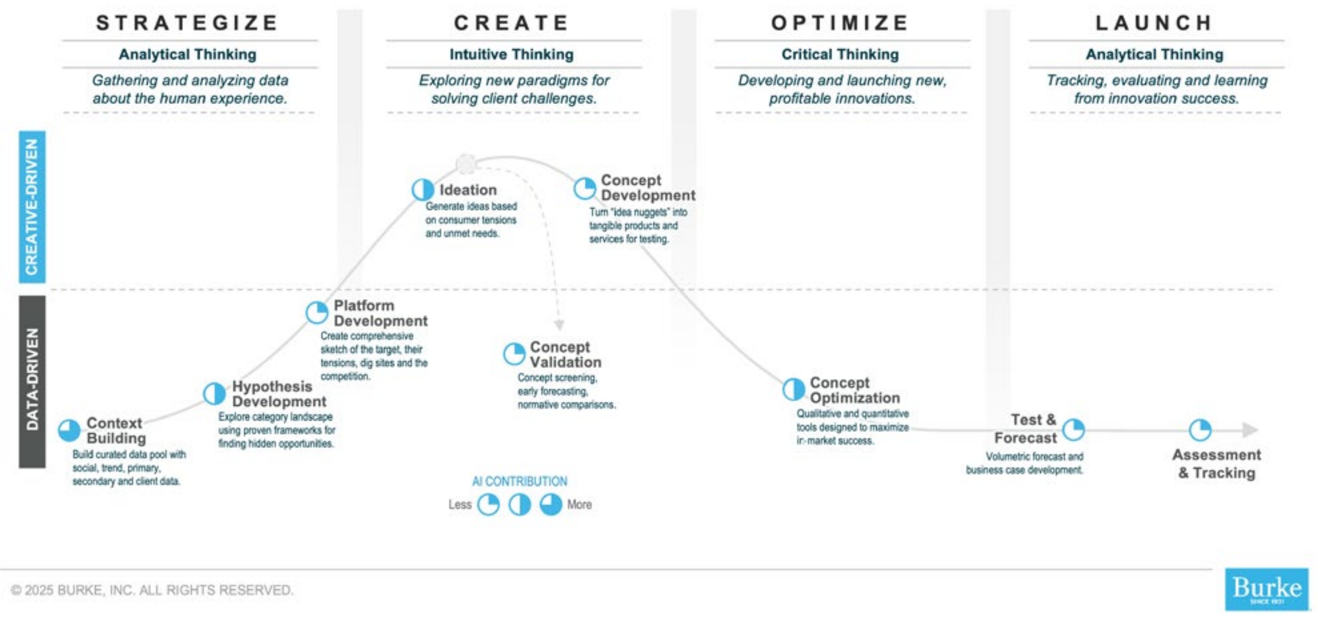
Coverage ensures you're gathering all necessary data to fuel innovation. Start by checking these four data streams:

Consumer research: Quantitative and qualitative insights that reveal not just behaviors but motivations and needs. Consider detailed ethnographic studies or in-depth interviews that expose underlying emotional drivers behind consumer behaviors.

Competitive intelligence: In-depth analysis of competitor products, messaging and market positioning. Here, thorough comparative analysis can uncover overlooked white-space opportunities, like a competitor's failure to address a specific audience segment effectively.

Trend and cultural data: Monitoring conversations, trends, emerging behaviors and cultural shifts. Keeping tabs on niche social platforms or emerging influencers could uncover nascent trends well before they become mainstream.

Figure 1


STRATEGIZE
Analytical Thinking
Gathering and analyzing data about the human experience.
CREATE
Intuitive Thinking
Exploring new paradigms for solving client challenges.
OPTIMIZE
Critical Thinking
Developing and launching new, profitable innovations.
LAUNCH
Analytical Thinking
Tracking, evaluating and learning from innovation success.
CREATIVE-DRIVEN
DATA-DRIVEN
Context Building
Build curated data pool with social, trend, primary, secondary and client data.
Hypothesis Development
Explore category landscape using proven frameworks for finding hidden opportunities.
Platform Development
Create comprehensive sketch of the target, their tensions, dig sites and the competition.
Ideation
Generate ideas based on consumer tensions and unmet needs.
Concept Development
Turn "idea nuggets" into tangible products and services for testing.
Concept Validation
Concept screening, early forecasting, normative comparisons.
Concept Optimization
Qualitative and quantitative tools designed to maximize in-market success.
Test & Forecast
Volumetric forecast and business case development.
Assessment & Tracking
AI CONTRIBUTION
Less
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Technical and operational data: Documenting what's technically feasible, from ingredients to regulations. Being clear-eyed about practical constraints helps avoid wasting resources on appealing yet unfeasible ideas, ensuring all innovative concepts can realistically be executed.

Missing one of the above means feeding AI incomplete information, limiting breakthrough opportunities.

Curation is also critical. More data isn't always better – irrelevant or outdated information can dilute ideas and lead AI toward derivative outcomes while eroding predictive accuracy. Think of it this way: Every redundant survey response, every outdated trend report, every tangentially related data point adds noise to the signal. And this noise doesn't just dilute good ideas, it actively steers AI toward conventional thinking.

Here are some guidelines to effective data curation for AI:

- Start by eliminating duplicate findings across studies.
- Remove research older than 18 months, unless it provides critical historical context.
- Strip out data from non-representative samples or markets you won't enter.
- Focus on robust patterns while noting – but not overweighting – outlier perspectives that might signal early trends.

At the end of the day, feeding AI a curated set of high-signal insights instead of a data dump often means the difference between breakthrough innovation and expensive mediocrity.

Context is all about grounding AI in your market reality, to help it derive relevant strategic direction from real-world insights. Start with an innovation platform – a data-backed framework that gives AI everything it needs to generate useful ideas within established parameters.

Fueled by concrete data as well as strategic intuition, a well-crafted innovation platform should include the following: competitive landscape and category dynamics; the brand's strategic position and unique assets; specific consumer tensions and/or need states; innovation ideas worth exploring; and clear boundaries of where you can and cannot credibly play in the market.

By establishing robust strategic context, you're not asking AI to guess what might work, you're directing it to operate within carefully defined opportunity spaces aligned with your business objectives – all backed by validated insights.

Context also matters in determining how your deliverables will come to life. Understand what each project needs and choose a proven approach that connects strategic intent to AI deployment. For instance, with brand-extension challenges, leveraging AI to perform a brand-stretch analysis may make sense. If you're exploring white-space opportunities, you might use AI to help contextualize consumer need states as jobs to be done.

Document what worked

For every innovation where you enlist the help of AI, it's important to document what worked and what didn't – useful frameworks, successful deliverables, etc. Clearly articulate how, why and if a given solution worked to solve your innovation challenge.

Often, it helps to develop a runbook to track your processes, recording precisely how and why each innovation – and its approach – succeeded (or didn't). This builds institutional memory and turns one-off breakthroughs into repeatable outcomes. For instance, carefully documenting the steps taken when launching a successful new product ensures future teams understand exactly how insights were converted into impactful innovations.

Additionally, it helps to hold collaborative review sessions. Having regular discussions on what's working, what's not and which emerging tools show promise will help teams learn, adapt and grow. Informal – yet structured – check-ins build organizational expertise in both innovation and AI application. They provide a platform for cross-functional learning, helping teams avoid repeating mistakes while leveraging successful strategies.

Balancing speed and rigor

Not every innovation question requires the same precision. Broad exploratory questions – like identifying general barriers or early appeal signals – can remain directional. More significant decisions – like estimating market potential – need greater rigor.

The best practice is progressive validation. Start quick and simple: early-stage AI outputs can be checked using fast qualitative methods or basic heuristics. For example, initial AI-generated product concepts can be evaluated via informal consumer feedback sessions or rapid online surveys.

As ideas solidify, add layers of rigor: use marketing mix modeling, volumetric forecasts and in-market testing to validate and refine. Imagine progressively refining a new beverage concept – initial AI outputs are quickly screened by target consumers, narrowed down and then rigorously validated with quantitative forecasting models before launch.

This tiered approach keeps exploration fast and affordable early on, scaling up validation only as stakes rise.

Turning insight into advantage

Off-the-shelf AI isn't a competitive edge – it's a starting point. The true advantage lies in proprietary insights: uniquely curated data, strategic context and frameworks exclusive to your organization.

When AI is paired with these insights, the result isn't just speed – it's smarter, richer and more relevant innovation. Start small: Map your innovation pipeline clearly, sharpen your inputs, document your processes and pilot one framework at a time.

Share your learnings and build on them. Regular internal showcases of successes – and even productive failures – build a culture of continuous improvement and innovation excellence. The future of innovation isn't just about moving faster. It's about innovating smarter, more consistently and grounding every step in the insights only your organization holds.

Eric Tayce is vice president, corporate innovation at Burke, Inc. He can be reached at eric.tayce@burke.com.

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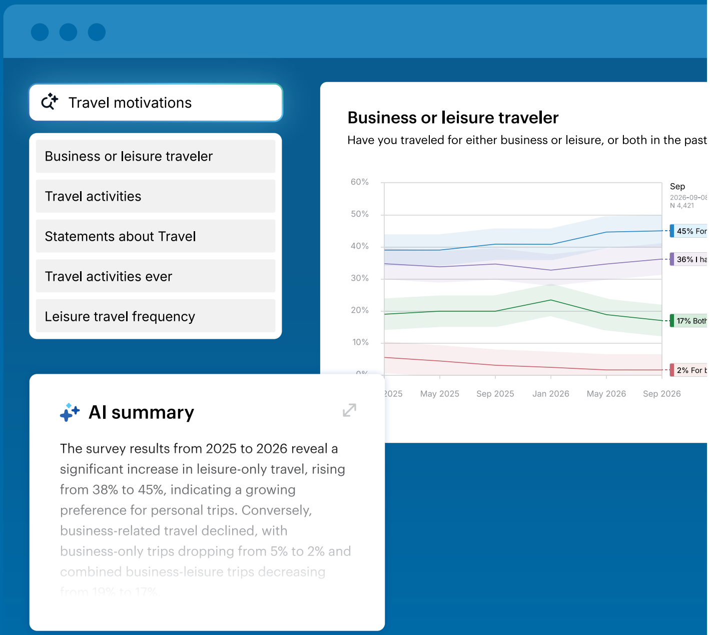

The survey results from 2025 to 2026 reveal a significant increase in leisure-only travel, rising from 38% to 45%, indicating a growing preference for personal trips. Conversely, business-related travel declined, with business-only trips dropping from 5% to 2% and combined business-leisure trips decreasing from 19% to 17%

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The evolution of the insights professional

Equipping you and your organization for what's next

| By Niels Neudecker

abstract

In an era of big data and rapid tech advances, thriving organizations are those that balance speed with strategic activation and amplify the human context behind the numbers.

We're in the middle of a seismic shift in the insights world. Technologies like AI and real-time analytics are defining what's possible. Every day, new tools and platforms emerge that allow us to reach unprecedented levels of precision and scale in our research. Exciting times where possibilities seem endless!

Yet, alongside these developments comes mounting pressure. Economic uncertainty, evolving consumer behaviors and fierce competition increase the demands upon us to do more with less and at a faster pace. The result? Insights teams must now show up as operational and strategic.

A recent 2025 GRIT Insights Practice Report explained this shift further. Driven by both the natural evolution of the field and the rise of new tools – along with greater access to existing ones – the "data enlightenment" sparked by the pandemic has ushered in what the report described as a "strategic consulting renaissance." As a result, consulting has once again become the primary focus within the research and analytics sectors.

Here's the kicker: Amid the race for more data, analytics and automation, insights organizations risk losing the human element of insight, grounded in context, meaning and institutional memory. When this happens, decision-making becomes reactive rather than strategic, missing critical opportunities for innovation.

But there's good news. Through our global brand work, we've pinpointed three pivotal shifts that are transforming the role of the insights professional from data and insights gatherer to proactive driver of change. In this article, we'll show how to harness each of these shifts and offer guidance on how to adapt and thrive in this new landscape.

Shift 1: From DIY to do-it-together

Do-it-yourself (DIY) research models and user-friendly DIY platforms have empowered anyone in an organization to collect data quickly, cost efficiently and independently. More recently, AI has enabled those same individuals to write polished, convincing reports without the need to analyze the underlying data or insights.

But as budget pressures mount and decision timelines shrink, the ease of DIY research can create new risks. When non-experts work alone, insights can lack context, duplicate existing knowledge or, worse, lead to misguided strategies.

The first major shift is a move away from siloed, do-it-yourself research models toward more collaborative, integrated approaches. As time and budget pressures mount, organizations are increasingly looking to leverage existing data assets before commissioning new research. This is not about cutting corners, it's about working smarter.

This shift reflects a broader cultural change: Insights professionals are no longer just report writers, they're strategic partners. By jointly reviewing what is already known – both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective – teams can identify knowledge gaps more effectively and generate hypotheses that guide more targeted, efficient primary research. It's no longer enough to simply hand off a report. Insights professionals must work hand-in-hand with stakeholders to co-create understanding and drive action.

For example, last year we partnered with a U.S. regional hospital system to launch a large-scale qualitative research study to better understand patient experiences in a post-Covid environment. But rather than starting from scratch, we began with a half-day collaborative workshop, bringing together a cross-functional team from the organization to map the landscape. We explored the existing research, surfaced knowledge gaps and generated hypotheses to understand the desired end-state and drill into the human truths we wish we knew about specific aspects of the patient care experience.

By leveraging this existing data, our path to impactful future insights was illuminated. We then completed 50 60-90-minute in-depth interviews, contextualized the full end-to-end patient journey, identified quick-win opportunities and packaged the insights in a way that was turnkey for the organization.

Your new playbook:

- Audit existing data sources before kicking off new research, using AI tools for faster synthesis.
- Organize cross-functional insight workshops to identify knowledge gaps and align priorities.
- Build shared dashboards that blend AI-powered summaries with expert interpretations.

Shift 2: From big data to thick data

Big data has transformed our ability to track and quantify behavior at an unprecedented scale. With powerful analytics, organizations can see what's happening in real time, detect emerging patterns and measure performance with precision. This scale has been essential for optimizing marketing, pricing and operations.

Yet as organizations grow more data-rich, they risk becoming insight-poor. Big data alone can reveal what consumers do but not why they do it. This blind spot can lead to strategies that chase trends without understanding motivations or missing signals of cultural shifts altogether.

Enter thick data.

Thick data combines the scale of big data with the richness of human-centered insight. Thanks to AI-enabled qual-at-scale tools, organizations can now gather thousands of qualitative inputs – selfie videos, chat transcripts, open-ended responses – and process them quickly to reveal emotions, tensions and cultural contexts at scale.

When thick data is layered with contextual market trends and cultural intelligence, it provides a multidimensional view of the landscape. It tells us not just what is happening but why it's happening, how it's evolving and what it might mean for the future. This is the foundation of strategic insight, the kind that drives innovation and informs long-term planning.

We recently incorporated this methodology for a global research project for Hilton, a world leader in the hospitality industry. Seeking to gain deeper understanding of people in the Caribbean and Latin Americas (CALA) region to drive growth, it needed insights that were big – hearing from 3,000 travelers across multiple countries – and thick data that added a layer of cultural understanding.

Through a multipronged approach including an online survey, segmentation and culturally rooted analysis, we were able to uncover critical insights about the CALA region, providing Hilton with a roadmap for future research topics such as how to keep Hilton Honors members engaged once enrolled, how to best tie local areas and cultures into its offerings and more.

The insights not only support human-centered initiatives but also made Hilton consumers feel heard and understood, all of which promotes increased loyalty and growth for the brand.

Your new playbook:

- Map cultural and market trends alongside behavioral data to build richer context.
- Use AI-powered text, image and video analysis to scale qualitative insights.
- Develop insight reports that connect numbers to human stories, helping stakeholders act on what really matters.

Shift 3: From speed to insight to speed to action

The third and perhaps most critical shift is a redefinition of what it means to be fast. For years, the focus has been on accelerating the speed of insight generation. But in today's hypercompetitive, always-on environment, generating insights quickly isn't enough. Organizations often find themselves stuck with mountains of reports but little clarity on what to do next. The real competitive advantage lies in accelerating the speed to action.

This means moving beyond analysis to activation. It's about synthesizing insights across multiple data sources and translating them into clear, commercially relevant strategies. It's about helping organizations not just understand their environment but how to respond to it – quickly, confidently and effectively.

For insights professionals, this requires a new set of skills. It's more than being a great researcher or analyst. It's about being a strategic consultant – someone who can connect the dots, tell a compelling story and recommend a course of action with clarity and conviction.

We recently partnered with the U.K. market of Nestlé brand KitKat

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Making history

which wanted to gain deeper understanding of Gen Z consumers to better inform the work of its advertising agency and fuel a new global ad campaign. To kick off our two-step approach, we launched a six-day online community of 80 consumers that unearthed a universal and meaningful insight resonating with Nestlé's Gen Z audience across all global markets. We then validated the attitudinal learnings from the Gen Z community through a survey involving 1,500 additional consumers from the same markets. In doing so, we ensured comprehensive validation of our findings and global alignment around these findings.

Because we knew that these insights would be directly funneled to VML, Nestlé's ad agency, we then tailored our deliverables in a way that was easily and efficiently consumable to creative stakeholders as opposed to a C-suite boardroom. By narrowing in on the single universal human truth that we found among Gen Z adults and packaging it in a creative yet simple format, we helped the creative agency swiftly take the insights and develop a new global campaign titled "Break Better."

Your new playbook:

- Design insight reports with recommended actions tied directly to business priorities.
- Build alignment sessions with stakeholders to prioritize and commit to next steps.
- Train teams on storytelling to turn insights into compelling, actionable narratives.

The rise of the strategic insight consultant

These shifts raise an important question: Can traditional analytics and insights functions evolve fast enough to meet the demands of today's organizations? The answer lies not in more tools or faster reports alone but in reimagining the role of the insights professional.

In the near future, the ability to curate and maintain organizational knowledge may become table stakes. The true differentiator will be the rise of the strategic insight consultant – professionals who go beyond finding insights to activating on them. These professionals will be valued not just for their technical expertise but for their ability to: connect the dots across complex data ecosystems; tell compelling, actionable stories that resonate with decision-makers; and influence, inspire and guide organizations toward bold, confident actions.

The best insights professionals of tomorrow will be those who don't just answer questions but those who spark progress, shape strategy and have the courage to recommend what to do next.

Niels Neudecker is managing director, North America, with Human8. He can be reached at nielsn@wearehuman8.com.

●●● special advertising section

18 TOP TASTE-TEST RESEARCH COMPANIES

It's a matter of taste – and that's why it's important to choose the right partner when conducting taste tests. Whether you're introducing a new product or improving an existing one, this research provides an opportunity to understand your product and consumers better and ensure a successful launch.

These companies specialize in a range of solutions for both in-person and virtual needs, from fully stocked test kitchens to remote moderation and observation tools. Whether your research needs require home-use tests, in-market environments or extensive in-facility work, the following companies are equipped to meet the specifications of your next project.

AnswerQuest, LLC

Founded 2005 | 21 employees
Jason R. Miller, CEO

With almost 10,000 feet of space just outside Boston, AnswerQuest is the Northeast's premier sensory facility. AQ's test kitchen comes fully equipped with both upright and walk-in coolers and freezers, stainless prep counters, tables and serving carts, residential ovens and dozens of microwaves. Abundant storage, plentiful outlets and an additional 400 free amps is available for specialized equipment. Our team is experienced in sensory, and our sensory director (a trained chef) oversees every test personally. With a database of almost 100,000, we can tackle even the most challenging specifications and our trained recruiters fulfill quotas on time and within budget.

Phone 1-781-897-1822
www.answerquestresearch.com

Area Wide Market Research Inc.

Founded 1988
Ann Weinstein, CEO

Area Wide's seasoned staff pours three decades of experience into every project. Our professional, in-house recruiting team – the most skilled in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Virginia – can fill any group, from an intimate few to many hundreds. Recruiting low-incidence? That's when we do our most creative sourcing! For central location tests, we staff and manage the entire process seamlessly. On-site, enjoy classroom-style or individual booth configurations, ample free parking directly outside our door to ensure on-time starts and a stocked kitchen with two fridges, two freezers, four microwaves, two ovens and its own viewing room. Plus, our building is privately owned. No product, from cigarettes to alcohol, is off limits!

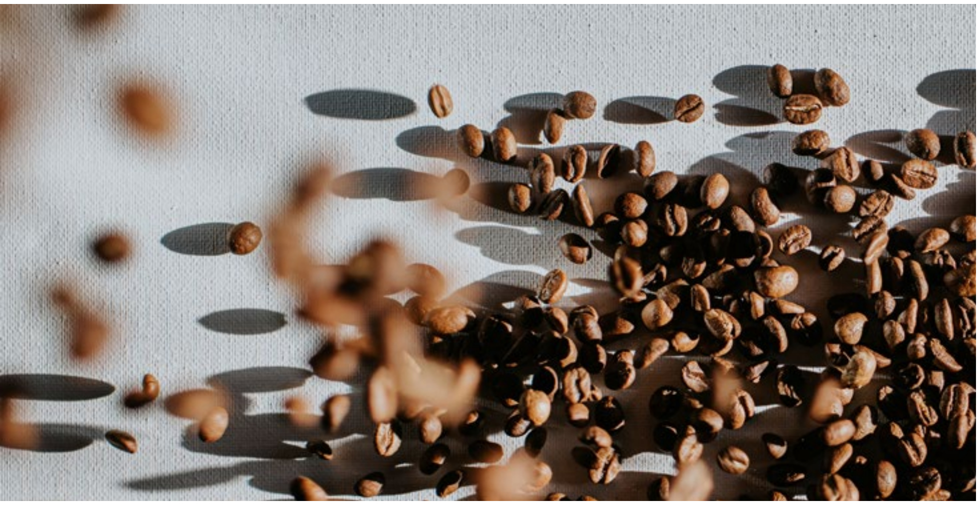
Phone 1-301-590-1160
www.AreaWideMarketResearch.com

Blending Views

Founded 2018
Brian Styx, CEO

Blending Views was born from decades of hands-on research with Fortune 500 powerhouses but we're not your typical research firm. We're a small business with massive capabilities in the Chicago market and a serious knack for making things seamless. From day one, we've made it our mission to deliver a testing experience that feels effortless – for both our clients and respondents. Our commercial kitchen is meticulously maintained, features an open layout and is upgraded regularly to meet the highest industry standards. The Blending Views facility isn't just functional – it's eco-conscious, people-forward and built for good vibes. Around here, innovation meets hospitality and there's always a smile waiting for you.

E-mail bstyx@blendingviews.com
Phone 1-708-826-3200
www.blendingviews.com



BLS Research & Consulting

Founded 2016
Dr. Brittany L. Stalsburg, CEO

BLS Research & Consulting is a full-service market research and communication strategy firm based in the NYC metro area. We use both qualitative and quantitative methods to deliver actionable insights that drive innovative strategies for organizations, brands and companies. Product and taste testing are our core strengths. We help brands assess product performance and identify ways to optimize for their target customers. Our holistic approach goes beyond performance metrics to explore how products can better meet consumer needs while also identifying market gaps for innovation. Our capabilities include surveys as well as in-person and virtual focus groups, IDIs and ethnographies. We also stay at the cutting edge of research methodologies and offer more authentic product and taste testing experiences through in-person intercepts and organic recruitment.

E-mail brittany@blsresearch.com
Phone 1-860-227-3875
www.blsresearch.com

CSS/datatelligence

Founded 1987 | 100+ employees
Carolyn Corbett, VP of Sensory

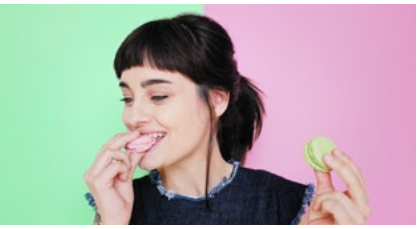
TestAmerica

CSS/datatelligence: Advancing sensory and consumer research into strategic growth. CSS/datatelligence is a market research expert specializing in global sensory and consumer research, dedicated to helping brands understand and optimize the complete product and packaging experience. Our mission is to transform complex sensory and consumer data into clear, actionable insights that fuel innovation and growth. We support clients across diverse categories including food and beverage, personal care, fragrances, cosmetics and home care, by designing and executing research grounded in proven methodologies such as CLTs, HUTs and consumption and satiety protocols. Our multidisciplinary team includes sensory scientists, behavioral psychologists and predictive intelligence experts. We collaborate closely with clients to uncover nuanced consumer preferences and translate them into strategic recommendations. To ensure authentic, real-world insights, our state-of-the-art test studios feature sensory booths, fragrance chambers, laundry and residential environments and dedicated spaces for CLTs, focus groups and client observation. Partner with CSS/datatelligence to gain a deeper understanding of the sensory and consumer landscape – and transform these insights into a competitive advantage.

E-mail Carolyncorbett@cssdatatelligence.com
Phone 1-386-677-5644 x225
www.crgglobalinc.com

Curion

Founded 2017 | 300 employees
Keren Novack, President



Curion specializes in delivering impactful insights to the world's top CPG companies, helping them develop winning, repeatedly purchased products. Curion's deep data-driven product insights, sensory expertise and state-of-the-art consumer centers enable them to uncover responses to critical client objectives. With over five decades of experience in the product testing industry, Curion is dedicated to guiding clients with their proprietary XP Xperience Performance platform, connecting brands to consumers at every step. An innovator in the industry, Curion recently developed a groundbreaking benchmarking product testing method, the Curion Score™, which has become a trusted and sought-after tool within the industry. As one of the largest product and consumer insights companies in the U.S., Curion has built a reputation for excellence and trust among the world's leading consumer brands. Curion's commitment to innovation and expertise, coupled with a passion for delivering actionable insights, makes Curion a valuable partner for companies looking to develop and launch successful products.

E-mail info@curioninsights.com
Phone 1-224-632-1919
www.curioninsights.com

Decision Analyst

Founded 1978 | 120 employees
Jerry W. Thomas, CEO
Bonnie Janzen, President
Felicia Rogers, Executive Vice President

Decision Analyst is a recognized leader in in-home usage testing (IHUTs), taste testing and product optimization. We have tested thousands of consumer packaged goods and durable goods over the past 45 years. Our product testing services include central location taste tests, product clinics, IHUTs and product optimization techniques using choice modeling. We favor monadic testing of products but also design and execute paired-comparison, sequential-monadic and protomonadic tests. Optima®, our product testing system, predicts consumer acceptance, determines the optimal set of ingredients or features and optimizes pricing. Our team members have extensive experience in conducting and analyzing taste tests and optimization studies. We own and operate consumer panels for IHUTs and have our own facilities for processing and shipping test products. We offer research and analytical services to help our clients improve existing products and create new products.

Phone 1-817-640-6166
www.decisionanalyst.com/services/producttesting

Fieldwork

Founded 1980/Insights 1960 | 350 employees
Nikki Darre, President

fieldWORK
DENVER

Our specialties include taste tests and sensory research, medical, CX/UX, B2B, mock jury, consumer and global research. For over 40 years Fieldwork has recruited the highest-quality consumer, business and medical respondents both through and far beyond databases, using proven methods to reach your audience. We believe in a customized approach to recruitment. Fieldwork provides unsurpassed project management and hosting. Fieldwork is your qualitative research partner. Focus on the research. We'll do the rest! What do you need? Contact me today: SarahK@fieldwork.com.

E-mail Info@Network.Fieldwork.com
Phone 1-800-863-4353
www.fieldwork.com/market-research-services

Focus & Testing – an Insights Center Facility

Founded 1995 | 35 employees
Spence Bilkiss, CEO

Focus & Testing, an Insights Center Facility, has skillfully executed food and beverage research through CLTs and focus groups for over 30 years. Since our inception, sensory testing has been our focus, allowing us to emerge as the prominent sensory center in Los Angeles. The 12,500-square-foot facility features the ultimate commercial-grade kitchen for everything from CPG to restaurant menu testing and anything in between. The facility also includes a secondary kitchen, observable CLT suite with 46 respondent stations, a second CLT suite with 36 stations and two focus group suites. Our tenured and ServSafe-certified team sets us apart, enabling Focus & Testing to execute projects like a well-oiled machine.

Phone 1-818-577-4022
www.focusandtesting.com

Insights Center

Founded 2016 | 25 employees
Jeff Bryles, Managing Partner

Insights Center is a unique organization offering specialty facilities across the U.S. that offers commercial kitchens and spacious focus suites. We built the organization to answer a growing need in the marketplace for facilities that could host both qualitative and quantitative studies. Our test kitchens include walk-in refrigeration, ventilation, fryers and stainless prep space. Our CLT labs are capable of seating up to 50 at a time and our ServSafe-trained personnel handle even the most complex studies with ease. Whether it's a sequential monadic, paired comparison or discrimination test, our clients know they can rely on the data we collect.

Phone 1-720-787-7630
www.insightscenters.com

Karchner Marketing Research, LLC, WBE

Founded 2003
Helen and Mike Karchner, Co-Founding Moderators

In today's fast-paced market, staying ahead demands agility, insight and innovation. Karchner Marketing Research (KMR) has been delivering this since 2003! Empowering business owners with deep customer/consumer/prosumer insights through PMR accomplishes this goal. From national CPG, beverage, restaurant (QSR, FCR, FSR) brands to a small (mom and pop, local, family-owned) business, leveraging respondents' sensorial input during taste tests impacts their opinion/decisions. How do we effervesce a respondent's internal inclinations? Well, KMR conducts PMR in a very unique way for taste tests. We identify the aha journey, the propensity for a respondent to actively respond to a product or service, either at our KMR Research Studio or at the restaurant location or at an alternative neutral location. Our proprietary strategic approach strengthens a client's product portfolio by uncovering missed opportunities or potential risks before resources are wasted. By anticipating tomorrow's needs today, our clients remain strategically advanced and continue outpacing competitor innovation. Elevate your business with KMR's expertise – because smarter decisions lead to lasting success. KMR – your strategic partner from quick gut-check projects to multiphase global studies. Value establishes KMR's prominence!

E-mail helen@kmrinsights.com
Phone 1-610-564-9624
www.KMRResearchStudio.com

MarketView Research

Founded 1999 | 25+ employees
Jessica Cardella, Senior Vice President

HELPING BRANDS SERVE UP WINNERS
ONE BITE AT A TIME
MARKETVIEW RESEARCH

MarketView Research is the go-to authority in taste testing and product testing research – trusted by top brands to turn consumer insights into winning products. For over 25 years, we've helped clients uncover the flavors, textures and experiences that drive real market appeal and fuel innovation. Our deep expertise spans every stage of product development, from early concept testing to in-market validation. We deliver clear, actionable insights grounded in what consumers truly want – whether you're refining a recipe, comparing products or preparing to launch something new. We handle everything from start to finish: study design, survey creation, recruiting, fieldwork, data tabulation and analysis. With experienced in-house teams and a relentless focus on client success, we make the entire taste-testing process seamless, strategic and built to move your product forward with confidence.

Phone 1-201-840-5264
www.mvrg.com

Murray Hill National

Founded 2013 | 35 employees
Susan Owens, COO

We find the perfect people for your research projects

Clients trust Murray Hill National with thousands of studies per year as their research partner. In return, we deliver valuable solutions, high-quality recruitment and data collection for their consumer, health care and B2B market research needs. Specializing in all methodologies and audiences, we can host and deliver your results across the U.S. For the last 25 years, the executives at Murray Hill National LLP have worked diligently and advanced to one of the leading data collection and recruitment companies in the U.S. Our teams are committed to meeting your research needs. We provide high-quality recruitment with access to 5 million consumers, 650,000+ B2B executives/professionals, 750,000 physicians, nurses and more, and we organize 150+ patient panels. Any audience, any methodology specializing in B2B and health care. Our qualitative services extend far beyond the traditional focus group. Our services include online, digital, remote, home-use test and any other methodology needing to find an audience with feedback or expert knowledge. Call us today for your next project, your "regional or national" recruiting experts!

Phone 1-972-707-7645
www.murrayhillnational.com

Precision Research Inc.

Founded 1959 | 25-49 employees
Scott Adleman, President

Precision Research: a top U.S. taste testing research facility. Precision Research is recognized as one of the premier taste testing research facilities in the United States. Located in Chicago, our state-of-the-art commercial kitchen and testing center is specifically designed for consumer taste tests, sensory evaluation and product comparison studies. We provide a full-service solution – from recruiting qualified respondents to administering tests and collecting in-depth consumer feedback. Our facility supports both qualitative and quantitative research and can accommodate a wide range of food and beverage testing protocols including blind, branded, central location and home-use testing. With a team experienced in managing complex testing logistics and food-safe procedures, Precision delivers accurate, reliable insights that help brands optimize products and drive innovation. Trusted by leading food manufacturers, restaurant chains and CPG companies, Precision Research is your partner for uncovering what consumers truly prefer – and why.

Phone 1-847-257-0827
www.preres.com

Reckner Facilities

Founded 1991
Gina Cassel, Senior Vice President, Reckner

Celebrating 30 years of market research excellence, Reckner provides state-of-the-art taste test and product testing facilities located in the Milwaukee, New York City and Philadelphia MSAs. Spacious, fully-equipped test kitchens offer ample refrigeration and freezer space, microwaves, ovens, abundant counter space and more. Highly-tenured staff are fully-trained in food service and well-versed on the detailed protocols of product preparation and testing. Experience in all food and beverage categories including alcohol, confectionery, dairy, frozen foods and more. Focus group rooms, multipurpose space, product testing rooms and sink booths are also available. Project management staff are highly experienced with CLTs, home-use-tests, large quotas and complex designs, all with quick turnarounds and competitive pricing.

E-mail gcassel@reckner.com
Phone 1-215-822-6220
www.reckner.com

Sensory Center of Atlanta

Founded 2019 | 18 employees
Marisa Pope, President

At the intersection of culinary creativity and consumer connection, our facility is built to elevate your brand. R&D and marketing teams thrive here – side by side. Our 1,350-square-foot test kitchen is purpose-built for food and beverage research, featuring a 16-foot vent hood, gas and electric commercial appliances, dual oven types and walk-in coolers and freezers. It's efficient, flexible and ready to bring your next product to life. Meanwhile, your marketing team watches it all unfold in comfort – our upscale observation rooms include plush seating, personalized service and even curated dining experiences. Plus, with rooms already vented for health and beauty testing, we're ready for whatever you're innovating next. Experience a space designed for progress – yours.

Phone 1-770-394-8700
www.sensorycenteratlanta.com

SIS International Research

Founded 1984 | 50 employees
Ruth Stanat, CEO

Established in 1984, SIS International Research is a global market research and consultancy firm specializing in food taste testing. Our modern facility in the Flatiron section of New York City can accommodate up to 100 taste tests per day. Our taste testing capabilities cover North America, Latin America, the EU, the APAC region and the MENA region, including over 100 countries and 33 languages. Our methods include focus groups, individual taste tests and central location tests. SIS is also known for our advanced data analytics and high-quality reporting. Studies often feature competitive products during taste tests. We can also enhance the research with desk research and competitive analysis. We can expand taste testing to include IHUTs or in-home taste tests. SIS integrates brand research into our taste tests. Our strategy and consulting division assists with analysis and reporting. We provide actionable data for informed decision-making.

E-mail Restanat@sisinternational.com
Phone 1-917-546-0640
www.sisinternational.com

Symmetric, A Decision Analyst Company

Founded 2016 | 25+ employees
Jason Thomas, CEO
Arianne Larimer, President

Symmetric operates American Consumer Opinion® (a worldwide panel of millions of consumers, established in 1995) and five B2B worldwide online panels: Physicians Advisory Council®, Medical Advisory Board®, Executive Advisory Board®, Contractor Advisory Board® and Technology Advisory Board®. We have over 40 years of experience conducting in-home usage tests and taste tests. Our professional team is well trained, dedicated and meticulous. Our product processing and shipping facilities encompass 1,500 square feet with ample space for product storage. Facilities are temperature-controlled and cleaned daily.
At Symmetric, we place a high value on representative samples, scientific sampling methods and advanced fraud-detection systems. Our online panels are carefully balanced, continually refreshed and systematically cleaned.
In addition to IHUT mailing and taste tests, our services include programming, hosting, online communities, tabulation and coding.

Phone 1-817-649-5243
www.symmetricsampling.com/services/mailing

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Top 10 FAQs about on-line research • Internet demographics • Don't call them on-line focus groups

Quirk's
MARKETING RESEARCH Review
Practical applications in marketing research
July 1998

Internet research issue

- Research guides creation of Penn State's World Campus
- Case histories featuring Nickelodeon, Bay Networks, Informix
- A review of on-line interviewing software

Penn State launches an online presence

We're familiar with virtual education courses, but in 1998, Penn State's World Campus launch required research to ensure it would be successful. With non-traditional students – classified as those over 25 who did not live on a college campus – being a click away from online college courses, Penn State began to develop a strategy to compete for them.

The article "Turning to a virtual campus for a real education," explained that before launching an online program, organizers had to determine customer demand, faculty readiness, the technical readiness of the audience, program pricing, program reputation and more. Its goal was to develop three programs for January 1998 and at least three programs for fall 1998.

Throughout its six-phase research strategy, Penn State conducted electronic and telephone surveys and in-depth personal interviews and found that that 82% of independent learners were seeking convenience of study, 53% were seeking a Penn State education, 85% has access to technology and 43% received some form of reimbursement from their employers.

Penn State used a wide range of research processes to polish its World Campus offerings. It established that marketing research would help expand its programs and degrees in the future and anticipated the internet to drastically change the online education space.

1998

These burning internet questions remain hot today

The article "The top 10 FAQs about online research," answered pressing questions regarding conducting marketing research via the internet. Questions included: How do you recruit people for these surveys? How can you make sure that the person you invite is the one taking the interview? What kinds of security issues do you have to worry about when conducting online interviews?

Many are still with us, all these years later, though with their own modern twists. (No one had to deal with bot farms and AI back then!)

The answers, while obviously of their time, offered readers helpful insights and reassured them that online research was ultimately a good thing. Author Bill MacElroy explained how to navigate recruitment using databases or by telephone for more sensitive research studies. MacElroy also explained what cookies were and how they're used in and outside of the research industry.

PC usage, ownership in 1998

Forrester Research's 1998 study predicted that the number of households that shop and invest online would double from 5% to 10% by the end of the year. It also predicted that internet and PC access would broaden to include low-income households instead of only the "high-income, technology-optimistic elite." According to the Survey Monitor entry titled "Study predicts e-commerce to double by end of 1998," 43% of households owned at least one PC and 25% of North Americans were online in 1998.

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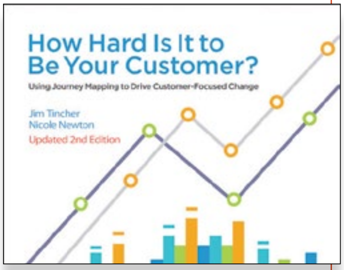

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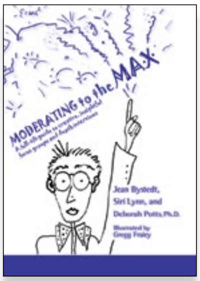

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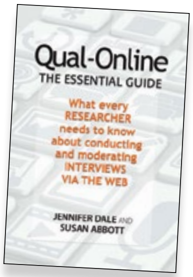

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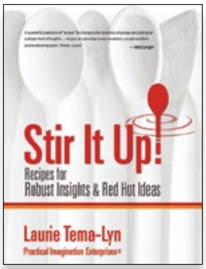

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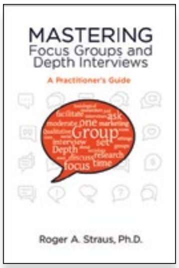

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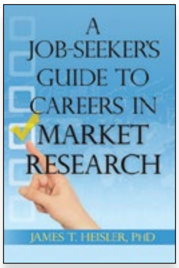

An authoritative guide to the market research industry at the beginning of the 21st century, its size and scope, what value it provides, who works in the field, who uses it and for what decisions, the market research process, common methodologies, growth prospects for the industry, and more. The book explores market research as a career choice—skills, education, and training; how to get that first job, moving upward, potential earning power, success profiles, and stepping stones to related careers.

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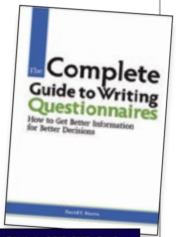
How to Get Better Information for Better Decisions



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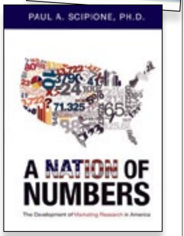

Explore the factors and events that came together to make America the birthplace of marketing research. Scipione documents how far the marketing research industry has come in its first 100 years, morphing from analog to digital, with new tools in big data and advanced analytics, observation of actual consumer behavior via scanning UPC codes, and advances in the neurosciences, and speculates where the industry will be in the future.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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CMO Alliance will host the Chief Marketing Officer San Francisco on September 10. Visit https://events.cmoalliance.com/location/sanfrancisco.

Insights Association will host the Corporate Researchers Conference on September 9-11 in Chicago. Visit www.insightsassociation.org/Events/Event-Info/sessionaltcd/2024LEADERSHIP.

Corinium Global Intelligence will host CDAO Melbourne on September 10-11. Visit https://cdao-mel.coriniumintelligence.com.

WBR will host eTail Connect West on September 15-17 in San Diego. Visit https://etailconnectwest.wbresearch.com/.

Pharma CI Conference and Exhibition will host the Pharma CI USA Conference & Exhibition on September 17-18 in Newark. Visit http://pharmaciconference.com.

IQPC will host the Responsible AI Summit on September 23-24 in London. Visit www.aidataanalytics.network/events-responsible-ai-summit.

WBR will host eTail Connect Australia on September 23-24. Visit https://etailconnectaustralia.wbresearch.com.

IQPC will host CX Retail USA Exchange on September 23-24. Visit www.quirks.com/events/cx-retail-usa-exchange-2025.

Quirk's Media will host Quirk's Media – Data Quality on September 25. Visit www.quirks.com/events/quirks-virtual-data-quality-2025.

Empresarial will host Le Printemps des études on September 25-26 in Paris. Visit www.printemps-etudes.com/en/accueil-english.

ESOMAR will host Congress 2025: Reimaging on September 28 - October 1. Visit https://esomar.org/events/congress-2025.

WBR will host eTail Connect Autumn on September 30 - October 1. Visit https://etailconnectautumn.wbresearch.com.

Strategy Institute will host the Customer Experience for Financial Services Summit on September 30 - October 1 in Toronto. Visit www.cxfinancialservices.com.

WBR will host eTail Toronto on October 7-8. Visit https://etailcanada.wbresearch.com.

Richmond Events will host The Richmond Market Insight Forum on October 8. Visit www.richmondevents.com/forums/details/inu25.

Forrester Research will host B2B Summit EMEA on October 6-8. Visit www.forrester.com/event/b2b-summit-emea.

Merlien Institute will host Qual360 on October 14-15. Visit https://apac.qual360.com.

WBR will host eTail Germany Connect on October 14-15. Visit https://etailconnectgermany.wbresearch.com.

Gartner will host the Chicago CDAO Community Executive Summit on October 16. Visit www.evanta.com/cdao/chicago/chicago-cdao-executive-summit-7427.

MRS will host User Research on October 17. Visit www.mrs.org.uk/event/conferences/user-research-conference-2024.

Insights Association will host Ignite: AI on October 21. Visit www.insightsassociation.org/Events/Event-Info/sessionaltcd/2025IGNITEAI.

My Digital Shelf will host the Shopper Marketing Summit UK on October 22. Visit www.shoppermarketingsummit.co.uk.

Customer Management Practice will host Customer Contact Week on October 22-24 in Nashville. Visit www.customercontactweek.com/ccw-nashville.

Informa Connect will host TMRE 2025 on October 28-30 in Las Vegas. Visit https://informaconnect.com/tmre/.

Quirk's Media will host The Quirk's Event – Global 2025 on November 18-19. Visit www.quirks.com/events/the-quirks-event-global-2025.

Quirk's Media will host The Marketing Research and Insight Excellence Awards on November 18-19. Visit www.quirksawards.com.

Event details as of August 4, 2025. Please see websites for more details.

To submit information on your upcoming conference or event for possible inclusion in our print and online calendar, e-mail info@quirks.com. For a more complete list of upcoming events visit www.quirks.com/events.

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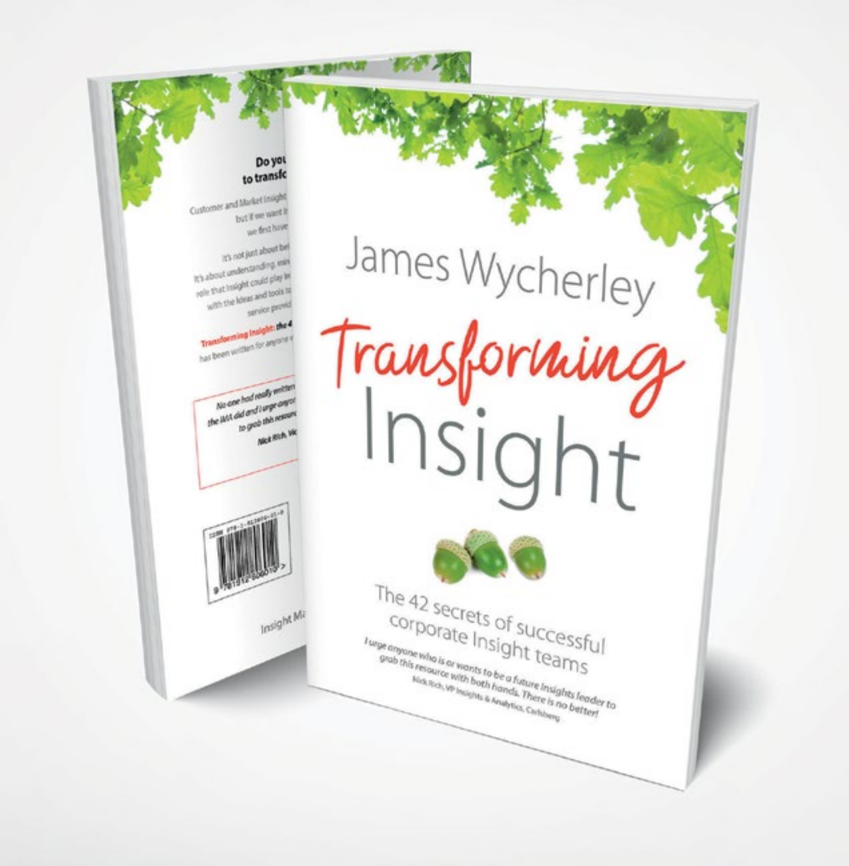
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What's your top tip for improving collaboration between client- and supplier-side researchers?

One of the biggest differences between client- and supplier-side research is the level of investment in how the research will be used. On the vendor side, as a researcher I relied on what the stakeholder told me, without full visibility into internal dynamics, competing priorities or broader business objectives. As a client-side researcher, I can tweak my research approach to dig deeper into the true business needs – sometimes even uncovering insights that help multiple teams or solve adjacent challenges. I think the best way to improve collaboration is for clients to provide more strategic context upfront and for vendors to ask bigger-picture questions rather than just focusing on execution of the question at hand. When both sides are aligned on the bigger "why," the research becomes more impactful and ultimately more valuable to the business.

> *"When stakeholders feel personally invested in the story, they're far more likely to champion the consumer perspective in decision-making. The goal is always the same: making insights impossible to ignore and easy to act on."*

How do you translate consumer insights and emotions into compelling narratives that ultimately guide business decisions?

Translating consumer insights into compelling narratives starts with empathy. It's not just about what consumers say but understanding what they feel and why it matters. Data alone doesn't drive action; storytelling does. I focus on framing insights in a way that connects with stakeholders on both a rational and emotional level. That means going beyond charts and numbers to bring insights to life through real consumer voices, stories and immersive experiences.

Whenever possible, I like to involve stakeholders, sometimes future stakeholders, in building the narrative. Whether it's through workshops, debrief sessions or firsthand exposure to consumers, this involvement deepens their connection to the insights and makes the findings more actionable. When stakeholders feel personally invested in the story, they're far more likely to champion the consumer perspective in decision-making. The goal is always the same: making insights impossible to ignore and easy to act on.

Can you share an example of a time you used ethnographic research to uncover insights beyond what consumers say, focusing on their behaviors and actions?

First, I'm a huge fan of qualitative research and always want to conduct it whenever possible to uncover the nuances between stated and actual behavior. There's always a gap between what people say they do and what they actually do, and qualitative research – especially ethnography – is one of the best ways to bridge that gap.

Scan to read the full article at www.Quirks.com.

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