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OCTOBER 2009

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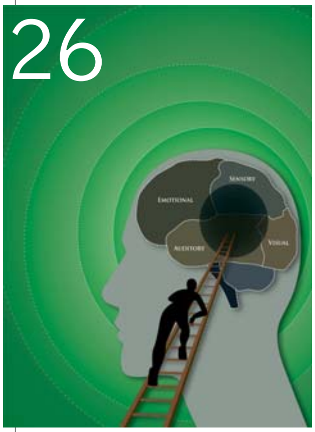

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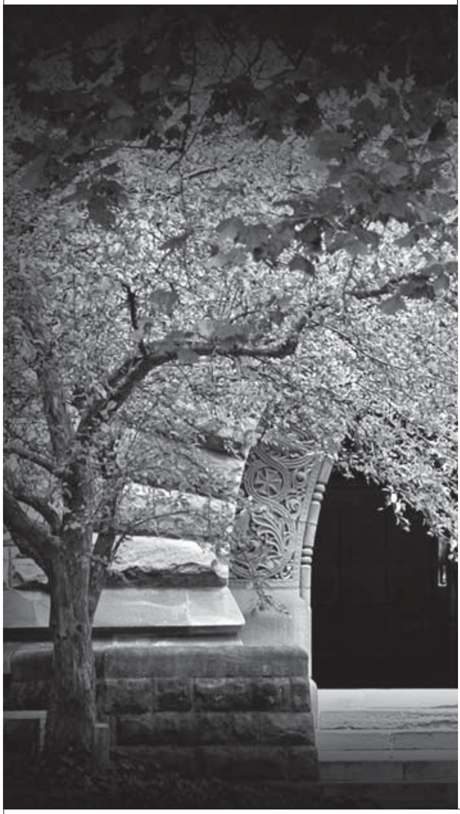

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Chicago	May 11-12
Cincinnati	Aug 31-Sep 1
San Francisco	Nov 2-3

602 | Tools & Techniques of Data Analysis $2,595

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Los Angeles	Mar 31-Apr 3
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San Francisco	Aug 11-14
Cincinnati	Oct 13-16
Baltimore	Dec 1-4

603 | Practical Multivariate Analysis $2,595

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in case you missed it...

news and notes on marketing and research

Buick youth-anizes its brand identity

As one of the four remaining core brands of General Motors (GM), calling Buick niche would be an understatement. In 2008, Buick's market share at GM was 4.6 percent, and the brand sold 137,197 vehicles for a 1.04 percent overall industry market share in the U.S., according to Noreen O'Leary and Steve McClellan's July 20, 2009, article, "Buick leads GM's efforts at reinvention," in *Brandweek*. With fewer models to appeal to even more buyers, GM is quickly devising a marketing strategy to expand Buick's target audience beyond retirees on the hunt for plush, easy-driving sedans.

GM's 2009 launch of the 2010 Buick LaCrosse seeks to attract younger consumers with a more sophisticated car design and image overhaul to match. The 2010 LaCrosse is drawing good reviews, but target consumers (late Boomers aged 46-55, about 10 years younger than current Buick buyers) are reluctant to even visit Buick showrooms, given that the brand image is - in a word - old.

"We have a huge challenge with Buick because many people don't know what the brand stands for," said Cheryl Catton, general director, advertising and promotion for the Buick-Pontiac-GMC division.

Buick's attempts to reach a different audience encompass marketing Buick via "younger" media vehicles. Catton said the use of non-TV media is proportionately higher in the LaCrosse campaign, with its digital component including new use of social media like Twitter and Facebook. The campaign is also using more outdoor advertising and, for the first time, will have a 60-second in-cinema spot. Buick is also doing experiential marketing, such as using zip-code-precise targeting.

As for TV, Buick is buying into drama, cable and prime-time programming. It previously skewed toward early morning, news and weather, and has also been associated with golf, namely via recent brand spokesman Tiger Woods.

Marketers happy to feed consumers' track-a-holism

In December 1995, during the early days of online package tracking, UPS had just 100,000 online tracking requests. By December 2008, that number was 27.3 million requests a day. America is becoming a nation of track-a-holics. Tracking a package or a flight or a pizza may not help it arrive any sooner or more smoothly, but some would say it still satisfies the consumer desire for control - real or perceived. And according to Bruce Horovitz's July 26, 2009, article, "Tracking deliveries of all kinds is on everyone's radar," in *USA Today*, marketers have caught on quickly to the fact that the marketers that track best, win.

Here's what Americans are tracking:

Packages. FedEx.com gets six million package-tracking requests daily. "Tracking is one of our top drivers for customer satisfaction," said Mark Colombo, senior vice president of digital access marketing. "People are obsessed with it." FedEx has 14 tracking "events" for the average package, from pickup to when it gets on the plane to when it's on a local truck to delivery.

Flights. Daniel Baker started FlightAware in 2005, a free service that receives FAA information and converts it into maps that track almost all non-military flights in the U.S. and Canada. The service receives 100 million flight-tracking requests a month. "There are tons of people who are just tracking to track," said Baker. He says that's about 20 percent of his site's business.

Buses. The Chicago Transit Authority's bus tracker (www.ctabustracker.com) provides estimated arrival time based on traffic, scheduling and GPS systems on most of the city's 2,000 buses. The tracker is also rolling out a new service to provide information via text messages on cell phones.

Spending. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg is giving New Yorkers the chance to track city agency performance at www.nyc.gov/cpr. The Web site includes 550 data points that residents can track. It also tracks spending of the $5 billion in federal stimulus money the city is receiving, at www.nyc.gov/stimulustracker.

Research helps P&G launch no-frills Tide

Procter & Gamble (P&G) has launched Tide Basic, a new offering geared toward the coupon-clipping consumers who have shown themselves less willing to shell out for premium detergents. Though it lacks features like anti-pilling and color-preservation technologies, it costs about 20 percent less, according to Ellen Byron's August 6, 2009, article, "Tide turns 'Basic' for P&G in slump," in the *Wall Street Journal*. For decades, P&G has held fast to the "higher price = higher quality" equation, but as cheaper store brands gained traction in the aisles, P&G was forced to change with the times.

Suzanne Watson, associate marketing manager for P&G, teamed up with Mark Christenson, a Tide brand manager, to promote the launch of a wallet-friendlier Tide. The decision to test a lower-priced Tide fell to Alex Tosolini, a P&G vice president. Tosolini opted for testing powder, as it carried less risk given that it is a smaller segment of the detergent market.

The managers supported the idea but had packaging concerns - should the new version be encased in Tide's iconic orange? Shoppers on average spend 45-60 seconds in the laundry aisle, devoting just seven seconds to choosing a product, making color a crucial guide for finding the right product, P&G research found. Yellow and blue, the other colors of Tide's famous bull's eye, were considered, with yellow used less often for detergent packaging than blue. "People kept insisting, 'Tide isn't yellow,'" said Tosolini. "But then we thought maybe it could discourage current Tide users, which is what we wanted."

Christenson and Watson suggested naming the product "Tide Basic." Preliminary tests with consumers included Tide Simply Clean, Tide Basico and Tide Basic. Tests also judged yellow vs. orange package mock-ups. Tide Basic, in yellow, won with consumers.

P&G began stocking Tide Basic in Walmart and Kroger Co. stores across the South in late June 2009. Tide Basic can be found on shelves down with other mid-tier brands - right where P&G marketers want it.

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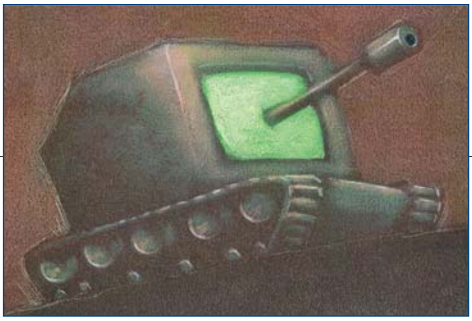


true-life tales in marketing research

Editor's note: War Stories is an occasional column in which Art Shulman, president of Shulman Research, Van Nuys, Calif., presents humorous anecdotes of life in the research trenches. Send your own (or a colleague's) tales of research-related wackiness to him at artshulman@aol.com. Contributors may remain anonymous. To view this article online, enter article ID 20091001 at quirks.com/articles.

Sexism is not dead on college campuses. At least not in the market research class I teach. And it's not necessarily the men who are sexist.

To illustrate what is meant by probing and clarifying, I asked one of the women in my class, in her early twenties, what she liked about playing with Barbie dolls when she was younger. She provided a number of responses, some of which required clarification, including that she liked "the accessories."

I asked her which Barbie accessories she was referring to. Her reply: "Ken."

So, now we know that at least some women attending college consider men accessories.

Bruce McLeary of Marketing Analysts reports that early in his career he worked in a phone room that regularly monitored interviewers by listening in while they executed the survey. The company was doing a tracking study for a utility in the Southeast and the first few questions were overall rating scales (very positive to very negative) about the customers' electric, gas and water utilities. The interviewer screened the respondent, obviously someone from the rural South, then started in with the first overall rating question: "Now, thinking about your [ELECTRIC COMPANY], how would you rate your overall impression? Would…"

But she was interrupted before she could read the scale.

"I don't like 'em," stated the respondent forcefully.

The interviewer persevered, trying to make sure she read the scale as instructed: "Would you say you are very positive, somewhat…"

The respondent interrupted again with, "I'm positive I don't like 'em!

Research consultant Daniel McCrobie was working in a jet airplane simulator doing research on a new product his company was introducing. The product would be installed in airplane cockpits and the company wanted to get pilots' impressions of the new product, so they had them fly a short simulation.

One time McCrobie ran a bit late due to a pilot getting lost on the way to the facility that housed the simulator so he had to set up the simulator from the rear of the cockpit. While entering the flight data into the flight management system, he had his elbow on what he thought was the console. In actuality, it was on the display of the rear maintenance system. He heard the distinctive sound of glass breaking, looked down and realized he had demolished the rear display, an $80,000 piece of hardware.

McCrobie dejectedly reported the breakage to the maintenance manager, thinking he was going to be banned from the simulator or experience some other horrible punishment. But the manager told McCrobie that he was quite happy about the breakage, saying that that unit was acting up and that he could actually replace it now. McCrobie actually ended up making the manager's day.

So, just remember, when you break something, don't get upset. You may actually have done someone a favor.

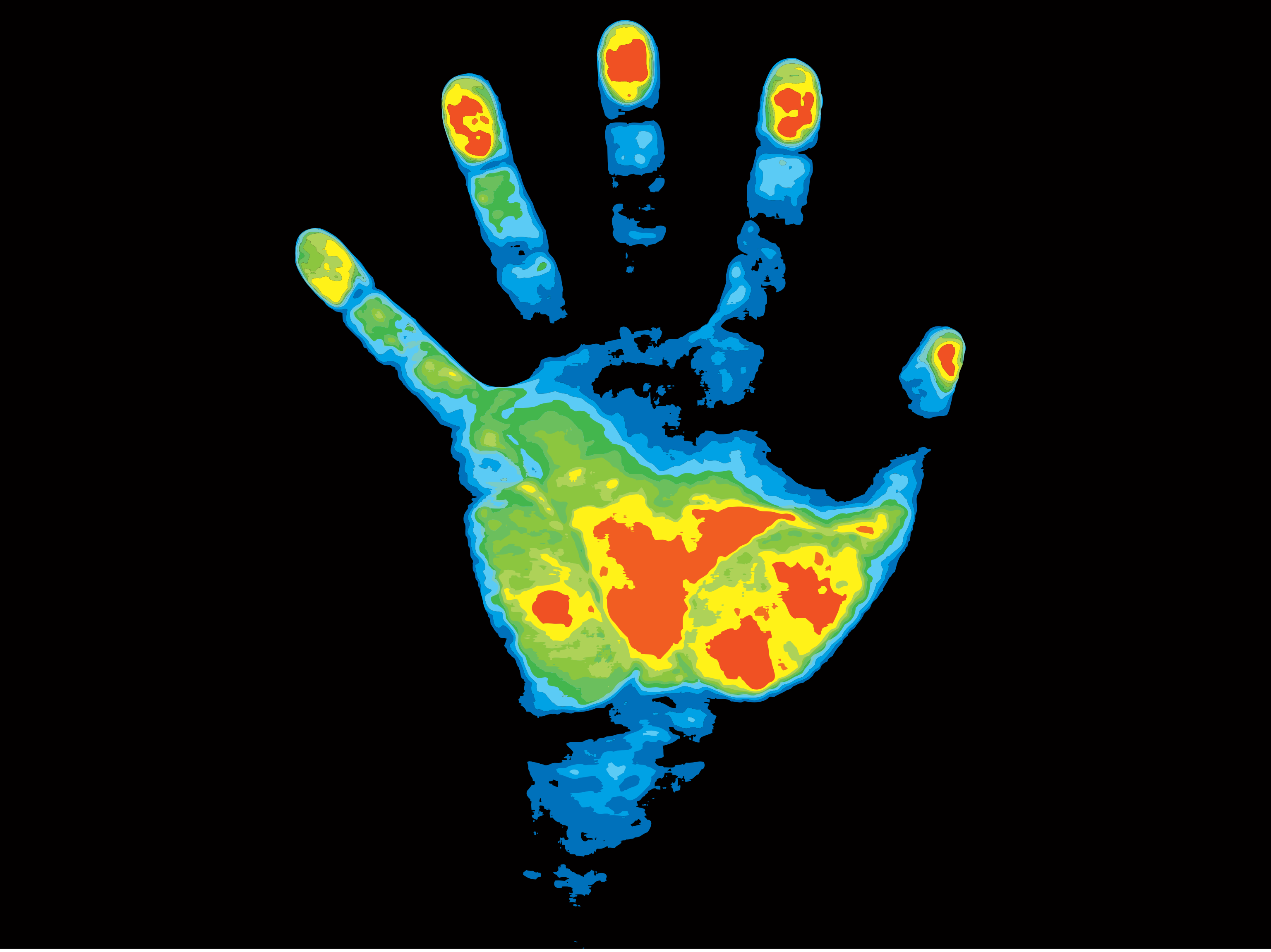
Paul Lubin of Informa Research Services tells about the time when he was in Miami conducting focus groups during hurricane season. Just after the groups were completed, he was on his way to his hotel room when a storm hit and all the hotel lights went out. He eventually made it back to his room but had to feel his way against the wall and count the doors in order to do so.

The next morning he awoke early to catch a flight to Jacksonville for an important meeting, but it was still dark out and the hotel still had no power. Needing to shave and get dressed, the only way he could see what he was doing was when lightning flashed. So, there stood Lubin, waiting for nature to cooperate so he could get ready. He made some progress but the flashes were brief and intermittent. It wasn't going well. Eventually he gave up, thinking what he was doing was insane.

What's so unusual about market researchers thinking what they are doing is insane?

Lubin also relates receiving a call from the president of a large health and beauty aid manufacturer, who was calling to complain about a store auditor Lubin's firm had in the field. Working on a hot day at one store of a large Southern grocery chain, the auditor had gone behind some crates and taken off her pantyhose, thinking no one was watching. Of course, store cameras recorded it all, prompting the chain's president to call Lubin's client to express his outrage.

Lubin reports that the auditor's shelf inventory and delivery measurements were accurate, though. | Q



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Americans growing more dependent on wireless

Americans are growing more and more dependent on mobile devices to stay online and stay in touch. Together, laptop and mobile wireless access account for the vast majority of wireless access, as 51 percent of Americans have gone online using either of these two methods. Some people (19 percent) even opt for both means of wireless access - portable laptops on fast Wi-Fi networks or handheld access on slower networks from cell carriers.

Use of the Internet on mobile devices has grown sharply from the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2009, according to a study conducted by Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, Washington, D.C. In December 2007, 24 percent of Americans said they had at some point used the Internet on their mobile device. By April 2009, that number had grown to 32 percent. In December 2007, 11 percent of Americans said they had yesterday accessed the Internet on their mobile, and by April 2009, 19 percent of Americans had done so. When mobile users were asked to think about how they get information or communicate with others while away from home or work, 50 percent say it is very important to them to have mobile access in order to stay in touch with other people, 46 percent say they mobile access is very important for getting online information on the go, and 17 percent say mobile access is very important to them so they can share or post online content while away from home or work.

African-Americans are the most active users of the mobile Internet, and their use of it is also growing the fastest. This means the digital divide between African-Americans and white Americans diminishes when mobile use is taken into account. Forty-eight percent of African-Americans have at one time used their mobile device to access the Internet for information, e-mailing or instant-messaging, and 29 percent of African-Americans use the Internet on their handheld on an average day, compared to national averages of 32 percent and 19 percent, respectively. Compared with 2007, when 12 percent of African-Americans used the Internet on their mobile on the average day, use of the mobile Internet is up by 141 percent.

The high level of activity among African-Americans on mobile devices helps offset lower levels of access tools that have been traditional inlets to the Internet, namely desktop computers, laptops and home broadband connections. By a 59 percent to 45 percent margin, white Americans are more likely to go online using a computer on a typical day than African-Americans. When mobile devices are included in the mix, the gap is cut in half; 61 percent of whites go online on the average day when mobile access is included, compared to 54 percent of African-Americans.

Broader measures of use of mobile digital resources also show fast growth from the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2009. In 2007 and 2009, respondents were asked about 10 different non-voice data activities they might do on their cell phones: sending or receiving text messages; taking a picture; playing a game; checking e-mail; accessing the Internet; recording video; instant messaging; playing music; getting maps or directions or watching video. Although several activities involve using the Internet on the mobile device, many (such as taking a picture) do not. In 2009, 69 percent of all adult Americans said they had ever done at least one of the 10 activities versus 58 percent who did this in late 2007. In 2009, 44 percent of all adult Americans said they had done at least one of the non-voice data activities on a typical day, up from 32 percent in 2007. For more information visit www.pewinternet.org.

Domestic autos boost their APEAL

The automotive industry has achieved a three-year high in appeal for new and redesigned models, and seven of these models have received segment-level awards, including the Dodge Challenger, Ford F-150, Ford Flex, Hyundai Genesis, Nissan Maxima, Volkswagen CC and Volkswagen Tiguan, according to the 2009 Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout (APEAL) Study from J.D. Power and Associates, a Westlake Village, Calif., research company. Throughout the years, vehicle models achieving high APEAL scores have been shown to benefit from faster sales, less need for cash incentives and higher profit margins on each vehicle sold. In 2009, the APEAL score for all-new and redesigned models averaged 790 on a 1,000-point scale - 11 points higher than in 2008 and 15 points higher than the 2009 score for carryover models.

continued on p. 65

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names of note

Alec Gallup, who served as chairman of the *Gallup Poll*, a Washington, D.C., political polling firm, died of a heart ailment on June 22, 2009.

Thom Mocarsky has rejoined Columbia, Md., research company *Arbitron Inc.* as vice president, investor relations.

Lightspeed Research, Basking Ridge, N.J., has named **David Day** global CEO and **Tara Jethwani** vice president, client operations. The company has also promoted **Sophia Kellman** to senior vice president, talent.

Jethwani

Kellman

Burke, Inc., a Cincinnati research company, has promoted **Dianne Marschman** to vice president, account management. Burke has also hired **Scott "Rocky" Shook** as senior account executive, client services.

Eric Spahr has been named vice president, managing director, of *LaunchForce*, a Cincinnati consultancy. Brand innovation will be among his responsibilities.

The NPD Group, a Port Washington, N.Y., research company, has hired **Arnie Schwartz** as president, U.S. food service; **Brian Holliday** as director, retailer relations, automotive; and **Don Unser** as head of its retail business group.

Ipsos Loyalty, a New York division of Paris research company Ipsos, has hired **Mark E. Greene** and **Dolores Forget** as senior research executive, mystery shopping.

Jason Miller has joined *AnswerQuest*, an Atlanta research company, as managing partner of the operations, systems management, qualitative and field management divisions.

Miller

Hartley

GfK Custom Research North America, a New York division of Nuremberg, Germany, research company The GfK Group, has named **Thomas Hartley** vice president, customer loyalty.

IMS Health, a Norwalk, Conn., research company, has hired **Kimberly S. Gray** as chief privacy officer, Americas.

The Qualitative Research Consultants Association has appointed **Monica Zinchiak** as editor-in-chief of *QRCA Views*.

Holger Wissel has been hired as manager, market research, of *Bosch Thermotechnology Corporation*, a Londonderry, N.H., utilities company.

Abt Associates, a Cambridge, Mass., research company, has appointed **Kathleen L. Flanagan** as president and CEO.

Aegis Group, a London communications company, has named **Nick Priday** CFO and **John Brady**, **Simon Laffin** and **Martin Read** non-executive director.

Jack Hollis has been named head of strategy and marketing research of *tmr Agency*, a Lakeland, Fla., research company.

Maktoob Research, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, has hired **Jigar Mehta** as manager, business development.

TRA, a New York research company, has appointed **Terese Herbig** to its sales team and **Hank Close** and **Bob Meyers** to its advisory board.

Clean Design Inc., a Raleigh, N.C., design agency, has hired **Bill Campbell** as director, brand strategy.

Kelley Trosko has been named director of marketing of *The Research Group*, Baltimore, and its focus group facility division, *Observation Baltimore*.

Trosko

Egel

Barbara Egel has been named vice president of *Primary Insights Inc.*, a Chicago research firm.

Dallas research company *e-Rewards Inc.* has named **Mark Walton** senior vice president, international operations. Walton will be based in London.

Rochester, N.Y., research company *Harris Interactive* has named **Michael Saxon** senior vice president, technology, media and entertainment and telecommunications, North America. Saxon will be based in Princeton, N.J.

Ian Lewis has joined Phoenix research consultancy *Cambiar* as director.

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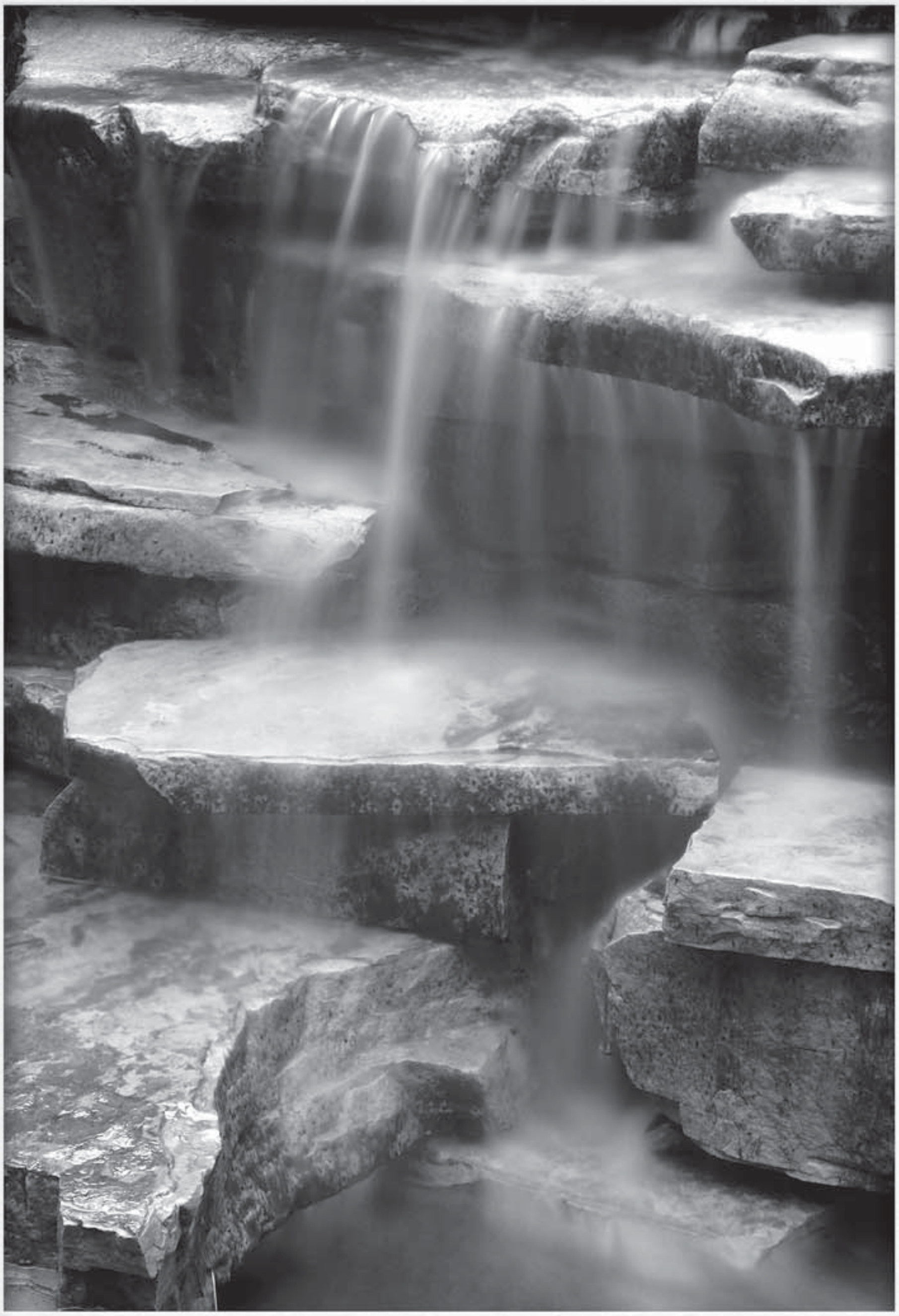
In the fine art of research,
the shades of gray complete the masterpiece.



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The Fine Art of Marketing Research

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ComScore launches Ad Metrix in Canada

Reston, Va., research company comScore Inc. has introduced Ad Metrix in Canada, a service for digital media campaigning designed to evaluate where display ads are viewed online and the demographic composition of the audiences reached. The service is designed to capture multiple varieties of display advertising, including static banners, rich media and video ads. Ad Metrix also includes: Ad Metrix Publisher, to provide insight into where marketers are spending their ad dollars online and what share of the market each publisher captures; Ad Metrix Advertiser, to provide information at the advertiser and product level regarding which publisher sites and creative advertisers are using; and Ad Metrix Demographics, to explore the demographics of Internet users exposed to advertising, providing person-level intelligence on the placement and reach of ads. For more information visit www.comscore.com.

Polaris introduces two Web products

Polaris Marketing Research, Atlanta, has debuted a four-part white paper series, titled "Designing and Implementing a Customer Satisfaction Tracking Program." The series includes the following topics: why measure customer satisfaction; gap analysis; what needs to be measured; and guidelines for structuring and rollout.

Additionally, Polaris has launched The Marketing Dialog, its semimonthly blog discussion with executives, educators and opinion leaders in marketing regarding how they have used marketing research to make decisions. Twice a month, Polaris will share the thoughts and experiences of the marketing professionals involved and invite marketers to participate with their own ideas and comments. For more information visit www.polarismr.com/contact.html.

Zoomerang debuts centralized survey management tool

Zoomerang, a division of San Francisco research company MarketTools Inc., has introduced Zoomerang Enterprise for online survey management. Enterprise is designed to allow survey managers to collaborate and share information using a survey questionnaire and results library, management dashboard, search capability and more. Access to survey collaboration is based on a centralized work area for employees in different departments to see if someone from another team has already created a survey similar to the one they want to write, giving them the opportunity to use the existing survey template. Zoomerang Enterprise is included at no additional cost with Zoomerang's premium subscription. For more information visit www.zoomerang.com.

Research Now gains Momentum for mobile surveys

Research Now, London, has released Momentum, its new family of mobile survey products designed to offer quick polls using SMS; online surveys using WAP, GPRS and 3G connections; and survey application downloads to mobile phones. Momentum also includes a mobile application survey engine, where respondents download an application to take surveys, insuring a consistent look and feel and routing/validation. Momentum has been launched in Research Now's U.K. panel, and the worldwide Valued Opinions family of panels will follow. By the end of the launch, Momentum is set to include 36 countries. For more information visit www.researchnow.co.uk.

Compete measures how ads make an impact

Compete, a Boston research company, has introduced Ad Impact, an offering designed to measure how exposure to online advertising affects consumers' online behavior, specifically search queries and interaction with brand, competitor and third-party sites. Ad Impact is intended to complement survey-based branding studies and enable publishers to prove their value to clients by helping advertisers measure the impact of their campaigns. Ad Impact draws from Compete's online panel of U.S. consumers and provides behavior-based metrics in three categories: site impact (branded site and microsite visitation); search and ecosystem impact (search phrases, social media, rival site and third-party site visitation); and campaign profile information (demographic, impression and frequency reporting). Clients can request additional customized metrics and use the information from Ad Impact as inputs into cross-media measurement.

Ad Impact also delivers analytical reports that aim to allow clients to measure the impact of advertising on relevant consumer behaviors; assess performance versus control groups and other segments to understand the benefit of reaching specific audiences; benchmark against other campaigns and against competing publishers; gain a more complete view of advertising ROI; and establish publisher-advertiser trust through accountability and transparency. For more information visit www.competeinc.com.

SPSS updates software suite

Chicago research company SPSS Inc. has launched PASW Statistics 18 (formerly SPSS Statistics), an enhanced version of its statistics software suite. PASW Statistics 18 is intended to support the analytic process - preparing data, running analysis and creating and delivering reports. The latest version includes new analysis and reporting capabilities that aim to improve results and offers expanded ability for users to create their own analytical functionality using open source (R and Python) programming languages.

Additional features include: PASW

continued on p. 67

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research industry news

Calendar of Events October-November

Infosurv will host a one-hour Webinar, themed "Tapping the Wisdom of Crowds To Predict the Future," on October 27 at 1 p.m. EDT. For more information visit www.infosurv.com/icewebinar.

Quirk's and Research Innovation and ROI Inc. will host a Webinar, themed "Planning for Success: Strategies to Make Your Research More Valuable to Executives," on November 2 at 12 p.m. CST. To register, visit https://quirks.webex.com. The Webinar is sponsored by AbsolutData Research and Analytics (www.absolutdata.com).

CASRO will hold its annual conference on October 14-16 at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colo. For more information visit www.casro.org.

IIR will hold The Market Research Event 2009 on October 18-21 at the Red Rock Casino Resort and Spa in Las Vegas. Register with code TMRE09QUIRK to save 15 percent off standard rates. For more information visit www.iirusa.com.

PMRG will hold its annual meeting of The PMRG Institute, themed "Tools for Maximizing Brand Potential," on October 25-27 at the Sheraton Philadelphia City Center Hotel in Philadelphia. For more information visit www.pmrg.org.

ESOMAR will hold its annual online research conference, themed "Online Panels and Beyond," on October 26-28 in Chicago. For more information visit www.esomar.org.

Statistical Analysis Software will hold its annual data mining conference on October 26-27 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. For more information visit www.sas.com/events/dmconf/index.html.

IIR will hold The Conference On Marketing on November 2-4 at Eden Roc Hotel in Miami. For more information visit www.theconferenceonmarketing.com.

The MRA will hold its First Outlook Conference and Expo on November 4-6 at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront. For more information visit www.mra-net.org.

CASRO will hold its annual data collection conference on November 19 at the Four Seasons in Las Vegas. For more information visit www.casro.org.

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

News notes

QSR International, a Doncaster, Australia, research software company, has selected **Eastern University** in St. Davids, Pa., and the **University of Guelph** in Guelph, Ontario, as recipients of the first NVivo 8 teaching grants, worth $10,000 each. The grants are intended to help each institution offer students access to qualitative data analysis technology and research methods using NVivo 8 software.

IMS Health, a Norwalk, Conn., research company, intends to eliminate 850 jobs, citing the need to reduce costs and focus on markets with high growth.

Robert Groves has been confirmed as director of the **U.S. Census Bureau**. The Marketing Research Association, Glastonbury, Conn., endorsed his nomination on May 13, 2009, and lobbied for his appointment.

Second To None Inc., an Ann Arbor, Mich., research company, celebrated its 20th anniversary in June 2009.

EMI Surveys, a Cincinnati research company, hit a record high for monthly sales in May 2009.

Acquisitions/transactions

The U.K. division of French research company **Cegedim Strategic Data** (CSD) has acquired **Hospital Marketing Services**, a Hampshire, U.K., data analysis company. CSD plans to expand its patient data analysis to include hospital specialists.

After six months, Nuremberg, Germany, research company **The GfK Group**'s retail and technology division has completed its takeover of **Ifop Music**, a Paris surveying company. Ifop will continue trading under its existing name.

IBM, an Armonk, N.Y., technology firm, has agreed to acquire Chicago research company **SPSS Inc.** in an all-cash transaction for $50 per share, resulting in a total cash consideration of approximately $1.2 billion. The deal is expected to close later in the second half of 2009.

Paris research company **Ipsos** has agreed to acquire 100 percent of the share capital of **Market Research Bureau of Ireland Limited**, Blackrock, Ireland, pending approval from the European Competition Authority.

Allegiance Inc., a Salt Lake City research company, has acquired **Inquisite**, an Austin, Texas, research software company, in an effort to expand its enterprise feedback management offerings.

Alliances/strategic partnerships

Research companies **Delve**, St. Louis, and **The Focus Room Inc.**, New York, have partnered to offer research companies a solution to facilitate qualitative research and streamline and manage data collection needs.

Starcom MediaVest Group, Chicago, has teamed up with **Telemundo Communications**, Hialeah, Fla., to expand its Beyond Demographics research initiative to the Latino market. The companies are undertaking a study to examine consumer behavior for the U.S. Hispanic market.

continued on p. 71

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By Paul Tuchman

How to get the most for your qualitative research dollar

Editor's note: Paul Tuchman is president of Outsmart Marketing, a Minneapolis research firm. He can be reached at 952-924-0053 or at ptuch@aol.com. To view this article online, enter article ID 20091002 at quirks.com/articles.

Now more than ever, companies are scrambling to maximize their qualitative marketing research dollars. For some shortsighted firms, that means cutting research, delaying projects or skipping entirely the up-front qualitative phase of the research process. But for others, today's tight economy fosters a new, more creative approach to research.

Here are five questions we're seeing more clients ask themselves these days. While budget pressures might be the prime motivation, they are the right questions to ask even when the economy isn't slumping. Getting the most for your qualitative research dollar is always the smart thing to do.

1. How many cities do we really need to visit? The old three-cities-in-four-days marathon has fallen victim to higher airfares, shrinking travel budgets and, most importantly, more critical thinking about the purpose and goals of the research. There's no one answer to this question, but to maximize your research spending, keep a few key insights in mind:

- At least sometimes, get out of your own backyard. Too many clients end up listening to themselves - or people who look and sound like them - by doing most or all of their research in their home market. You'll be amazed how much more you can sometimes learn by going to another market where your company or brand isn't as well known, or isn't viewed, for better or worse, as the hometown team.
- Only go where you know or suspect that usage, attitudes or the competition is different. Since we're talking qualitative, there's no real advantage to adding markets and groups just for the sake of bigger numbers. But if your sales data, past research or educated hunches tell you that you'll hear different things, or get different reactions, in different markets, then by all means figure out the most cost-effective way to include them. But if all that is likely to be different is the accent,

snapshot

Tight budgetary times are a good excuse to reassess your firm's use of qualitative research, the author argues. Examine the markets you're doing your groups in - are there better options? Are there alternatives to travel? By answering these and other questions contained in the article you'll develop practices that will pay dividends no matter what the economic conditions are.

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then save some of your limited research budget for the next project.

2. How do we schedule groups to maximize our learning? To minimize time away form the office, marketers' instincts are often to squeeze groups and – if working in multiple markets – cities as close together as possible. But it's usually better to build time into your research schedule so you can react to learning and insights as you gain them. In terms of what you actually learn, you often end up with two research projects for the price of one.

If you're conducting only one day of groups, leave enough time between sessions to change concepts or artwork, or rethink the guide if necessary. If you're doing more than one city, don't do them on consecutive days. A day – or sometimes a week – back in the office can yield huge dividends in terms of learning when you move to the second or third city.

If one phrase is sinking a concept, or one image is misleading respondents about your product, change it and see if you can create a winner. Hearing the same issues or criticisms group after group doesn't move you any closer to the finish line, but taking the time to answer objections by modifying the stimulus often can.

3. Are there alternatives to travel? Definitely! While there is often no exact substitute for actually watching a group or interview in person – you never quite get all the nuances and subtleties when viewing it on a PC or a video monitor – several suppliers can provide "almost like you're there" transmission quality. If you haven't used it in a while, you'll be pleased at how far they've come with picture clarity and real-time viewing.

And new built-in chat features let remote viewers chat live with each other and with anyone watching at the facility, allowing for ongoing learning and facilitating additional probes for the mod-

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4. Can we continue the research after the group is over? Follow-on research is becoming more and more popular, as clients look for ways to maximize the biggest expense in qualitative: recruiting the respondents in the first place. Most facilities are very open to "next steps" research: e-mailing respondents additional stimulus or questions for online responses, having the same respondents participate in a phase-two study with improved product or stimulus, or using the group participants for a longitudinal study on usage or attitudes.

Just make sure you talk to your consultant and facility first to understand the ground rules. Unless it's the client's list, the names technically belong to the facility and they can determine how and when they can be contacted, and what the charges will be.

5. Can't we just do it all online? In theory, of course, the answer is yes. Just about all kinds of qualitative can be done online these days and some companies have moved all or most of their work online.

But it's not really that simple. While online research can sometimes be less expensive than traditional groups or interviews, it's often comparable in price or even more expensive. And depending on the category, the kinds of respondents you want, the types of stimuli you're using and the kinds of questions you ask, in-person qualitative can yield greater interaction, richer learning and quicker and more effective moderator-respondent empathy.

Sometimes there really is no good substitute for genuine eye contact, the ability to read and interpret body language and voice inflection, and the atmosphere generated by meeting, exploring and sharing emotions together in-person. That's often the environment that allows respondents to be most relaxed, most open and most honest.

So by all means, consider doing some projects online. But do them online because that's the right solution for the problem at hand, not because it's the newest trend or the latest buzz.

Perfect time

If you think about these questions, and discuss them among your staff and an experienced qualitative consultant, you have the best chance of using your research dollars wisely.

Today's challenging business climate means this is the perfect time to look at your qualitative projects with a critical eye. The lessons you learn – and the new approaches you might launch today – will reap benefits for your company and your products long after this recession fades into memory. | Q

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> by the numbers

By John Goodman and Patty David

Why your customer satisfaction surveys are not actionable

When is the last time your organization took a significant action as a direct result of a survey? We recently interviewed the vice president of customer insights for a major communications firm, who commented that his firm spends millions of dollars on surveys yet still lacks actionable information. In that company, like many, satisfaction surveys have acquired a reputation for being unactionable and frustrating.

Why do many research studies end up on the shelf gathering dust? How can market research directors help internal customers (e.g., chief customer experience officers) and vice presidents of customer insights to create actionable, integrated voice of the customer (VOC) solutions? If market research does not help facilitate and fulfill the task of providing actionable solutions, the customer service or quality functions within the organization might execute a similar integrated analysis and the VOC function could be removed from market research along with the accompanying budget. We've seen this happen in pharmaceutical, communications and packaged goods companies.

Most surveys have little impact in the real world, for the following four reasons:

1. Surveys do not measure or report events that people either care about or can influence.
2. Surveys are presented in a vacuum so that other data describing the customer experience often contradicts it, giving everyone an excuse for inaction.
3. Surveys are poorly packaged so no one can quickly determine what the problem is and what should be done.
4. Surveys do not create an economic imperative to take action by showing the cost of inaction.

All four of these can be remedied, but to do so will require market research to go beyond its comfort zone and actually look at data from the operations and ser-

snapshot

Your internal clients are busy. To give them the customer satisfaction data they need, the authors suggest, you must make the information relevant and easy to act upon and tie it to a specific economic consequence.

Editor's note: John Goodman is vice chairman, and Patty David is vice president of research services at TARP Worldwide Inc., an Arlington, Va., research firm. Goodman can be reached at jgoodman@tarp.com. David can be reached at pdavid@tarp.com. To view this article online, enter article ID 20091003 at quirks.com/articles.

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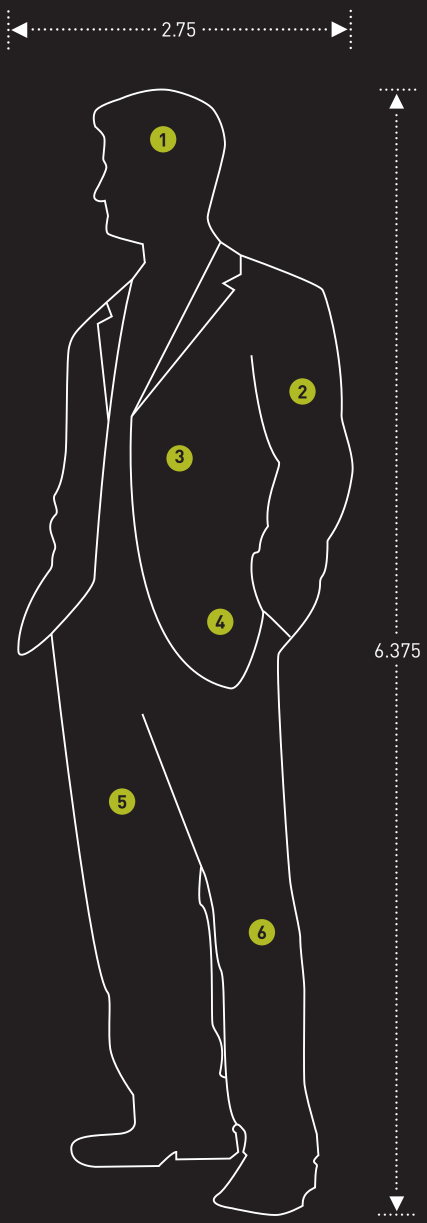

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vice part of the organization. Let's review each of the reasons:

1. "The data is not relevant; it doesn't tell me what needs to be fixed."

In most cases this means it is either too general or too tactical, missing the actionable insight. Most surveys are usually about the relationship or about the transaction. The "relationship" surveys measure what happened over the past six months or year and focus on ratings over general dimensions of the relationship. The problem is that a customer often wants to give specifics on one aspect of the dimension, but then s/he is not given the opportunity. Relationship surveys often ask for general comments when a respondent really wants to tell you about "this one specific thing you do that bugs me." In many cases, the issue may not even be top-of-mind or may be a policy that is an industry policy. Both the rating of a broad dimension and the open-ended approach do not evoke the specific issues. Companies miss the answers that are actionable.

The "transaction" surveys measure the tactical interactions: "How did Mary Lou the customer service rep handle your call?" In most cases, the transaction survey is conducted right after or within 24 hours of the call because the outcome of the transaction is often not obvious at that point. However, this impedes production of actionable insights that are bigger than the call but smaller than the relationship, i.e., "Mary Lou did fine, but your system never followed through on her promises of action."

2. "The data you are providing is not telling me what I hear from other reliable sources."

Your internal customers are receiving two other ongoing flows of information about the customer experience. The first describes what your company has done for (e.g., on-time delivery) or to (e.g., missed delivery) customers via transactions by units like operations, sales and accounts receivable. The second flow is information from customer service and sales describing recent contacts, complaints and interactions. Nothing happens in a vacuum. Often operational data and survey data highlight a completely different set of issues than contact and complaint information from service. Operational data describes events of commission or omission while survey data reflects attitudinal data. The information from the customer contacts consists of a combination of both types of data. These three somewhat contradicting data sets give another excuse for inaction.

3. "I can't easily make sense out of this survey report. I will need to study it later when I have more time."

Most survey reports are poorly packaged, precluding the desire to move quickly to action. Part of this is because most research reports indicate findings with a list of problems or opportunities. These reports do not suggest a specific set of priorities within opportunities nor recommendations for specific actions. Because the internal customer, the strategic business unit (SBU) or the V.P. of customer experience cannot make an immediate determination of the problem and the appropriate resulting action, no action takes place. This often occurs because of internal boundaries and lack of effective communication channels between the market research department and the internal user over the data. The SBU does not understand the market research data; however, in order to move to action, the SBU has to take serious time to understand the data. Most managers do not readily have this time. Therefore, the prudent approach from a manager's point of view is to put the report aside until there is enough time to review it in detail, but this hardly ever happens. Instead, it sits on the shelf along with other market research reports.

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4. "I agree there is a significant problem but I have other issues right now. I'll get to this next quarter."

Most reports do not create an economic imperative to take action from showing the cost of inaction. It is common for reports to highlight satisfaction measures, strengths and weaknesses, but what happens to the bottom line if no action is taken? The revenue impact of problems tends to be 10-20 times the cost of impact, but such impacts are seldom estimated in most satisfaction research reports.

More actionable

So, how do you make your survey reports more actionable?

Ask a direct question about what did not work. Do not hesitate to show the respondent a predefined list of things that could have gone wrong. This allows you to uncover as many as three times more problems. Understanding problems will result in actions. Furthermore, problems are events that be acted upon and can be prevented, making the report more obviously actionable.

Integrate your survey data with other sources, including operational data and contact data. If you place your research data within the context of the contact data and key data that describes what the company has done to the customers, it instantly becomes more relevant and less contradictory. Remember, your client receives these two other data streams regularly so your report will be compared to them. If you explain the context and any contradictions, you look smarter and your report will not be discounted. Integrating data results in actions.

Suggest specific actions. A standard management rule is: Do not give an executive a problem; give him a problem with a suggested solution. Talk to a couple of operating people from the SBU for at least the top two issues. Understand the context and suggest possible solutions, i.e., strawman solutions. By doing this, the executive will not start with a blank sheet of paper concerning action plans and fixes.

Create an economic imperative to act now. A few years ago, TARP highlighted an engine problem to an auto company that was causing $50 million in potential damage to customer loyalty. The auto company agreed that it was an important issue but other items had higher priority. The minute TARP recast the data to say, "Each month you fail to take action will cost you $4.6 million," the auto company took action. If you can quantify the cost of inaction for a month, you will almost always precipitate action.

Cut through the clutter

Your internal clients are busy, swamped with information from other sources and are primarily concerned about the bottom line. Unless your reports cut through the clutter with immediate, relevant information, they will continue to be ignored. The best course of action is to tell your clients what it will cost them not to take action. |Q

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automotive research

By Matt Schroder

Getting to the bottom of things

Laddering showed Infiniti how drivers viewed its Around View Monitor technology

Editor's note: Matt Schroder is director of communications for the Qualitative Research Consultants Association. He can be reached at mschroder@qrca.org. To view this article online, enter article ID 20091004 at quirks.com/articles.

snapshot

Infiniti used laddering to better understand how a host of new technologies met, or didn't meet, car buyers' unstated psychological motivations and how the technologies supported the Infiniti brand.

Accolades for one of the latest automotive technologies from Infiniti include a 2008 Breakthrough Award from *Popular Mechanics* and a "Best of What's New" distinction from *Popular Science*.

The road to that recognition was paved in large part by the results of extensive qualitative research.

Today, Infiniti EX35 drivers can experience an Infiniti-first technology: the Around View Monitor (AVM). Cameras placed on every side of the vehicle reflect objects or other vehicles around the car. The AVM shows the surrounding environment in a composite bird's-eye perspective on a dashboard monitor. The AVM system was one of 25 advanced technology features Infiniti developers had on the table four years before its 2008 launch.

The decision to implement this feature came after literally hundreds of hours of employing a qualitative research technique called laddering. Laddering interviews are typically used to provide an in-depth understanding of how consumers relate to a brand by delving into hidden, preconscious factors that influence purchase. A desired outcome of the technique is often information that supports brand identity development and provides emotionally-based direction to drive strategy.

In the AVM instance, laddering was implemented with a unique twist.

The Nissan advanced product development team, which already had qualitative research experience for a different application, engaged Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA) member Michele Zwillinger, chief explorer at Los Angeles-based SnoopPro Research, to put together a laddering project to aid new-product development decisions. The purpose of the research was to determine which of 25 potential technology features supported the Infiniti brand most effectively.

Zwillinger and Rachel Nguyen, director of advanced planning and strategy for Nissan North America, presented the case study at the QRCA's Symposium on Excellence in Qualitative Research in Chicago earlier this year.

Series of probes

Usually conducted in a one-on-one interview setting, laddering uses a series of probes (such as "Why is that important to you?") to generate means-end chains, or ladders, related to a product or service feature or attribute.

"What drew us to use laddering was that we wanted to understand if the values consumers associated with the advanced technology features were consistent with Infiniti brand values," Nguyen says. "We're very brand oriented, and this proved to be a very credible way for us to help keep a constant check on how the brand is resonating with our customers and similar prospects. And it offered us an effective way to prioritize our technology rollouts over the course of several years."

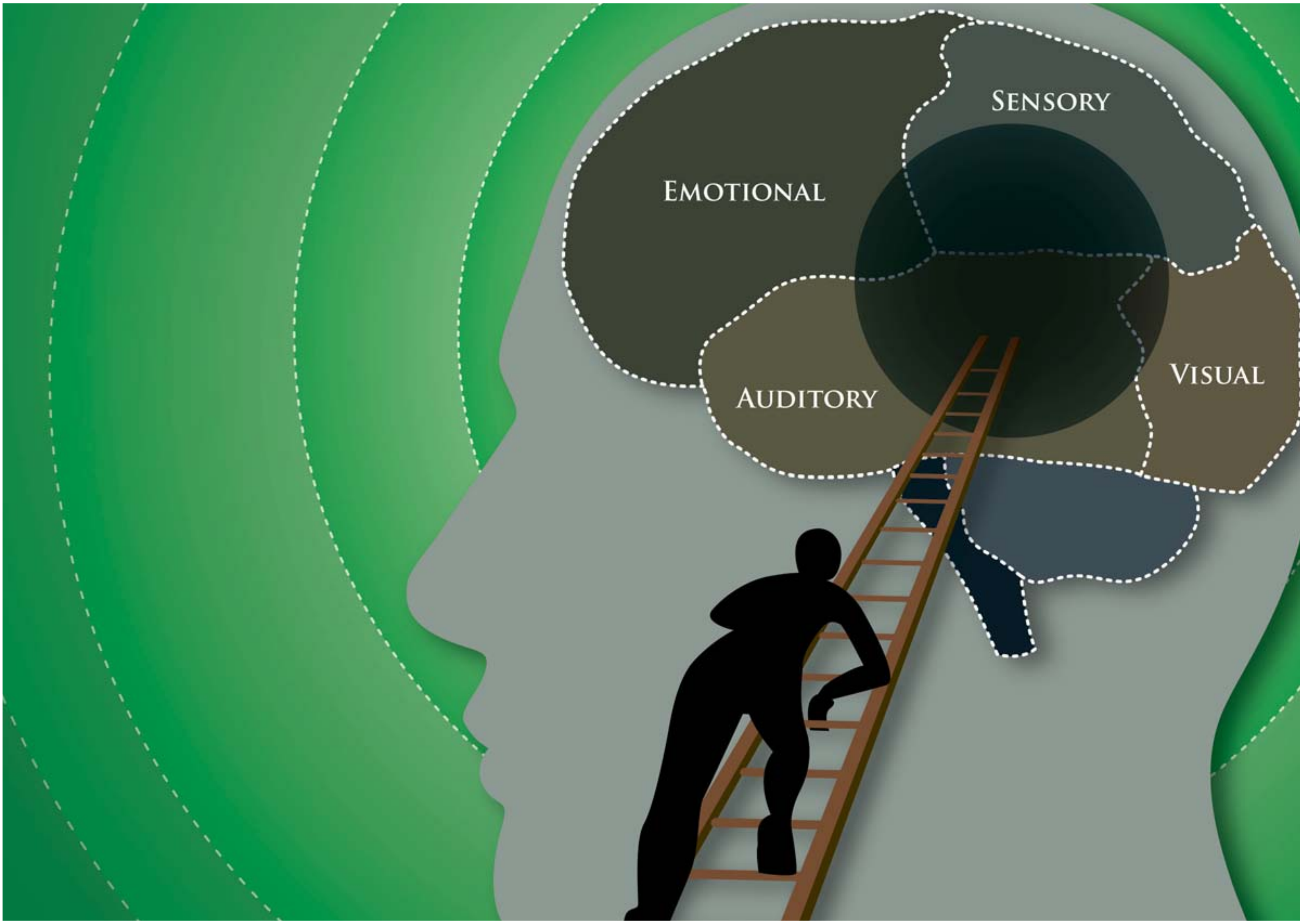
Zwillinger and her team recruited Infiniti and competitive brand owners using the following screening requirements:

- an even 50/50 split of male and female drivers;
- drivers of one-third of each car type (sedan, SUV/crossover and coupe/convertible/sports model);
- age range 25 to 70;
- mix of married and single - no quotas;
- total household income of $100,000 and over;
- criteria consistent with Infiniti-owner profile developed from prior qualitative research.

How they aligned

In this project, the goal was to identify the core value of individual features to see how they aligned with the already-known core values of the Infiniti brand.

Researchers initiated the production of stimuli that would present the 25 advanced automotive features both visually (graphic) and verbally (writ-



Check surroundings for safety
Front
Beep
Change View
CAMERA
DEST
ROUTE
MAP
ZOOM OUT
ZOOM IN
ENTER
STATUS
INFO
SETTING
AM·FM SAT
DISC AUX
BACK
VOICE

Beyond the obvious utility of the Around View Monitor, laddering helped Infiniti uncover respondents' more deeply-held feelings surrounding the technology, such as the peace of mind it brings and the stress that accompanies damage to one's car.

ten statements) to best communicate features that were not yet in the marketplace and which would require participants to stretch their imagination to comprehend.

The screening, development of verbal and graphic concepts and a warm-up process became critical to the validity of the overall process. Zwillinger's script explained the laddering process so respondents could quickly understand the objectives and flow of the interview, and so they would not be surprised by the repetitive questions it requires. "I found that I had to set that stage for them, get them comfortable with the laddering technique," Zwillinger says. "That warm-up put the respondents much more at ease and increased the success of the interview."

Each person reviewed 10 to 20 features, and eventually laddered between seven and 10 features which they both understood and were interested in seeing on a car they would purchase in the future. Before laddering took place, the respondent was read and shown a description of each feature, then was asked to describe it to make sure everyone was talking about the same thing. "We asked them to indicate in their own words - not reading back the concept statement - the benefit each feature provided and using their words, then had them ladder the importance of each benefit," Zwillinger says. "From the laddering we were able to determine the core value embodied by or most closely associated with each feature."

Primary core value

Each of the 25 features was laddered, from direct physical benefits to emotional consequences/benefits and ultimately to the primary core value for the feature, by repeatedly asking the respondent "Why is that important to you?" The laddering process was repeated for several benefits if more than one was expressed, and if there was time.

The following example of the outcome from Zwillinger's laddering process for the Around View Monitor shows actual responses collected from one of the hour-long interviews:

Level 1 benefit: Video cameras make blind spots more visible
Level 2: Won't back into something
Level 3: Won't destroy something
Level 4: Damage to car is stressful
Level 5 core value: Peace of mind

Researchers ended up with thousands of pages of data that were transferred into 25 spreadsheets, one for each of the 25 features tested. Each sheet included automotive ownership, demographic, psychographic and laddering data (including the core value) for each person seeing a specific feature.

To make it easier for the client to understand and use the laddering outcome, Zwillinger created a template that summarized all the data for each feature in terms of perceived benefits, physical consequences, emotional consequences and core value. For example, continuing with the AVM example, the abbreviated analysis included:

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Perceived benefits: Camera more accurate than sensor
Physical consequences: Avoid hitting or bumping into something; easier to park
Emotional consequences: Concern about repair costs
Core value: Peace of mind

Analysis of the laddering exercise led Zwillinger to develop of a list of seven core values similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The list included an unusual value that reflected the unique values of the Infiniti-defined target. That value, hedonistic compassion, combines the altruism and outer-directedness of Maslow's love/belonging with a tinge of narcissism, but differed from similar language associated with the values Zwillinger labeled emotional security and self-esteem.

"We found many of the participants in this study cared about others, mainly as a reflection of self," Zwillinger says. "They take care of themselves so they can take care of others. They desire luxury for sensual reasons, not to impress others."

Zwillinger was able to summarize what the customers were saying, with an eye toward what Infiniti wanted to do with the information, Nguyen says. Ultimately, the research allowed for placing each individual automotive feature into the appropriate Infiniti brand pillar (peace of mind, driving pleasure and hospitality) based on the core values of that feature. "The depth and understanding of what we were trying to accomplish from an advanced product planning perspective, that's what Zwillinger produced in spades," Nguyen says.

Weighted evaluation

After a thorough review of each feature summary ladder from the research, Nguyen and her team at Infiniti created a weighted evaluation for each of the advanced automotive technology features according to four criteria:

- breadth of support of core customer values;
- breadth of emotional consequences;
- clarity of feature's benefit to the customer;
- appeal to respondent (like or dislike).

Integrating all the data, the Infiniti advanced product team placed the features into three tiers - essentially a customer-driven prioritization of the features which supported the Infiniti brand identity. The individual features that scored the highest in the four-category evaluation emerged as the team's recommendations for feature rollout.

Competitor assessment, feasibility and investment costs were also considered in the final decision, but qualitative research results carried an undeniable weight. "What the qualitative research is doing, and laddering in this case, is soliciting intangible values from tangible ones," Nguyen says. "And that's a powerful tool when you can have someone tell you what's at the core of why something is important to them." |Q

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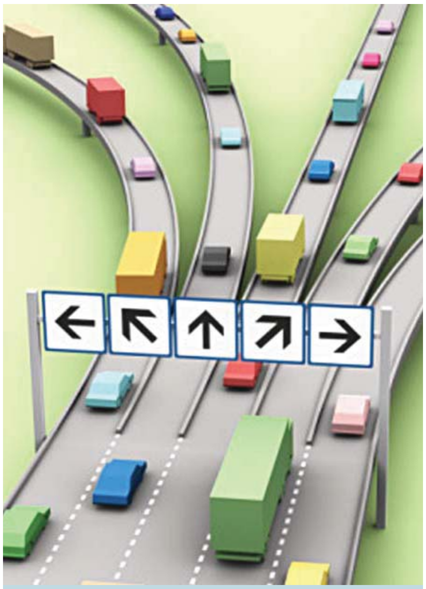

Researchers chart the road ahead for the auto industry

By Emily Goon

It has been a trying year for the American auto industry – and that's putting it mildly. With two of the Big Three auto manufacturers receiving government bailouts after filing for bankruptcy and countless others coping with the recession through layoffs and dealership closings, the instability left consumer confidence in American automakers shaky at best. Data from AutoPacific, a Tustin, Calif., research company, shows that when respondents were asked in June 2009 if they would be concerned about purchasing a vehicle from General Motors, the result was a staggering 58 percent yes. Chrysler fared even worse, with 62 percent of respondents answering in the affirmative.

The good news, however, is that the worst of it appears to be over. Consumer reluctance to buy Chrysler or GM models dropped double digits once both manufacturers had made it through bankruptcy in July 2009 (42 and 53 percent, respectively). Granted, those figures are still high compared to the likes of Ford, Toyota and Honda, but the numbers are clearly heading in the right direction for automakers, and the Big Three's existence is no longer in flux.

The auto industry has taken steps based largely upon guidance from market and trend forecasting studies to keep current with (and – ideally – ahead of) consumer needs, wants and expectations. With a minimum four-year life cycle from R&D to the showroom floor, automakers rely on research projections to take them from rock bottom to rock solid in both sales and public opinion. We may not be out of the woods yet, but researchers are working diligently to analyze the effects of the past 18 months and help auto manufacturers move forward. The crisis has pressed them to trim the fat, reevalute demand and seek to define consumers' ever-evolving (and always personal) definitions of "value."

In August, to gain some insight into what went wrong and what the future might hold, we spoke with three such researchers, whose companies have an auto industry focus, to assess the current state of car-making.

Back on board

Their consensus was that the outlook is surprisingly bright, as perhaps now more than ever automakers are poised to deliver products that are competitive and more precisely in line with con-

snapshot

Three auto industry research experts delve into the damage done to domestics, why some manufacturers were hit worse than others and what 'value' will look like on showroom floors in upcoming years.

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sumer demand. But, they noted, there is still much work to do. No longer able to rely on high-margin SUVs to prop up their bottom lines, automakers are facing a host of new production-related financial realities. Further, American car makers must convince consumers of their financial security and overall trustworthiness, and they need new products hot enough to compel car buyers to take the leap of faith and get back on board with domestics.

The good news is, satisfaction is high among purchasers of vehicles, and the level of quality differences between the top and bottom are smaller than they've ever been, according to Dan Hall, vice president of AutoPacific. "If you listen to Washington, they'll tell you that the problems we're having right now are the result of car makers making vehicles people don't want to buy, and up until we had a banking crisis, that wasn't a problem. We were having no problems selling vehicles … I think vehicles are better now than they've ever been, and I think they match consumers' desires more now than they ever have."

So what do consumers want these days? That's easy: value. The hard part is defining what value means to car buyers. It's a broad concept that takes into account price and features, as well as the total cost of ownership. Where upfront cost and fuel economy may be the most valuable attributes to one person, quality and resale could be equally as important to another. This is how even high-end luxury car buyers believe they're getting good value, says Duncan Lawrence, executive vice president of Morpace, a Farmington Hills, Mich., research company. "Value has always been paramount in consumers' minds. Some aspects of value and how it is defined may actually be changing over time."

Most influential

Right now, cost and fuel economy are the most influential in the value equation. "If gas prices go up, [the importance of] fuel economy is going to continue to go up. When the economy gets a little bit better, maybe the saving-money portion becomes less important," says Lawrence.

Hall agrees that fuel economy is crucial in the consumer pursuit of value, but that's nothing new. "About 70 percent of consumers over the past three years rate fuel economy as either extremely or very important to them, and that's been steady over the past three years," he says. "One would expect that people would be much more interested in fuel economy, but the data show that that's not the case."

Citing data from a first-quarter 2009 survey of respondents who had purchased a new vehicle in the last quarter of 2008 when gas prices were at an all-time high, Hall notes that sensitivity to fuel prices didn't change the type of vehicle that they purchased.

"Pain point"

While gas prices have declined to more reasonable levels, everyone knows they have only one place to go: up. Consumers anticipate a gallon to be well over $4 in the next five years and in the $3 range over the next year. According to Jim Mulcrone, senior research manager in the automotive research group of St. Louis-based Maritz Research, the "pain point" could be as low as $3 per gallon. At that cost, he says, research results show that fuel economy/gas mileage begins to skyrocket as the most important reason for purchase.

Higher gas prices could help the sale of hybrids and other fuel-efficient vehicles, Lawrence says. "There is and there will continue to be resistance to the [fuel-efficient] technology, such as these hybrid electrics, because of the upfront cost to purchase. People really aren't going to buy these types of vehicles unless it makes some economic sense for them – and that's generally as gas gets closer to $4 per gallon. Anything over $3.50, the math starts working for the hybrids," he says.

Results from a survey of visitors to the Motor Mouth online community of Gongos Research, Auburn Hills, Mich., show the three most common roadblocks to electric vehicle acceptance include safety, speed and range (the length of time a vehicle will travel before needing to be recharged). Characteristics such as size (capacity and cargo), availability of charging stations, battery disposal/recycling, performance, climate control (excessive drain on battery) and comfort also make the list of factors that drivers are reluctant to compromise on.

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an all-electric vehicle today, they would be most likely to do so in the form of a mid-size car (42 percent) over a full-size car (8 percent) or large SUV or CUV (5 percent), according to the Gongos data.

And cost, not the desire to go green, seems to be at the heart of fuel economy. While purchasers of hybrid vehicles were more likely to rank environmental concern as a high priority, those who considered purchasing a hybrid vehicle were more concerned with economics, according to data from AutoPacific. For most, doing a good green deed wasn't enough of a reason to pay the premium for a hybrid. When gas prices peaked near the $4 mark, the Prius boasted strong sales, but once the cost of fuel went down, incentives were offered to move them off dealers' lots.

So don't laud the altruism of Prius drivers just yet. According to Hall, "A lot of people who were buying hybrids were really buying them for the statement that the vehicle made, which makes a lot of sense when you consider the fact that the lion's share of hybrid sales went to the Prius – the only vehicle of hybrids in the marketplace that has a unique body style and makes a statement from 100 yards away. You don't have to explain to your neighbors that your car is a hybrid."

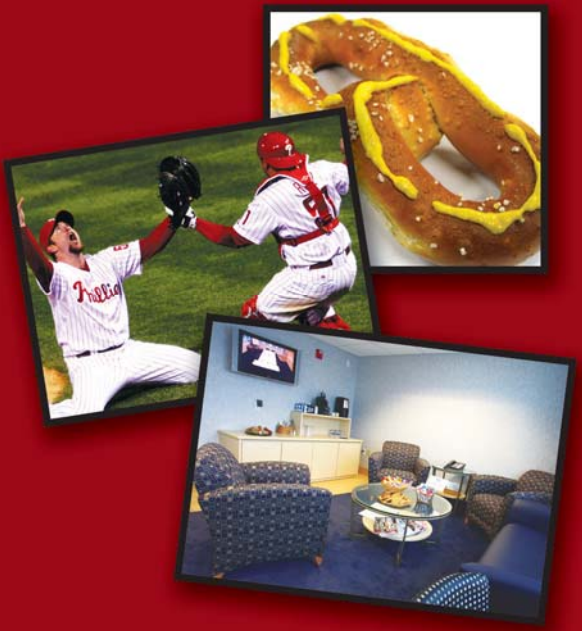
Great value is the driving force in car-buying, but money clearly isn't the only thing that matters. "Status still matters although many of us won't readily admit it," says Lawrence. "Luxury automotive brands have certainly seen a downturn in sales, but no worse than any other brands. Luxury car buyers have simply moved the value equation to factor in elements beyond price and fuel economy."

Brand identity and reputation

The cold hard truth is that not all auto manufacturers are created equal. The financial turbulence that reared its ugly head during one of the most severe economic crises since the Great Depression was not spawned overnight. Brand identity and reputation come into being over the course of many years – decades, even – and domestic car makers in many cases had no one but themselves to blame for consumers' dim views of their products. In contrast, companies like Toyota and Honda – both with positive brand images and established reputations in quality and fuel economy – were left in better shape relative to some of their American counterparts.

Toyota may have the Prius to thank for its green image, which persists in spite of the firm's lineup of trucks and SUVs, says Hall. "When gas was $4 a gallon they were not getting a lot of grief for launching a pickup truck because the Prius gave them a nice halo. They have a brand image that's green, and the Prius did that for them.

"In the auto business, the halo vehicle could be anything that excites consumers. The classic first example of the halo vehicles was the Chevrolet Corvette because it brought people to the dealership and then they left in another



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Chevrolet. The best halo vehicle of 2008 was the Toyota Prius." In the latter part of 2007, Toyota sold approximately 70,000+ extra vehicles because consumers came to look at the Prius.

Toyota isn't the only brand benefiting from halo success. Almost all makers have one halo model or vehicle with a better image than the brand itself, says Mulcrone. "It's a representation of what that brand can do and what it stands for and you hope that some of that image permeates into the other models. But the bottom line is, the brand has to stand for something."

Advertising can have a huge effect on a nameplate, but changing a brand identity takes time. While Toyota was riding the coattails of the Prius' success, Chevy was also advertising pretty aggressively to point out that it has several fuel-efficient models, says Lawrence, but it really didn't have the same impact. "In general, you need to support the brand because it has more impact on more vehicles and there are only a few models that have their own strength. Most of the time, you think about the brand and then the nameplate."

Adapt or die

The line has been drawn in the sand: adapt or die. But does that mean that hybrids are the way of the future? Yes and no. As consumer demand for fuel efficiency, comfort and style increase, automakers are also increasing the options. A high price for fuel doesn't mean we'll all be in Priuses and Insights. In fact, it's possible that the cars of the future will deliver in every way: body style, efficiency, power, even image.

Consumers may end up compromising very little. Manufacturers will be able to give consumers variety by offering smaller cars on a number of different platforms. Hatchbacks, coupes and wagons could help draw in buyers looking for more than the basic sedan. Advancing technology will also help increase both power and fuel efficiency while decreasing operating costs. Crossover SUVs with turbocharged, smaller-displacement engines embody this trend. Consumers will also have more options in the size of vehicles and type of drivetrains - from flex fuel to diesel. Volkswagen's Jetta TDI, which runs on clean diesel and gets a reported 40+ mpg, has sold well.

Hybrid and electric cars could also be changing. The Volt, Chevy's upcoming plug-in hybrid, reportedly gets 230 miles per gallon in city driving and has a range of over 300 miles using a lithium-ion battery pack and a small gasoline engine. The Volt is leading the way as Chevy repositions itself to regain market share and could potentially serve as Chevy's next halo vehicle, but with a $40,000 ticket price, that remains to be seen.

Ramping up their efforts

Going forward, all three researchers we spoke with cited reasons for optimism. As the new models in development attest, automakers seem to have a finger on the pulse of the American consumer. And while some companies have cut back on their purchase-related research, others are ramping up their efforts to track what's being said about them online. In addition to helping them spot trends, this type of listening will assist automakers in learning how various market segments define value and how it should end up manifested on the showroom floor.

Perhaps more importantly it also aids awareness of word of mouth, the positive version of which is so crucial to restoring consumer confidence. "Everything takes time; the automakers didn't earn their reputations over a couple of years and they aren't going to get rid of them over a couple of years," Lawrence says. "Make sure that people believe you've got a quality product and that you're every bit as good as the best in the industry. The most important thing is word of mouth. If people are saying good things about your brand then that's going to bring people into the dealership and get them to buy your vehicle." | Q

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Time for a new model?

The ignored importance of brands in the American auto industry

By Lorne McMillan

The U.S. automotive industry has had more than its share of bad news these last several months. This article makes the case that two significant contributors to the decline of American automotive companies are an under-appreciation of the role of branding coupled with a squandering of brand equity through badge engineering. The media (and particularly the automotive media) is rightly focused on the business and the economics of the auto industry, while most automotive consumer marketing research focuses on products, features and (of course) marketing.

When it comes to the automotive brands themselves - what they stand for, what health they're in - it seems like everyone is looking the other way. This is generally not the case with German, Japanese or Korean manufacturers, where there is more of an understanding and respect for the brands these manufacturers control and a much more judicious use of platform engineering.

We will explore here how the extravagant use of platform engineering at American auto manufacturers has weakened their brands and put domestic car makers at a deep-rooted competitive disadvantage. We make here a call for there to be a renaissance in the appreciation of branding in the American automotive industry and for a renewal of interest in automotive branding as a source of long-term prosperity for domestic car manufacturers.

Immense failure

No doubt books are being written now on the immense failure of the American auto industry. While the downward trajectory of the American share of the U.S. auto market has been evident for years it was not inevitable that this should lead to bankruptcy. It could have led to smaller but stronger brands. It may yet.

From a strategic perspective the American industry has failed on three essential points:

- Never truly coming to grips with quality small cars, but instead being reactive to consumer demand for smaller vehicles spurred by oil crises. This equating of small = cheap and cheap = poor-quality allowed manufacturers of smaller and cheaper cars to turn around and make high-quality small cars. Look at Honda as a great example of this; what American auto brand is known for quality small cars?

snapshot

With domestic automakers attempting to rise from the ashes, the author argues that a renewed focus on branding could play an important role in restoring a sense of vision and viability to the industry.

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- Virtually abandoning the luxury sedan market to first the German brands and then to Japanese brands as well. This still has not been recovered, and has left the American industry with hardly any flagship product in which to invest pride and credibility.
- The huge overreliance on short-term price-support marketing to shift product out of dealers (remember employee pricing, "You pay what we pay"?). This distorted the used-car market and severely stressed what was left of brand equity, particularly for General Motors (GM) and Chrysler brands. How can we invest integrity into brands whose products were effectively being given away on TV three years ago?

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Excitedly speculating

Among all the media coverage of the decline of the domestic auto industry, plant closings, job losses and the human cost of this failure, the automotive media has been excitedly speculating if GM will "rescue" one of its soon-to-disappear Pontiac cars and re-badge it a Chevrolet, and if Fiat, which now has a strategic voice at Chrysler, will have Chrysler build the Fiat 500 in the U.S. and badge it as a Dodge.

Indulging in speculation about slotting products under badges like this in some giant kind of chess game is really no more than corporate fantasizing that it has some sort of control over consumer tastes. We know from years of work for many manufacturers that consumers are generally not impressed by this; people do understand platform engineering but when this is taken too far - when it becomes badge engineering - then a note of cynicism creeps into consumer opinion and many consumers start to question the benefits to them of such a move.

Do this for too long, as GM and Chrysler clearly have, and Ford nearly has, and the badges themselves (the brands) have the meaning drained right out of them.

Dark art

What's the difference between platform engineering and badge engineering? Most auto manufacturers around the world practice the dark art of platform engineering, where they go to great lengths to create an engineering base flexible enough to support different vehicle models. The theory is brilliant: design different body styles and interiors to sit on a common foundation. The advantages are obvious, and when it's executed well it's very successful, but when it's evolved into badge engineering, we now know it can lead to near disaster.

While platform engineering uses a common foundation to create vehicles with different body styles and different usage intentions such as the common platform for the Ford Fusion (sedan) and Ford Edge (SUV), badge engineering uses a common platform to create a range of vehicles that are all the same body style, but are presented under different brands (a current example would be these four SUVs from GM: the Buick Enclave, the Chevy Traverse, the GMC Acadia and the Saturn Outlook).

GM has been the past master at this for many years, taking a common platform and spinning three or sometimes four versions of similar vehicles under different brands.

Automotive blogs are great places to study consumer reactions to this type of activity. Consumers often know part of this story but often don't realize how widespread the practice has been or how long it's been going on.

Now, the tactical benefits of badge engineering are seductive - gain more short-term share for little extra cost by having more apparent choice out in the market. Still, no one seems to have considered what long-term damage this might do to the brands that have carried this type of cloned product for years. But now we know: Do you remember Oldsmobile?

What we've seen in the U.S. auto market over the past few years has effectively been the erosion of confidence in the product lineup of domestic manufacturers, particularly of GM and Chrysler, because their product ranges have been broad but shallow, offering too many similar models. They have been outmaneuvered by the likes of Toyota and Honda that have product ranges that are both broad and deep.

Question the belief

It's quite fashionable at present to doubt the value of branding per se. Several books and blogs recently have questioned that great slippery enterprise, which purports to generate added value to products and services. Indeed it may be a good thing to question the belief that identifying with a particular brand of handbag or toothpaste will make you a better person. But when it comes to automobiles it's actually easy to show the value of branding, and it's easy to believe in the power of branding when one takes a comparative look at the automotive landscape.

Here's a simple but quite effective test to explore automotive brand depth: Ask yourself about the "-ness" of it. For example, what, exactly, is BMW-ness to you? Write your answers on a piece of paper. Now, what is Cadillac-ness? Or Dodge-ness? When we do this in qualitative research the richness of data might surprise you. Of course owners of particular brands usually have a larger array of meaning associated with their brand than non-owners. Luxury automotive brands tend to have a richer brand imagery than mainstream brands, simply because they tend to have invested more in their brands over the years and have appreciated that their brand image is as important as their products.

If you own a BMW or a Mercedes-Benz or a Jaguar, it's not uncommon to find people like you writing down up to 10 attributes of "-ness" for your brand. If you're an owner of a Dodge, a Buick or a Mercury vehicle, you're doing really well to find five. You may think this proves nothing whatsoever but I think it's symptomatic of the fact that auto brands are like house plants: They need to be cared for, fed, trimmed and put in the right spot.

If brands are used simply as envelopes for carrying product, and if there is no consideration of the health and direction and stature of the brands themselves, then they stagnate, grow quiet and eventually die. American automotive brands are in a perilous state simply because they've ceased to mean much. When they have little meaning within them, they can't contribute enough to the products under their umbrella. They reach a point where they lack differentiation (the "-ness"!) and they lose sight of their unique properties. Once they've lost that, they're done for. After all, why would anyone want to buy a vehicle under a brand that doesn't stand for much?

Great gifts

One of the great gifts that qualitative marketing research has given the automotive industry is the realization that the buying of an automobile is not a strictly rational decision. People who sell cars have always understood this, but people who make cars can still have a hard time believing that something so complex, so expensive, so central to people's lives can be decided apparently on a whim.

My belief as an automotive researcher is that cars, like homes, are actually too important to be left only to an entirely rational decision-making process, that for each of these huge purchases we have to feel good about them. We have to live for years with the results of these transactions so they need to do a lot more than just satisfy a narrow list of functional needs.

There are no really poor-quality cars sold in the U.S. anymore, now that the days of Yugo jokes are over! But even though virtually all cars meet a fundamental baseline of reliability and of minimum comfort, it's clear that this is not enough for most

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people. Consider: any automotive research project we run will tend to have two interesting consumer insights hovering in the data background:

- One is a phenomenon we call specification drift - simply the consumer assumption that the baseline specification on vehicles gets higher almost every year. For example, years ago one could hear in focus groups the assumption that electric windows would be an optional extra on low-spec vehicles. This feature is now completely embedded in fundamental expectations of vehicles, and it's the same with a host of features that start out as extras and over time become regarded as standard features (think power steering, radios, CD players, automatic door locks … it's a long list), so the baseline of acceptability drifts ever upwards.
- The second is more subtle. It's the simple desire of people in regular automotive brands (not only the luxury or sporting brands) to want their cars to have meaning. They want their cars to stand for something, to have some personality.

Dynamic and needy

So if we take each of these phenomena we can see that the market is both dynamic and needy: the whole benchmark of quality is rising, vehicles are getting better and most people want their vehicle to stand for something. They want meaning, not just transportation. This is the role that branding plays in the automotive world.

If this isn't proof enough of the effects of branding in this market, consider a more practical test of the power of comparative branding: comparing the residual values of vehicles made under what the industry sometimes calls "twinning" agreements. This is where manufacturers come together and produce vehicles on a shared production line. Each manufacturer brands its own version of the vehicle and while there are small cosmetic and specification differences, the vehicles are basically the same. This doesn't happen very often across competing manufacturers, but when it does there's an interesting real-world case to be studied. Two examples of this would be Nissan and Ford twinning a minivan, where they produced the Mercury Villager and the Nissan Quest for a number of years, and Toyota and GM twinning a small family hatchback, where they produced the Toyota Matrix and Pontiac Vibe. In both cases the residual values of the Japanese-branded vehicles seem to be higher than the American-branded vehicles. In other words, the Nissan and Toyota versions of these vehicles hold their prices better. Coincidence? Much more likely to be brand effect.

Serious attention

No doubt that the domestic auto industry needs to stabilize but as this is happening serious attention also needs to be given to planning for brand health. Not simply corporate health, but how Dodge, Jeep, Chrysler, Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, GMC, Ford, Mercury and Lincoln are going to grow. Most of these brands have wonderful histories, have achieved fantastic things in their time and could do so again, if they are tended, fed, encouraged and cared for.

Brands can be tough things. Consider Land Rover as an upscale survivor brand. The manufacturer of 4x4 vehicles came out of British ownership with the defunct Rover Group where it toyed with engineering input from Honda for some years, was bought and nurtured by BMW, was bought in turn by Ford, and now belongs to Tata Motors of India. Yet it's still Land Rover, still making vehicles full of personality. One wonders if many domestic American brands could withstand the same sort of multiple changes in ownership across three continents over a 20-year span.

Be more proactive

As a research community we often hear from research buyers and users, as well as from practitioners, strong calls for the research industry to be more proactive and to take more of a lead in helping our client companies use the data we provide for them. Well I believe that now is a vital time for the American auto industry to be helped in this way. But how to do this? It leads to some really interesting ethical questions about the ultimate ownership of brands, the moral authority some owners have over brands and the ability of the research community to really do anything about this.

Consider: there are many shampoo brands, clothing brands and soda brands out there that have very well-mapped brand dynamics, fully attuned sets of brand values, a clear sense of where they are now and what their priorities are for the future. But there is no real evidence that many of the remaining

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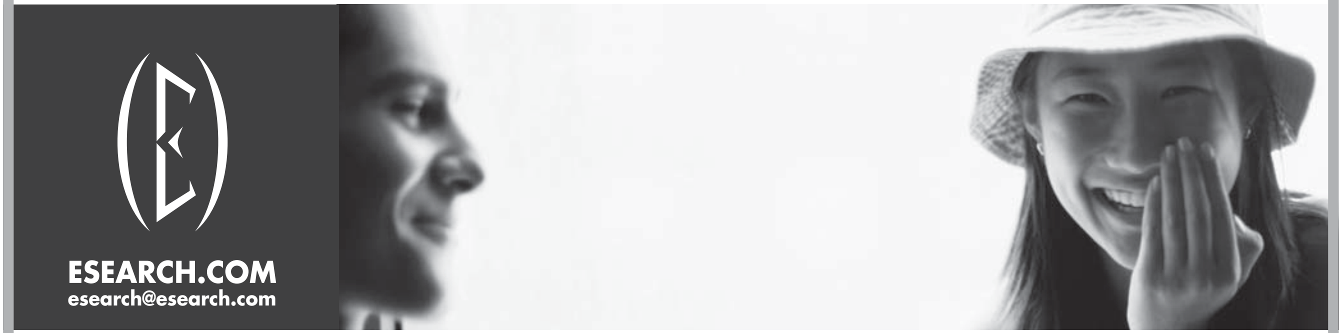

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American domestic automotive brands really have this level of brand management thinking behind them.

Research provides many of the tools for good brand management, but we provide these services not for the overall good of the industry we serve, but as vendors to paying clients in that industry. So as a research community we find ourselves in a problematic situation (as do researchers who serve the financial market): When we see our industry collapsing in front of our eyes, what use is our vendor-based business model now? We have the tools to really help, but how do we do that?

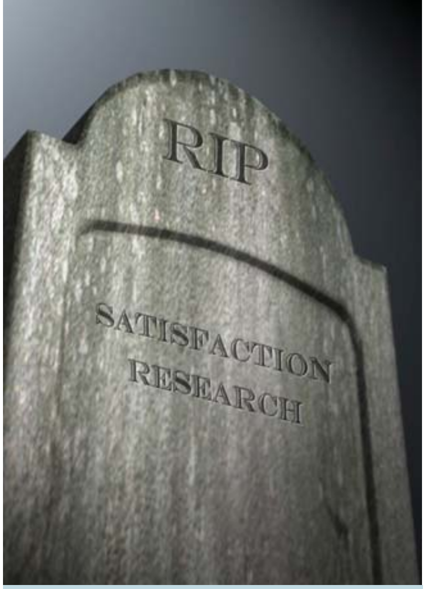
Who really has the rights to the moral ownership of brands that have been managed to near-extinction? (Some automotive brands that are, in theory, dead are in fact very much alive in the world of enthusiasts. There are plenty of people around who still drive and enjoy Oldsmobiles, to take one of many examples. One can still buy Oldsmobile products, there are enthusiast clubs, specialist part suppliers and so on. The only thing is, there's no one actually making new Oldsmobiles and no one planning future ones. So is the brand really dead?)

Is there a new paradigm for commercial marketing research about to be born from this kind of frustration? One that can somehow serve an industry rather than only specific players within it?

This crisis in the automotive industry, evidence perhaps of the creative destruction proposed by some economists, may indeed lead us to a new way of working, to a new kind of relationship with the companies we have served in the past. Now that it's clear that the old ways of doing things no longer work for the domestic automakers, perhaps we can all work together to find a more successful, more sustainable approach. | Q

Satisfying no longer

Part III: Finding customer satisfaction's rightful place



By Dennis Murphy
and Chris Goodwin

snapshot

Concluding their series on the failings of customer satisfaction measurement, the authors address ways to overcome those shortcomings through 10 best practices, including keeping satisfaction metrics separate from employee compensation, protecting respondents' interests and stopping questionnaire bloat.

This series began back in July with a postmortem on customer satisfaction measurement's failings. We grouped our comments under four headings: insubstantial theory, haphazard execution, measurement confiscation and inappropriate application.

In August, the second article underscored the consequences resulting from a myopic or misguided assessment on customer satisfaction. This third and final article explores how to resurrect the discipline though a combination of repositioning and the use of a rescue-kit of tools – some new approaches and some other, oft-forgotten but still sound research practices.

Our prior critiques may have seemed harsh, but they weren't meant to imply that no one is getting customer satisfaction right. In fact, the original drafts of all three articles were written by one of the authors from the cabin lanai of a cruise ship (yeah, my wife thinks I'm crazy too). The final morning of the trip I was pleasantly surprised by the customer satisfaction survey that was slipped under the cabin door. Here's what the cruise line did right:

- The survey itself made it absolutely clear that the organization's purpose was understood: your satisfaction is a means to their end – they want to sell you your next cruise.
- It was equally clear what the recipient benefit of participation was – your next cruise would be even better synchronized to your needs than the current one.
- The execution instrument itself didn't make the customer feel as if they were the one being executed.
- Finally, the cruise line had early on demonstrated excellent customer service by handling a couple of small issues flawlessly, so it was clear that the survey information was for improving customer satisfaction – not just customer satisfaction scores.

As we build a case for "doing it right" you'll hear a bit more about the cruise. Here goes.

Insubstantial theory

Best practice #1: *Always embed a sales surrogate in every survey.*

A brand choice exercise usually works well. Even better, include actual customer revenue. (Note: We realize that this sometimes requires taking on

Editor's note: Dennis Murphy is vice president of the technology practice at Directions Research, Cincinnati. He can be reached at dmurphy@directionsresearch.com. Chris Goodwin is a vice president at Directions Research. He can be reached at cgoodwin@directionsresearch.com. This is the third of a three-part series of articles. Parts I and II appeared in the July and August issues. To view this article online, enter article ID 20091007 at quirks.com/articles.

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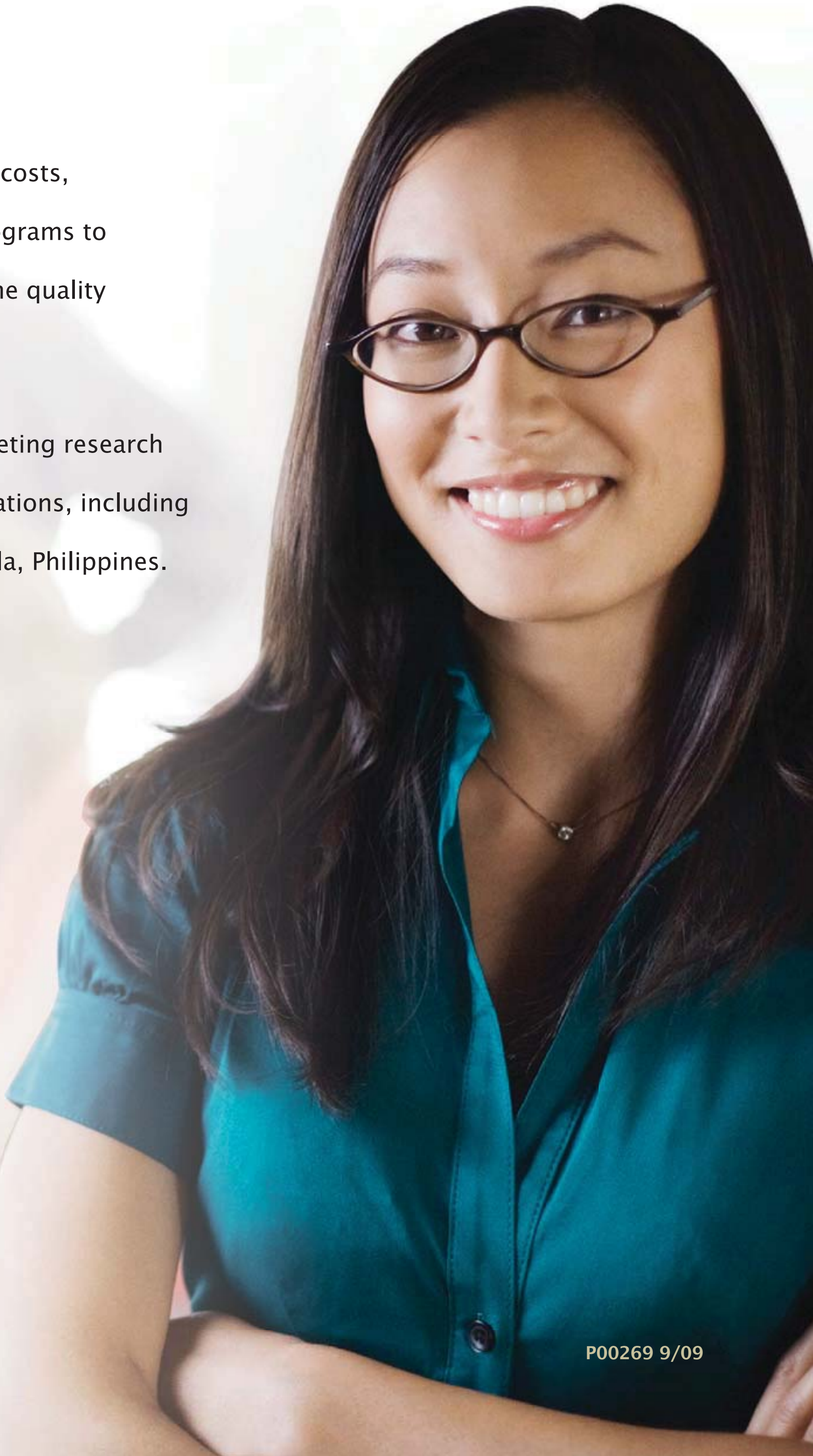

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the database team, the privacy officer, network security personnel, lawyers and some sales guy named Joe who always wants to protect only his customers from getting surveyed. But the results are more than worth the effort – except maybe for poor Joe.) This practice applies to all research, not just customer satisfaction. Explanatory information doesn't exist without something meaningful to explain.

With rare exceptions, the goal of business behavior is to sell – plain and simple. This means that most any survey should have a sales surrogate embedded as the most essential question. If you're trying to explain anything other than a financial performance measure (sales/revenue/profit) you're dealing with auxiliary objectives – not the bottom line.

In research-speak, the dependent variable is the idea we're attempting to explain, or, in a business sense, the result we are trying to achieve. The independent variables are the myriad items we're using to predict and explain the result. Too often organizations fail to embed a cogent dependent variable and forfeit the real power of research. What we're left with is little more than an impotent shopping list and a series of net scores. If we don't have a meaningful result to predict, we just have nice-to-know factoids. It's like driving a car so you can read the road signs.

Though sometimes done innocuously (we forgot why we got in the car to drive in the first place), often naïveté and laziness are the culprits.

Observation: It is a "research sin" to design a survey that lacks something to be explained. A survey without a dependent variable is a trip without a destination.

Now here's the kicker: Satisfaction should not be a dependent variable, or at least not the only one!

Bonus observation: A survey without a sales surrogate is a pistol without bullets.

Best practice #2: *Demand that customer satisfaction prove its mettle.*

Customer satisfaction deserves "a seat at the corporate table" if and only if it has earned it. Now that we've incorporated a sales measure (#1), make sure you examine whether the assumption that customer satisfaction impacts sales is a valid one. If it is, great; on the other hand if satisfaction doesn't matter – or matters minimally – maybe you have better places to put your money.

While we want to understand what drives satisfaction, we need to understand what drives sales. Therefore, we should think of customer satisfaction as an intermediate or auxiliary variable in this more global effort. Think of a hierarchal diagram – a battery of factors drive these intermediate/auxiliary factors and, in turn, the intermediate/auxiliary factors drive overall performance.

Customer satisfaction is an auxiliary component. As an intermediate-level result, it is a potential contributor to the highest-level result: the organization's financial performance. If you fail to incorporate the latter, you'll be erroneously explaining satisfaction as an end unto itself.

So what's wrong with that, you ask? Here's what: What if satisfaction has little or no impact in sales?

If there are no alternatives to your

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product, or the costs of switching are incredibly high, then satisfaction may not be a significant driver of future sales. Think of financial accounting systems or small-market airlines as examples of limited choice. In the short term, customer satisfaction may be irrelevant in these decision environments.

Haphazard execution

Best practice #3: *Practice KISS and think of it as meaning "Keep it short, stupid." A responsible analyst asks exactly what he or she needs, and not one thing more.*

Customer feedback is a gift, one bestowed upon a respectful request. If we recognize this process as a request rather than a demand, then at least we're getting the relationship with our respondents right. Our mothers taught us to ask nicely, so let's put mom's lessons to practical use.

Brief and easy surveys seldom meet all of our client specifications, but if clients fully comprehended the penalties assessed for long and complex surveys, they likely would reconsider. A conference speaker once described the ultimate customer satisfaction survey as a single question: "How did we do?" What we like about this approach, beyond its obvious simplicity, is that it hits dead on a simple truth. It allows the customer to tell you what they think is important rather than responding to what you tell them you – the client – think should be important.

Now we're not so naïve as to believe that we can get off as easily as asking "How did we do?" (although we could create a "net doer score" or NDS), but we do strive for simplicity and brevity. The "What can we cut?" mentality produces better work than the "What can we add?" approach if for no other reason than it lessens the customer burden which in turn holds the customer's attention.

Best practice #4: *Make the survey beneficial to the customer.*

You can't always make a survey directly (we'll tell you the results) or indirectly (you use our products) beneficial but when you can, it pays dividends. When surveys are sponsor-identified, response rates increase because a personal connection has been made. This is not always possible – and not always even desirable – there are times you must avoid any kind of identification bias. But when it is feasible, it does enhance engagement.

No one we know jumps out of bed in the morning planning their day around all of the surveys they can take – or if they do then let's agree that they're weird. Most of us have been subjected to far more time-consuming and dull surveys than to interesting and enlightening exercises – way more – and we seldom see "What's in it for me" beyond perhaps some modest remuneration. And even then isn't this really closer to bribery than an enthusiastic contribution on the part of respondents?

Observation: If the customer first understands why we solicit their input and second, how they might actually benefit, then their involvement increases exponentially.

Recall our cruise. My wife filled out a survey which in other instances she would have tossed. She got that

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the cruise line cared and the task was manageable for her.

Measurement confiscation

Best practice #5: *Protect respondents by representing their interests. Surely no one else will.*

Being "the voice of the customer" means balancing your clients' desires with the respondents' capabilities. Adding one more question because you "were told to" isn't being a professional, it's being a clerk.

Measurement confiscation happens when everyone wants a piece of your survey. They only want 30 seconds here, 60 seconds there or "one" question that ends up having 10 parts. These questions can't help but provide a disjointed structure which disrupts any kind of continuity as the respondent attempts to do their job.

Observation: The more sense the client's questions makes to a respondent, the more sense the respondent's answers make to the client.

There is no better way to lose the interest of a respondent than to ask them about things they have little interest in. If they get so bored that they quit, that's bad; if they get bored yet push on, providing random garbage, that's even worse. And you seldom know when that has happened. You have to think about your customer as much in research as you do in sales.

Observation: We design surveys so that customers can tell us what we want to hear. Shouldn't we be constructing them so that customers can tell us what they have to say?

Measurement confiscation and the next challenge, inappropriate application, start to move us into the realm of "political" or "organizational" challenges. This is where people who know nothing about research and who are usually not directly responsible for the bottom line of the business add to or repurpose surveys. If CEOs knew - really knew - how much the instruments they need to run the business were being undermined by well-meaning but wrong-headed executives, the head of market research would report directly to the president!

Okay, once we set aside our delusions of grandeur, we recognize, of course, that the CEO and/or president has far more important things to do, like personally convincing your largest customers to become larger customers. It is you, the researcher, who must fight against measurement confiscation alone, and this is not necessarily the kind of battle that most researchers are taught to confront.

This is one reason why top market research executives are often imported from other disciplines. These folks may not be the greatest researchers but they know the business. Said otherwise, they're great business folks who understand research. We know, we know: It's terribly unfair and ironic that in a profession built on hard scientific and mathematic skills, it's the softer personal skills that so often lead to promotion.

Best practice #6: *Create interchangeable modules in tracking surveys.*

All longitudinal studies (brand tracking, customer satisfaction, etc.) eventually succumb to the "no new

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news" problem. Isolating and maintaining the core measures and then varying the modules adds long-term vitality by always providing a source of "new news."

So, what kind of tools can you use to keep your survey from being hijacked by every executive with scant information and no research budget? Most tracking surveys, especially customer satisfaction surveys, include many questions that change little or not at all from month to month or quarter to quarter. For example, in a quarterly tracker, it is usually only necessary to launch the full boat of questions once a year, freeing up that survey space for the other three quarters. One of the biggest absorbers of space can be the need to track factors of large driver models. It's possible to do that by just tracking the top attributes.

Technically/methodologically/statistically, it's not necessary to include all those questions in every quarterly version of the survey. If you are doing a quarterly tracking survey, chances are that some core metrics make their way into an executive scorecard or market summary that gets shown to the boss every quarter. We wish we could help you there, but the tracking survey is probably being paid for mostly because of that one page of metrics. Live with it.

As for the rest of the questions: Put them into modules, short groups of questions that can easily be moved in and out of the survey on a moment's notice. With a little bit of advanced planning at the beginning of the design process, programmers, data processors and tab generators can create a flexible structure that allows these modules to be utilized.

Observation: When designing any tracking system think about a Lego set.

We've all had trackers where a one-off question becomes a permanent part of an ever-lengthening survey. Now here's the tough part: Bargain hard. If you absolutely can't resist the pressure of an executive who wants a short set of questions in your ongoing tracker, don't let it become a permanent part of your survey. Give them a module for one wave so that there is a mechanism for putting in and taking out the questions. By the way, feel free to use this on other studies besides customer satisfaction.

Best practice #7: *Make all research research on research.*

Our trade is about learning. Try new things. Experiment. If you believe market research is nothing more than applying your college course work, you're frankly not enhancing your profession.

Now, what about those demands for questions to be a permanent part of your survey? Your best tool for fighting these demands is to get hard data on what is relevant and what is not, and you can do that with the portfolio of research you have today. You need data that shows a) the detrimental impact of unfocused surveys and, b) what is truly relevant to satisfaction.

We could (and people have) written whole books on what you need, but let us make a few suggestions. Some of this data is already available in generic form, but we find that only data from your own customers

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is relevant to the executives you are trying to influence:

- Chart the dropout rate by time with your audience to argue for shorter surveys.
- Chart the increase in cost per interview with your audience as surveys get longer.
- Run correlations for all questions to your dependent variables (see section above on what those should be). Keep a running list across studies of what is actually related.
- For really important measures, like overall satisfaction, follow the closed-ended question up with an open-ended one: "Why?"
- End every survey with this question, "Please tell us what you think about this survey."
- Ask respondents what they think is important (stated measures), don't just derive importance.

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Best practice #8: *Rediscover self-explicative (stated) importance.*

Here's what some might see as a curmudgeonly point of view: The advent of calculators diminished our math abilities and computers have damaged our hypothesizing. We just run every conceivable alternative. What we call derived importance is in reality nothing more than correlation and has supplanted stated importance. Give folks some credit and actually ask them what matters. You may rediscover that they know – and it makes a lot more sense than most derived answers.

The final item on the list for research on research has more power than it at first appears. There is always a natural tension between the client belief that "more is more" and the researcher's experience that in fact "less is often more." Traditionally, clients would demand that we ask for the respondent's perspective on a whole bunch of brands over a whole lot of attributes. We've seen this matrix – 10 brands by 30 attributes – exceed 300 responses. Having all this data would be delightful except for the fact that respondents go brain-dead long before answering even a fraction of these queries.

We have a completely different approach:

a) We ask respondents to tell us which brands on a given subject are most relevant to them, not just the ones they are familiar with or the ones the client "thinks" they should know.
b) We give them a list of attributes upon which these brands might be evaluated and then rely upon the respondents to select those they consider most vital.
c) Each respondent creates through these first two steps their own unique matrix and it is simply this reduced set we ask them to assess.

Respondents will be answering more interesting questions and doing less work. More importantly, instead of having lots of noisy data from fatigued and bored respondents, we will have less data that has more meaning. If it sounds like responding to a limited matrix – brands you know on attributes you care about – might produce more thoughtful results, well that's exactly what we've found. This philosophy, "relevant space," developed in conjunction with our partner, Cisco, has been put to the test over four years now. If you want to read more about it, an explanation can be found in Wikipedia.

With these and other measures, hopefully you will have an arsenal of facts to help you in your battle to do customer satisfaction studies the right way. But, researchers can do great research and still face the next challenge.

Inappropriate application

Best practice #9: *Lobby against inclusion of customer satisfaction in scorecards and compensation.*

When personal gain begins to supplant customer well-being, the system becomes corrupt. There is nothing inherently wrong with including customer satisfaction in scorecards other than the measures lack actionability. The problem is more one of a slippery slope, with inclusion of the compensation formula following. This does lead invariably to bad behavior.

When the goal of surveying customers goes from pleasing the customer to pleasing the organization, you know that customer satisfaction has been inappropriately applied. This usually starts when a department or division starts using CSAT scores as measurements of efficacy or even a goal. As we wrote in the previous articles, if CSAT becomes part of the executive compensation scorecard, it's extremely difficult to maintain an effective survey.

We are back to those "softer" research skills, where there are no hard-and-fast rules. Unfortunately, we can't create a magic research technique to solve this problem. We've spoken at length in our two previous articles in this series on why you should avoid this. To recap:

- A survey that was once intended to benefit the customer is now intended to benefit the organization, especially the executives being compensated based on the surveys.
- Market researchers become the "police" by being in the position of creating the metric that becomes a judgment on the organization and its executives.
- Ironically, just when research seems to be legitimized by having an audience with the highest decision makers, those same decision makers have the most incentive to question the skills of the researchers (especially if CSAT scores go down!).

Observation: Let's put the customer back in customer satisfaction.

Best practice #10: *Keep working to make customer satisfaction better - don't set it and forget it.*

As we know it today, customer satisfaction is still closer to an undiscipline than a discipline. Our intent is to introduce more rigor. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we hope to have stimulated a conversation that brings new vitality - and yes, new discipline - to customer satisfaction.

We started this series of articles by lambasting the current state of customer satisfaction research across a wide range of issues. In the second article, we detailed the negative consequences of those problems on well-meaning researchers and organizations as a way to identify areas in which a well-designed customer satisfaction program could have positive consequences. We hope that these articles will give you some arguments for keeping customer satisfaction out of the executive scorecard.

There are endless possibilities, changes and tweaks you can do to make customer satisfaction studies better. And the changes aren't all methodological; some of the most important are positioning and political. But despite the savaging we gave customer satisfaction in our first article, we recognize it still deserves attention - first to determine if it does matter for your product category and then, if it does, making certain its contribution is understood and optimized.

Honestly, some things are in your control and others are not. Even if you still get your study stuck in the scorecard and compensation formulas, perhaps our articles have sensitized you to where to look for land mines. We hope this final installment has identified practices (some old, some new) in each of the four problem areas that can help you revive customer satisfaction and give it life. Not a new life, but the old life it had or should have had: delighting your customers, not rewarding your employees.

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Does the experience ring true?

Evolving customer satisfaction through brand authenticity

By Jeff Hall
David Robbins
and Kerry Colligan

You know what's great about customer satisfaction management (CSM)? It gives brand managers something in their know-thy-customer toolbox. Using CSM to build a clearer understanding of the customer-brand interaction makes sense. Strong CSM programs do this fairly well. Weak initiatives usually consistently do not.

The marketing research industry has spent years in healthy debate over the myriad valid reasons why CSM is often an insufficient and at times misguided customer experience management tool (see related articles on pages 22 and 42). To be clear, the purpose of this article is not to present yet another in-depth critique of CSM. Rather, it is simply built on the recognition that CSM often falls short by ignoring the dynamic process that creates the entirety of customer experience.

Customer perceptions are not created in a vacuum. They're co-created by media, word of mouth, marketing, vast operational elements and other sources originating both inside and outside the organization (Brown, 2003). Since the organization participates in this process, its actions are critical. The intended and unintended activities a brand undertakes to shape and influence the experience necessarily impacts perception. It is this critical element that customer satisfaction measurement is unable to capture. Managers are often left wondering how their actions have impacted the customer experience and guessing what specific steps should be taken next.

Further, customer perception is often treated as reality. This isn't the fault of CSM - managers must recognize this limitation - though often they do not. The focus on perceived experiences alone (without a holistic understanding of the customer experience) encourages decision-making that can often miss the mark.

We need not look any further than our own personal experiences to know that this is true. Think of a situation when your perception of an experience was inconsistent with another person's. The fact that people can have vastly different individual interpretations of the same experience highlights the frequent disconnect that can occur between perception and actual experiences. There's more going on than your personal perception. Each person's interpretation of the experience reflects a perceived experience, while the actual experience usually lies somewhere in between.

snapshot

If the goal is to deliver an authentic brand experience, rather than measuring the customer experience based solely on internal organizational metrics and procedures, firms must also understand how customers perceive it. The authors use case studies to examine what happens when brands do and do not align with customer perceptions and expectations.

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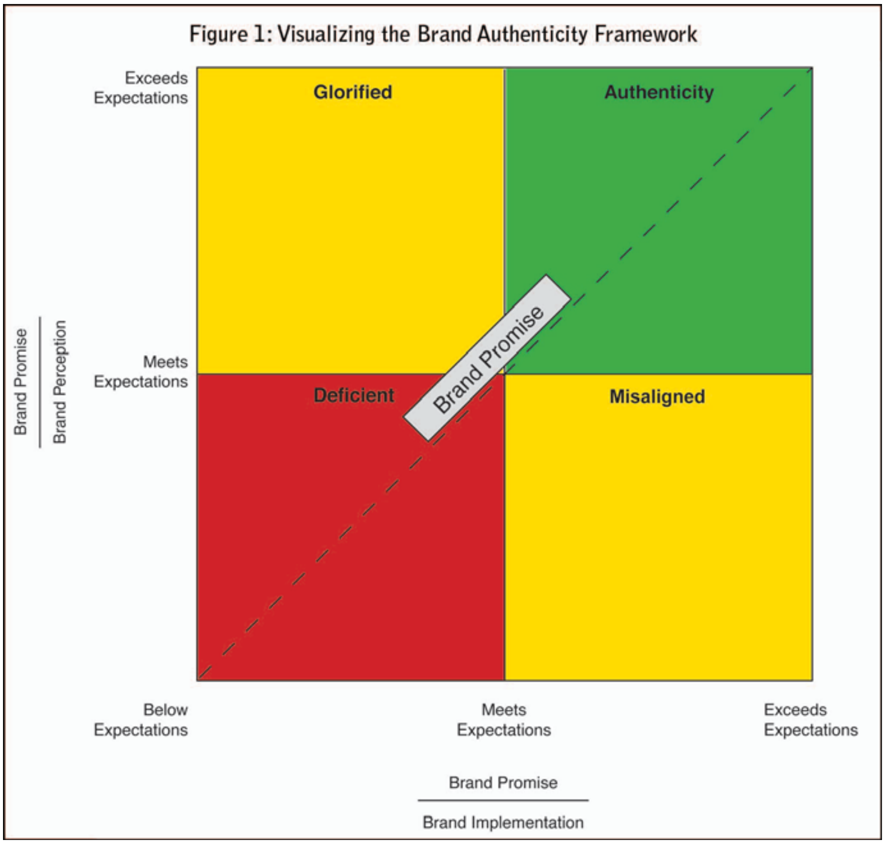

Figure 1: Visualizing the Brand Authenticity Framework

Actual elements

Rather than manage to customer perception or continue to struggle with only half the tools needed, the authors recommend measuring and managing the actual elements of the customer experience with the same care as customer perception. Developing a clear understanding of the actual experience mitigates the risk that customer perceptions are inaccurate. Or biased. The actual experience allows organizations to understand how well their specific operational standards, and execution thereof, relate to customer perception. Without it, customers are much more likely to defect, as misguided strategies and tactics are implemented in naïve attempts to win them over.

One way to develop that understanding is through a mystery shopping program, which can bring the customer-level perspective to the process. This is helpful because organizations generally see the customer experience in complex procedural ways, while customers tend to view their experiences in much less detailed terms. Time restrictions aside, customers are generally unable or unwilling to provide accurate and reliable operational feedback. But assuming the program assesses the right measures, mystery shopping can provide detail that effectively coincides with and measures the implementation of organizational procedures.

In addition, as noted above, customer perceptions are often incorrect or biased. Recognizing that some bias exists in all measures, mystery shopping can reduce that bias by removing the emotional incentive to "enjoy" the experience. Further, proper statistical analysis of mystery shopping data leads to raw and adjusted findings that provide insight into any bias that does exist.

Largely consistent

Authentic experiences are created when an organization consistently and intentionally meets or exceeds its brand promise and does so in a manner largely consistent with customer perceptions. A commonly accepted definition of CSM is represented by the y-axis (vertical) in Figure 1 - the degree to which a brand performs in a manner that is consistent with its customers' expectations (i.e., brand promise/brand perception).

Just as important is the degree to which an organization's actual performance or implementation is consistent with its brand promise - represented by the x-axis (horizontal) in Figure 1 (i.e., brand promise/brand implementation). Alignment across both the

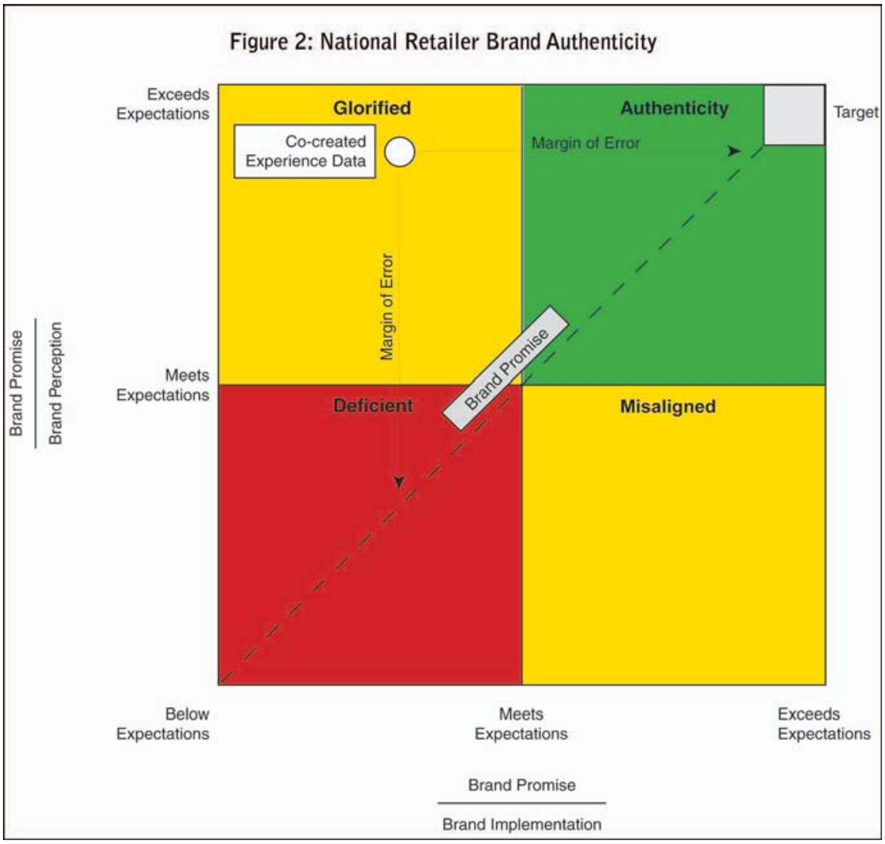
Figure 2: National Retailer Brand Authenticity

Exceeds Expectations
Meets Expectations
Below Expectations
Meets Expectations
Exceeds Expectations
Brand Promise
Brand Perception
Brand Promise
Brand Implementation
Glorified
Authenticity
Target
Co-created Experience Data
Margin of Error
Margin of Error
Brand Promise
Deficient
Misaligned

horizontal and vertical axes is what leads to authenticity.

The varied histories of brands demonstrate time and again that authentic brands are much more likely to show strong and sustainable financial performance. And this is not by chance. It is because at their very foundation lie clear strategic and operational initiatives designed to deliver authentic brand experiences. A few examples of brands that have been exceptional at this include Whole Foods, Best Buy, Southwest Airlines, Walmart, and Lexus. (Case studies on Best Buy and Walmart follow.)

Before getting into these case studies, let's discuss the dynamics and implications of creating inauthentic brand experiences.

Deficient brand experiences are often characterized by fundamental operational challenges (lower-left quadrant of Figure 1). In advance of attempting to create an authentic brand experience, these fundamental shortcomings must be addressed. For example, a brand that can't deliver product to stores or adequately staff its retail outlets should focus on survival not authenticity.

Misaligned brand experiences are characterized by organizations whose

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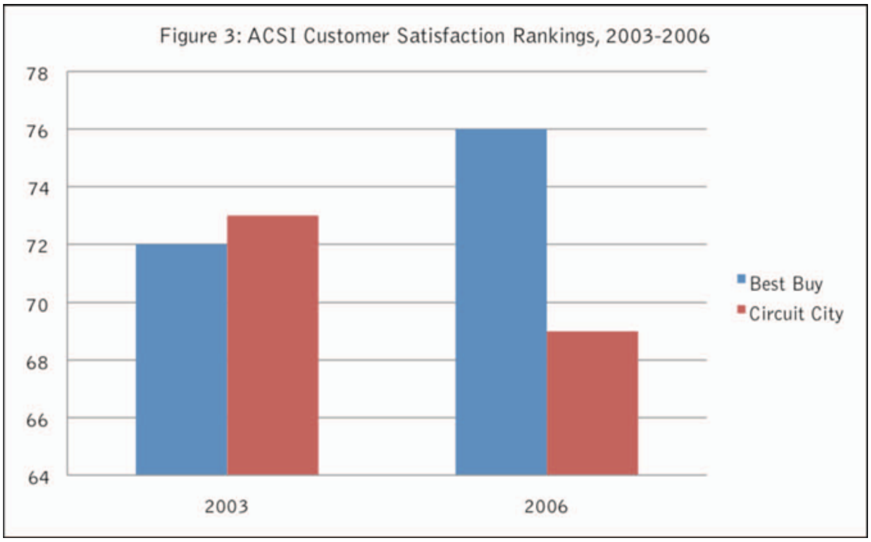

Measures of both customer satisfaction and financial performance demonstrate the importance of delivering a well-aligned experience. According to the American Consumer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), Best Buy outperformed Circuit City by 10 percent from 2003-2006. Best Buy's net EPS was six times greater during the same period.

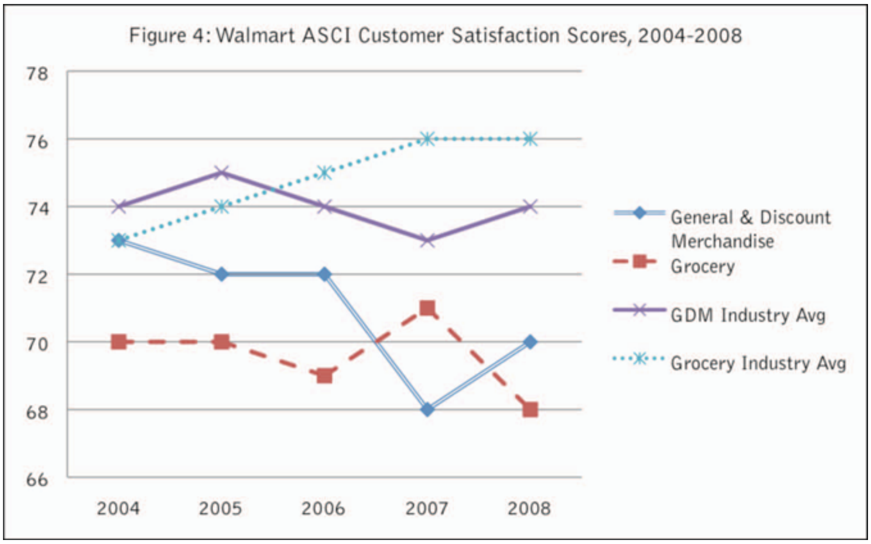

Table 1: Selected National Entertainment Retailer Program Results

	Traditional CSM Survey Tool	Actual Performance from POS Operational Audits	Target
Store employee discussed in-store marketing program while considering purchase	79%	49%	80-100%

actions fail to take into account the things that customers care about most, but who "do what they do" exceptionally well (lower-right quadrant of Figure 1). Thus, perception often falls short relative to the brand's co-created promise. Over time, misaligned brand experiences will lead to declining market share and performance. The focus needs to quickly shift toward a better understanding customer needs, followed by a hard discussion about how best to meet those needs. A key pressure point here is customers' ongoing exposure to competitive alternatives. How long will they stay with you if you're not meeting their needs?

Glorified brand experiences are characterized by organizations whose actions fail to measure up to customers' perceptions (upper left quadrant of Figure 1). Customers will often overlook these shortcomings because they think highly of the brand. Think of glorified brands as borrowing against their equity line of credit. Implementation must improve to better align the actual experience with the brand's promise. Here too, brands are extremely vulnerable. Their competitive advantage is based on perception rather than reality. Unless barriers to entry are extremely high, expect established or emerging competitors to emphasize and leverage equity shortfalls.

Measuring both

To better understand how authenticity is created and to demonstrate the importance of measuring both brand perception and implementation, consider a prototypical example from a national entertainment retailer.

This retailer operates more than 1,000 locations and is well known for its strong brand equity; customers are generally very satisfied with the overall experience and financial performance correlates on the whole.

The example shown in Table 1 highlights a large disconnect between customer perception (79 percent) and what's actually occurring at the point-of-sale (49 percent). The "co-created experience" data point in Figure 2 shows an authenticity-based view of the customer experience that is "glorified." Obviously, any management decisions or actions taken on the basis of either of these isolated data points (79 percent versus 49 percent) would have been risky because of the substantial margin of error associated with only having one piece of the puzzle.

By placing insufficient emphasis on customer perception - in lieu of the information from the audit - the data point moves toward a serious deficiency. Worse yet, placing too much emphasis on customer perception pushes the data point toward the incorrect conclusion that actual performance is aligned with the target. Incorrectly concluding performance is aligned with the target would have resulted in a large number of lost sale opportunities (of net 30 percent) if performance remained constant.

Undeniable success

Both Best Buy and Circuit City operated on the same brand proposition: provide a variety of high-engagement consumer electronics products and associated services to individual and small business consumers. The economic prosperity of the late 1990s afforded both companies undeniable success.

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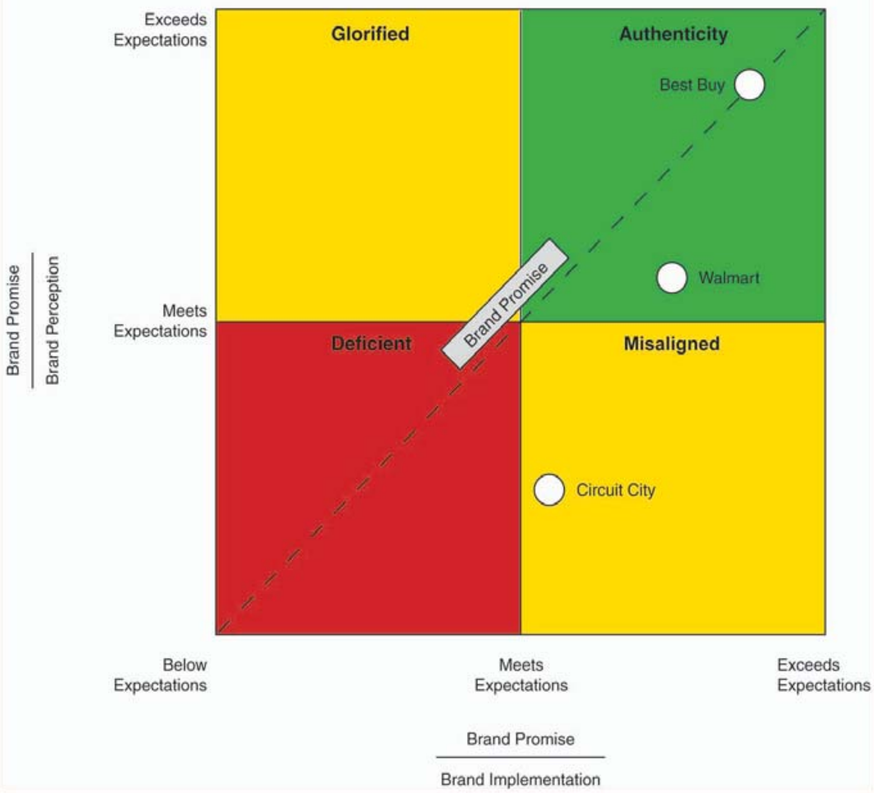
Figure 5: Best Buy, Circuit City and Walmart Brand Authenticity



Beginning around 2000, a pattern of intentional and consistent customer experiences emerges for Best Buy that is not evident at Circuit City. (An intentional experience is one that is designed by the organization to align with the brand promise, such as price-based value for Walmart or over-the-top customer service for Zappos. They are authentic when the designed experience exceeds expectations on dimensions that matter to customers.) The success of Best Buy and eventual bankruptcy of Circuit City resulted from different approaches to managing the actual and perceived experiences.

In 1989, Best Buy stopped paying sales commission to in-store employees. While controversial, it proved to be a major growth driver, as customers showed a preference for the low-pressure store experience (Boyle, 2006). Circuit City did not make a similar sales commission decision until a 2003 staff reduction prompted the move.

In 2003, Best Buy trailed Circuit City (Figure 3) on customer satisfaction measures (ACSI "Circuit City," 2009). CEO Brad Anderson put Best Buy on a new growth path with two decisions: 1) a customer centricity initiative that placed the customer at the center of merchandising and other operational decisions; and 2) the purchase of Geek Squad, a consumer electronics support service.

After extensive testing, chain-wide results of the customer centricity initiative showed 5.4 percent same-store sales growth versus 3.3 percent for stores not implementing the initiative (Boyle, 2006), resulting in a net earnings per share (EPS) of $1.96 in 2005. At the same time, Circuit City's net EPS was $0.33.

The Geek Squad marked Best Buy's entry into in-home, online and in-store services. By building a service that requires listening to customers and collecting information about product preferences, Best Buy created another avenue to customer centricity.

By contrast, Circuit City's version - the Firedog service - launched in August 2006. Designed to support computers, home theatre and car audio, Firedog came on the heels of record digital and flat-panel TV sales (Gogoi, 2006). Lower sales volume occurred in 2007. To compensate, Circuit City laid off thousands of its higher-paid, experienced staff - ostensibly those best able to provide the customer service Firedog was designed to deliver (O'Donnell, 2008).

There are many reasons for Circuit City's 2008 bankruptcy, including electronics sales moving online, the credit crunch and increased competitive pressure from Best Buy and Walmart at each end of the electronics market (Kavilanz, 2009). These macro factors mask the long-standing disconnect between the experiences Circuit City provided relative to its promise.

The Best Buy-Circuit City relationship illustrates the importance of a holistic approach because their brand propositions are similar. Best Buy's success rests in part on alignment between the brand promise and its delivery of it. Similarly, Circuit City failed in part because it was unable to deliver the experience it promised customers.

Strong brand authenticity

Walmart's early growth as a discount retailer and its more recent market-busting domination comes from price-driven value not exceptional customer satisfaction; Walmart creates strong brand authenticity in spite of low customer satisfaction.

Walmart's financial success is well-documented: it accounts for 21 percent of all U.S. grocery spending and 7.5 percent of all retail spending (Hudson, 2009) with sales topping $400 billion. Since 1988, Walmart has operated two segments under one roof: groceries and discounted general merchandise. Revenue is divided almost equally, 49 percent from grocery. Since grocery is not particularly lucrative - according to an industry analysis, average net margins are around 1.5 percent (Hoover's, 2009) - we can attribute a good measure of financial success to retail margins.

Unlike Best Buy, this financial success does not align with customer satisfaction. Traditional customer satisfaction models expect financial growth to be associated with higher scores[1]. The ACSI only began measuring Walmart's grocery segment in 2004. Since then, both grocery and general merchandise customer satisfaction scores have been well below average[2].

The stability of Walmart's customer satisfaction scores (Figure 4) demonstrates a keen managerial focus on making price-driven value a reality. It also demonstrates that the core strategy has not changed.

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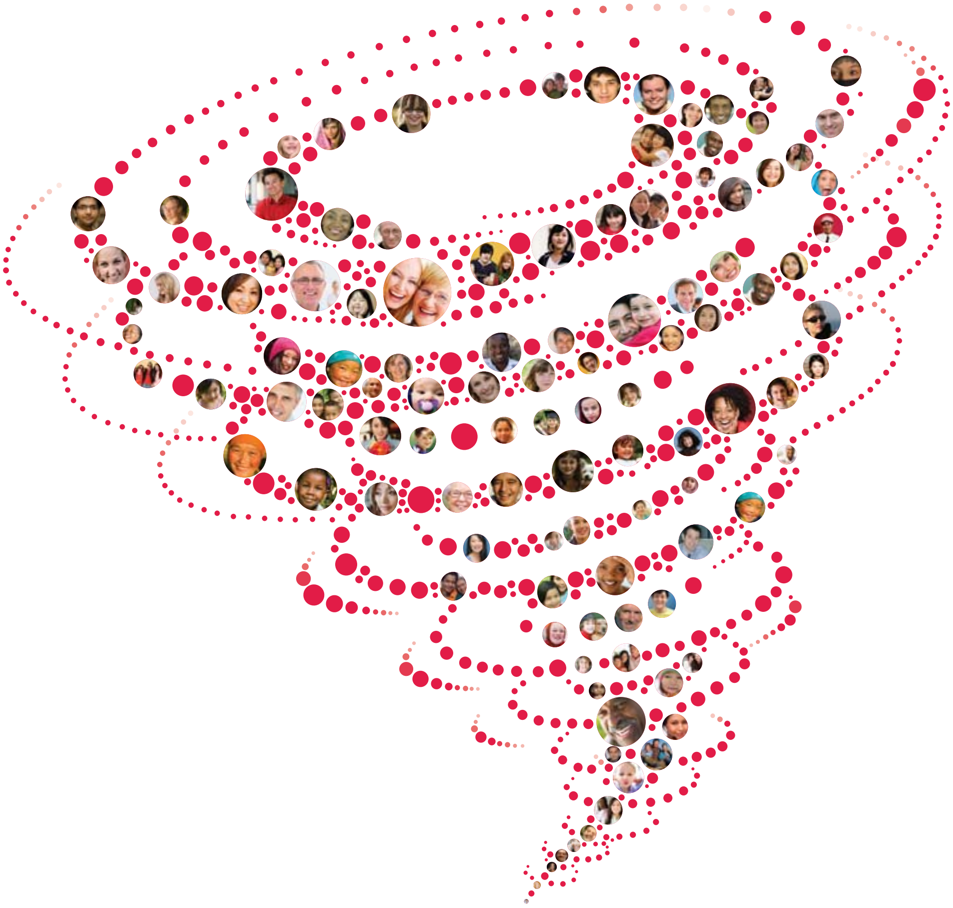

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800-795-3056
www.mraonline.com/facility.html

Marketing Leverage, Inc.
800-633-1422
www.marketingleverage.com

The Marketing Workshop, Inc.
770-449-6767
www.mwshop.com

Marketrends, Inc.
757-229-3065
www.marketrends.com

Mars Research
954-771-7725
www.marsresearch.com

Matrix Research Limited
905-707-1300
www.matrixresearch.ca

Millward Brown, Inc. (Br.)
212-548-7200
www.millwardbrown.com

Morpace Inc. » SEE AD 29
248-737-5300
www.morpace.com

MRSI
513-579-1555
www.mrsi.com

The MSR Group
402-392-0755
www.themsrgroup.com

Multivariate Solutions
646-257-3794
www.mvsolution.com

Mystery Shopping
866-870-1251
www.dynamic-advantage.com

Nufer Marketing Research, Inc.
805-497-9090
www.nufermr.com

Research Company Spotlight - Customer Satisfaction Research

Below is a list of firms from our Researcher SourceBook™ specializing in customer satisfaction research.

Company	Phone	Website
Opinion Research Corporation	800-444-4672	www.opinionresearch.com
Opinion Search Inc. » SEE AD 49	800-363-4229	www.opinionsearch.com
Opinionmeter International	510-352-4943	www.opinionmeter.com
Oppenheim Research	850-201-0480	www.oppenheimresearch.com
ORC Direct	44-20-7675-1000	www.orcdirect.com
PAI-Productive Access, Inc.	800-693-3111	www.paiwhq.com/qsb
Persuadable Research Corp.	913-385-1700 x302	www.persuadables.com
PhoneBase Rsch, Inc. » SEE AD 20	970-226-4333	www.pbresearch.com
PinPoint Research	510-655-9383	www.pinpointresearch.com
Polaris Marketing Research	888-816-8700	www.polarismr.com
Precision Research Inc.	602-997-9711	www.precisionresearchinc.com
PT Kadence Indonesia	62-21-3001-5990	www.kadence.com
Quality Solutions, Inc. » SEE AD 52	800-471-1646	www.qualitysolutions.com
QUESTAR	800-688-0126	www.questarweb.com
RDA Group	248-332-5000	www.rdagroup.com
Redhill Group Inc.	949-752-5900	www.redhillgroup.com
P. Robert and Partners S.A. » SEE AD BACK COVER	41-21-802-84-84	www.probert.com
Rockbridge Associates, Inc.	703-757-5213	www.rockresearch.com
Roller Marketing Research	804-693-3208	www.rollerresearch.com
RTi	203-324-2420	www.rtiresearch.com
Schwartz Consulting Ptnrs., Inc.	813-207-0332	www.schwartzconsulting.com
Six 9s Associates, Inc.	480-488-7936	www.six-9s.com
StrataMark Dynamic Solutions	513-338-1124	www.stratamarkds.com
Survey Service, Inc	800-507-7969	www.surveyservice.com
SurveyUSA®	800-786-8000	www.surveyusa.com
Target Research Group Inc.	845-426-1200	www.targetresearchgroup.com
TARP Worldwide	703-524-1456	www.tarp.com
Toluna USA » SEE AD INSIDE BACK	800-710-9147	www.toluna-group.com
TRC	215-641-2200	www.trchome.com
Triad Research Group, Inc.	440-895-5353	www.triad-research.com
USA/DIRECT, Inc.	973-726-8700	www.usadirectinc.com
User Insight	770-391-1099	www.uifacilities.com
Vantage Marketing Research, Inc.	303-948-5032	www.vantagemr.com
Voter Consumer Research	281-893-1010 x101	www.vcrhouston.com
WestGroup Research	602-707-0050	www.westgroupresearch.com

customer satisfaction scores and exceptional delivery on the price-driven promise create strong brand authenticity (Figure 5). Customers generally don't expect the promise of a great in-store experience but do expect a great value. The experience is authentic because it aligns with the brand's promise.

Levers not visible

The cumulative brand experience is the standard by which customers evaluate products, services and all organizations alike. These experiences are shaped simultaneously by customer expectations and brand promises. This framework is an important addition to traditional CSM, for it gives organizations access to managerial insight and levers not visible through CSM alone. By taking a more holistic approach to customer experience management, organizations can achieve strong and sustainable growth. | Q

Notes

[1] On average, every 1 percent increase in customer satisfaction is associated with 2.37 percent increase in a firm's return-on-investment (Anderson, 2000).

[2] Recently, general-merchandise scores have risen slightly, in part due to the increased importance of price-driven value in a down economy.

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Transform your tracking studies

Take them off autopilot to increase their impact and ROI

By Brett Hagins

My firm, Research Innovation and ROI Inc., has completed the first edition of annual study called the Four Rs of Research: Revenue, Risk, Results and Return. The objectives of the study are to help client-side researchers maximize the business impacts associated with research initiatives, reduce unnecessary costs and more explicitly quantify the economic value of research while linking it to financial outcomes.

The basis for the study was a quantitative benchmarking survey focused on best practices (designed collaboratively with input from sponsors), followed by in-depth telephone interviews and a literature synthesis that involved adapting best practices from other roles - such as sales - to problems commonly faced by corporate researchers.

For the first phase, *Quirk's* invited its database of client-side researchers to participate in our online benchmarking survey. The survey invitation included additional screening to verify client-side status and some level of budget responsibility. Almost 350 client-side researchers responded to the survey - with representation from both larger and smaller companies; most industry groupings; and different departmental sizes, reporting structures and budgets.

My firm then conducted 75 in-depth telephone interviews among client-side research executives (research managers/directors, vice presidents and marketing vice presidents) to study successful projects and best practices among client-side researchers. Information about the full scope of the study is available at www.researchinnovationandroi.com.

This is the first in a series of articles that will discuss the results of the study. Over the next several months we will cover topics such as: quantifying the economic value of research; encouraging the research department to take more risk through the use of performance evaluation criteria; overcoming barriers to research implementation; and best practices in reducing research costs.

snapshot

Tracking studies are a staple in the marketing research arsenal. Drawing from a larger study of *Quirk's* readers and in-depth interviews with client-side researchers, Brett Hagins offers tips on making them more effective.

Not actionable enough

The focus of this article is on enhancing return on investment from tracking studies. While suppliers love tracking studies as a recurring source of revenue, my view is that they frequently are not actionable enough and that well-planned custom research can yield more useful data.

In our benchmarking survey, we asked corporate research executives which research methodologies they

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When your market changes
every five minutes...
your ducks better
be in a row.

(And you better know at which
ducks you're aiming)

Knowledge is the key to customer acquisition and retention success

As markets change and the economy is redrawn, you have to know where you stand with your customers or face extinction. The fact is, your customers must relearn your real position and value. And you must relearn theirs.

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Accountability Information Management, Inc. can help. We understand the customer's true relationship to a request for your product or service, and the relationship of that initial inquiry to your company's eventual sales. Each day we learn how markets are shifting and we turn that knowledge into improved customer acquisition and retention. We know what people who receive magazines and e-mails do and want — and what they don't do and want.

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personally have been involved with in the last 24 months and which of these (if any) drove strong business impact for their respective organizations. The ratios of involvement to impact are shown in Figure 1 for various research methods and/or study types.

Part of our depth interviews focused on identifying best-in-class questions that senior researchers use to get information during initial meetings with their internal clients.

A sample of these questions, corresponding with a possible business application of tracking studies, are shown below:

"For this tracking study, what business objectives (highlighted in bold) do you hope to achieve?"

Diagnose marketing effectiveness

"How will you judge success? What are the goals of the marketing campaign(s)? Which metrics are critical for you - awareness? Preference?"

"What kinds of movement in these metrics would you expect to see if the campaign is successful? Three points? Five points?"

"Where will most of our marketing efforts be concentrated for next year (markets, developing consumer or firmographic profiles, etc.)?"

"What is your marketing budget for next year? The impact of a marketing campaign of that size may not register in an ongoing tracker - let me suggest some other options..."

"Would it be helpful to get a clear read on the ad, etc., so that we can measure the impact among those exposed to it?"

"Do we know what the media plan is? Which markets will be the focus? What will be the weight of our media in each of these markets?"

"Can you share the marketing calendar showing when the events will occur?"

"How much time do we have to get a baseline measure before the first marketing event?"

"Do we know what competitors have planned as well or what their relative spend is?"

"If our share-of-voice is low, would you consider being able to hold metrics steady or preventing a decline one measure of success?"

"In addition to yourself, who else will have responsibility for the impact of the campaign? Who else do I need to talk with?"

Serve as an early warning system for threats to the company

"What specific potential threats are you worried about?"

"What trends do you see in our industry, either positive or negative, that may impact our relationship with customers, now or within the next few years?"

"What might be a leading indicator that the concern may come to pass?"

"Which existing competitors pose the biggest threat to us? Which emerging competitors are gaining momentum quickly even if they may be small now?"

"Outside of our industry, what alternative/substitute products or business models could potentially impact our business?"

"What percent of the market would have to validate this threat before you took action?"

"Which segments of the market are most vulnerable to the threat?"

"What are some potential actions you might take to mitigate the threat?"

"What are the sources of internal opposition to these actions right now?"

Serve as an ongoing monitor of brand and reputation

"*Into which new areas are we trying to extend our brand?"*

"What are some factors that might cause our brand to decline or lose relevance in the marketplace?"

"Are there any plans to change our logo, positioning, etc?"

"Aside from our core brand, are there specific products and services (or sub-brands) that we need visibility on?"

"My understanding is that our current brand positioning is x, y and z - Is that right? What have I left out?"

"I can think of 10 touchpoints where customers are exposed to our brand right now? Which of these are the most critical?"

"Here's a list of 20 different measures that we could assess on an ongoing basis - which of these are most critical? How will you use that information?"

Assess the impact of new organizational programs and key changes

"What organizational changes have we made in Area X over the last 12 months?"

"Would the market have any visibility on this? Would our customers? What segments of customers, if any, would be most likely to notice the change?"

"Tell me about key operational changes you have planned in [insert customer touchpoint, area of responsibility] for the coming year." [Repeat for each touchpoint related to the brand.]

"What has been the anecdotal feedback from customers thus far about Program X? What additional hypothesis do you have as to what we might find out?"

Identify opportunities in the marketplace

"What hypotheses do you have about opportunities out there that exist that, if validated, you could take action on?"

"What percentage of the market would have to validate the opportunity?"

"What form might that validation take in the context of this type of study?"

"Which segments of the market do you believe have the greatest growth opportunity?"

"From a business perspective, which of these do you currently see as our biggest strategy to drive growth?" [Probe key stakeholders for opportunity hypotheses based on each objective.]

- *Increasing share-of-wallet from existing customers*
- *Get new customers*
- *Sell more products to existing customers*
- *Sell existing products in new markets*
- *Pursue growth from different channels - distributors, the Web, etc.*
- *Sell new products in new market segments*
- *Reduce unnecessary costs*

Screen it out

The value that a tracking study could provide has to be weighed against the value that other more custom approaches could provide for the same money and the same investment of time and energy. For each potential reason to do a tracking study there is a corresponding reason to screen it out or use a different approach.

Diagnosing marketing effectiveness. Tracking studies can be ineffective for this unless the company's marketing efforts are on a massive scale. It is like firing a water gun into an ocean and then trying to see a ripple from an airplane at 30,000 feet. It requires a great deal of customization in the design to do this effectively. This is often better left to a custom study focused on particular campaigns, events, etc.

Monitoring brand and reputation. Unless a client is in a really fast-moving, high-growth industry, brand and reputation do not change much (generally) over the short term.

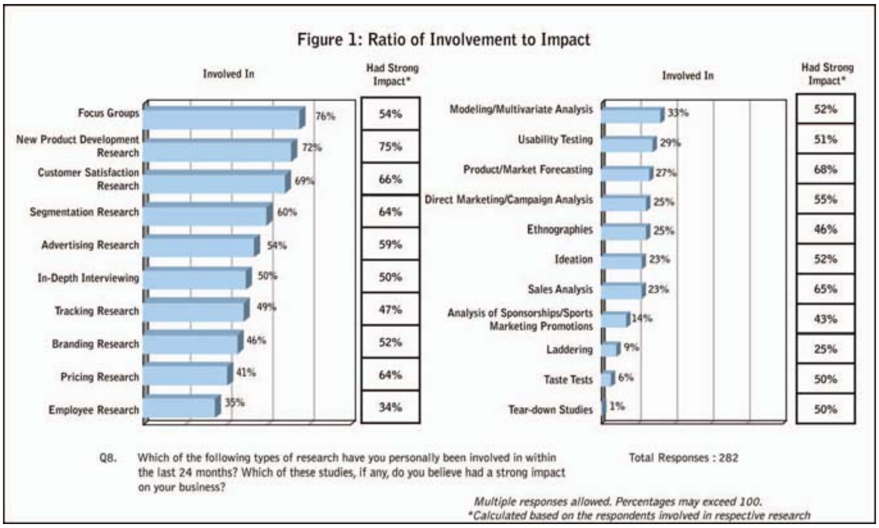

Figure 1: Ratio of Involvement to Impact

Q8. Which of the following types of research have you personally been involved in within the last 24 months? Which of these studies, if any, do you believe had a strong impact on your business?

Total Responses : 282

Multiple responses allowed. Percentages may exceed 100.
**Calculated based on the respondents involved in respective research*

A director of research once told me that his firm had to keep its tracking study going in case "bad news" came out about the company that adversely affected its reputation. Shortly after this prophetic conversation, the company was indeed embroiled in a scandal in the media, which was reflected in some of the results. The study did not provide any guidance on what to do about it, however, and the entire marketing research budget was eliminated a few months later.

Although tracking studies may monitor brand and reputation (and occasionally diagnose the impact of a perception-changing event accurately), they are still too focused on the diagnostic (what happened) and not on the prescriptive (how to improve things).

Serving as an early-warning system for threats or to identify opportunities. Unless they are designed with forward-looking questions that anticipate changes, most tracking studies validate what others in the organization already suspect. They are a lagging indicator, not a leading indicator. It is possible to design a study however that predicts change and does not simply validate it. But it is critical to go through a process of envisioning alternative futures first so that the organization will not simply be in denial when it sees a threat or dismiss a potential opportunity because it does not confirm preconceived assumptions.

Diagnosing the impact of operational changes. Tracking studies are frequently not targeted narrowly enough to do this.

For all these reasons, clients are often better off doing more custom, targeted research projects that are more focused. While a tracking study can be used for a lot of things it often is not particularly effective at any one thing.

At a minimum, work with suppliers who realize the limitations of tracking studies, as they will likely be more inclined to suggest alternative solutions.

Not tracking the right things

One of the reasons why tracking studies are ineffective as an early-warning indicator of competitive threats (or opportunities) is that companies often times are not tracking the right things. Their view of what could happen in the future is heavily shaped by the politics of the day and the existing social order. If a tracking study does spot a threat or an opportunity, the organization may be in denial if it does not fit with preconceived assumptions.

Most organizations subscribe to an official view of the future pushed down by senior management and do not bother to consider alternatives. Some companies have effectively used a process called scenario planning to develop alternative views of the future. They look out on the horizon - five years, 10 years or whatever time frame is most appropriate for the company - and then develop stories about the way their industry, markets and the world might look like at that future point. They then figure out what the leading indicators of each vision are and incorporate questions into their tracking study to help identify these indicators. This involves a process of doing in-depth interviews and including industry experts from the outside - even experts from indirect competitors who fulfill the same core need in other ways. Typically, a positive, neutral and negative scenario is developed based on competitive, environmental, economic and technological trends. They then flesh out fully-descriptive story lines for each scenario, identify leading indicators of which one is coming to pass and determine the best course of action given different circumstances.

Organizations unwilling to challenge conventional wisdom and the assumptions they make will tend to discount early-warning signals. As late as

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2003 for example, I did a small project for a newspaper that did not want to track the Internet as a source of news and information. Blockbuster had many tracking studies in place, but it did not respond quickly to Netflix until its impact did real damage to Blockbuster's market share. Unless an organization has thought about possible opportunities and threats in advance, and thought about the implications of those opportunities and the most appropriate path for each situation, it is very hard to break out of the business-as-usual mode.

Merge with other forms

Tracking studies should merge with other forms of research to provide greater depth. For example, intercepting respondents in the middle or at the conclusion of a study for an interactive chat session (such as through iModerate, which I have used) can provide more depth on targeted subgroups of interest.

For instance:

- intercept those who have awareness of company or competitive advertising to probe for recall and effectiveness;
- intercept lead users or early adopters to probe on new developments in an industry that may not have emerged yet among the entire respondent base;
- intercept respondents when particular events or conditions occur: declining share-of-wallet, growing share-of-wallet, etc.

If a company is tracking the same set of respondents longitudinally, they may wish to have its suppliers give those respondents Webcams to facilitate subsequent depth interviews online and help bring the research to life on the back-end. This allows stakeholders to make more of an emotional connection with the data, which is important in helping them internalize it.

Finally, consider having your supplier recruit a select group of industry experts and show them a portion of the results to solicit their opinions on interpretation, implications and what each company should be doing to accelerate strengths and mitigate weaknesses.

Obtain competitive bids

A huge portion of any market-level tracking study is tied up in the sample costs. Suppliers should obtain competitive bids from at least five different sample providers and negotiate with all of them to get the best possible price. In the current economic environment, you should expect quality and good value. Unfortunately, many full-service agencies don't make this a priority and then turn around and mark prices up further. Corporate research clients who purchase a lot of outside sample should develop direct relationships with sample providers or with a broker who specializes in this area.

Easy to misinterpret

It can be easy to misinterpret findings from a tracking study. Early in my career, I noticed that after a large advertising campaign, my company had increased awareness but had lower favorability scores. Did the campaign cause our favorability scores to go down? I finally realized that the new people who became aware of the company as a result of the campaign had lower favorability scores because their awareness was more superficial. So comparing the scores on that metric (pre- vs. post–campaign) was like looking at apples vs. oranges.

One of the challenges of interpreting tracking studies is that the sample size is often insufficient to draw conclusions. Leading companies will go back to the same set of respondents longitudinally at certain intervals because a paired sample is more powerful than an unpaired sample in detecting what has changed. With the appropriate experimental design, it can also be more effective in isolating the net contribution of a company's marketing efforts from other factors, such as changes in the economy, share-of-voice, etc. Going back to the same set of respondents from a previous wave obviously will distort some metrics like awareness, and therefore we recommend using a combination of fresh and previously-surveyed respondents. Sample companies with strong panel retention are best for this longitudinal approach.

Automating their reporting

By now, every research firm should be automating their reporting for tracking studies, which virtually eliminates human error, accelerates delivery time and allows more time for value-added insights. When there is quality reporting automation software available for $10,000, it is difficult to understand why even client-side researchers who do this work in house have not already made this investment.

In addition, consider reporting of tracking studies that focuses on relevant changes and key insights. No one needs to see 50 slides showing them that metrics are holding steady. Electronic dashboards that highlight changes in key metrics are more useful, and some leading programming tools have started integrating these into their offerings. Qualtrics was mentioned twice on an unaided basis during the depth interviews as a firm that has made this kind of investment of behalf of its clients. Also, one-page summary memos that are customized to particular audiences are more effective than a 50-page PowerPoint deck few will read. When most data is already available in charted form in online portals, consider having suppliers focus on executive summaries – potentially increasing usefulness while simultaneously lowering cost.

Quantify the financial size

One of the ways to make senior management care about opportunities and threats highlighted in tracking studies is to quantify their financial size. Slowly-emerging threats may require projections that look several years ahead based on existing trends for executives to fully appreciate their significance. Find ways to link softer metrics with harder ones. One leading company we talked to had quantified that every 10-point increase in awareness translated into a one-percent increase in market share.

In addition, an internal stakeholder survey conducted at the outset that documents views from all key players is useful in demonstrating that the research effectively changed perceptions and drove some action that may not have occurred otherwise.

Companion Webinar

Brett Hagins will present a Webinar on November 2 at 12 p.m. CST to discuss the methodology and findings from this important study. Learn what other firms are doing (and not doing) to maximize their research efforts and dollars. To register, visit https://quirks.webex.com. Quirk's would like to thank AbsolutData Research and Analytics (www.absolutdata.com) for sponsoring this event.

Survey Monitor

continued from p. 10

The average APEAL score for all models in 2009 has improved considerably to 779 from 770 in 2008, driven primarily by increased owner satisfaction with fuel economy. This higher satisfaction comes from three main sources. First, fuel prices have decreased during the past year, which has reduced owner concerns about gas mileage. Second, owners are switching to more fuel-efficient vehicles. Third, automakers are designing models to be more fuel efficient than their predecessors.

In 2009, domestic brands comprised the four most-improved nameplates. Dodge posted the largest improvement, followed by Pontiac, Buick and Cadillac, respectively. In addition, the three most-improved models were from domestic manufacturers, including the Dodge Ram, Buick Lucerne and Ford F-150.

The overall gap in APEAL scores between domestic and import models has narrowed during the past several years and is just five index points in 2009, compared with 15 points in 2008 and 27 points in 2007. Among premium models, import nameplates retained a slight edge, while among non-premium models, domestic brands have a similar edge.

Volkswagen captured four segment-level awards - more than any other vehicle nameplate in 2009 - for the CC, GTI, Passat and Tiguan. Ford received model-level awards for the F-150 and Flex. Honda models that received awards are the Odyssey (for a fifth consecutive year) and Ridgeline (for a fifth consecutive year). Mercedes-Benz earned awards for the S-Class (for a third consecutive year) and SLK-Class. The S-Class achieved the highest APEAL score of any model in the industry. Nissan received awards for the Armada and Maxima.

Also receiving awards were the Chevrolet Avalanche, Dodge Challenger, Hyundai Genesis, MINI Cooper, Porsche Cayenne (all for a second consecutive year); and smart fortwo. Porsche was the highest-ranking nameplate in APEAL for a fifth consecutive year. For more information visit www.jdpower.com.

Safety concerns may impact private-label purchasing

Does fear limit consumers' use of store-branded products? A study suggests that the urge to go private-label varies by category and what risks a switch might carry. While frugal American consumers have jilted their favorite national brands in favor of store brands for food/household (59 percent), health (48 percent) and personal care (48 percent) products, they're far more reluctant to switch to store brands on purchases for children (12 percent) and pets (23 percent), according to research from ICOM, a division of Dallas research company Epsilon Targeting.

The less-risk-means-more-switch trend revealed itself as well in the category of over-the-counter medicinal health care items. There is a direct correlation between severity and specificity of ailment and openness to switch. Forty-two percent of consumers have switched to less-expensive store brands for general pain relievers; 32 percent for cold and cough medicines; 31 percent for allergy remedies; and 22 percent for heartburn medication.

"Perceived risk, that's what is driving these key consumer decisions. This is the kind of insight that national brands can use to reach customers with promotions that meet their needs and bring them back," says Warren Storey, marketing director at ICOM. "These results highlight that understanding customer psychology, and tailoring promotions accordingly, is a significantly more effective win-back strategy than scatter-shot, one-size-fits-all offers." For more information visit www.epsilontargeting.com.

Online research ups consumer confidence in big purchases

Consumers are not willing to skimp on major home purchases where low cost can often mean low quality, but they are willing to research products in order to insure they're getting a good product for the price. Fifty-two percent of consumers said reading

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user reviews on products is one of the most important factors when deciding to purchase a major home or kitchen appliance online; 49 percent included comparing product specifications; 45 percent chose finding a familiar brand or manufacturer; 31 percent included checking merchant rankings; and 24 percent selected the lowest price regardless of merchant ratings, according to research from PriceGrabber.com, a division of Dublin, Ireland, research company Experian.

Clearly, consumers are doing their homework. Although some remain reluctant to make final big-ticket home furniture purchases online, 65 percent of respondents research potential purchases online no matter where they make their final transaction. The majority of online consumers (53 percent) research and purchase home entertainment items online. Eighty percent of online consumers indicated they will likely research their next kitchen appliance online, and 30 percent said they will likely make their purchase online. Similarly, 77 percent of online consumers will likely research online for their next laundry home appliance, and 26 percent said they will likely purchase their next laundry appliance online.

Even though consumers are spending more time at home, reduced spending habits have suppressed purchase decisions on larger-ticket items like appliances and furniture. Fifty-five percent of consumers indicated that they have made a concerted effort to cut back in the past few months. While 40 percent of online consumers purchased a home entertainment product (HDTV, Blu-ray player, DVR, speakers), only 22 percent of consumers purchased a laundry appliance (washing machine, dryer) or kitchen appliance (refrigerator, range top, oven, microwave), and only 11 percent purchased home furniture online in the last 12 months.

Ad effectiveness is in the eye of the beholder

When it comes to types of ads, advertisers and consumers agree on the effectiveness of some, but disagree on others. Namely, advertisers believe their ads to carry much more impact than they do with consumers, according to research from Rochester, N.Y., research company Harris Interactive and networking site LinkedIn, Mountain View, Calif.

While over half of advertisers believe ads that make people stop and think (53 percent) and ads that give people new information (51 percent) are very effective, just three in 10 consumers (30 percent and 29 percent respectively) feel the same. One-quarter of advertisers think ads that are integrated into the feel of the program and have the same tone as the program it is based in are very effective, compared to just 7 percent of consumers. When it comes to ads that show before/after, 24 percent of advertisers say they are very effective, while 13 percent of consumers say they are very effective. One in five advertisers say ads that reinforce a message already known are very effective, compared to 10 percent of consumers.

However, consumers and advertisers both like ads that amuse. Thirty-four percent of consumers and 41 percent of advertisers say entertaining ads are very effective, and one-third of both consumers and advertisers say funny ads are very effective. But there is a fine line in amusement, as just one in 10 consumers and 14 percent of advertisers say ads that don‘t take themselves seriously are very effective. In fact, 18 percent say these ads are not at all effective.

Looking at advertisements that might not work, 41 percent of consumers and 32 percent of advertisers believe that scary ads are not at all effective. Also, over one-quarter of consumers and 18 percent of advertisers say ads about a serious topic that make people feel slightly guilty are not at all effective. For more information visit www.harrisinteractive.com.

The generations define their comfort foods differently

When it comes to which general types of foods constitute “comfort foods,” there’s no real generation gap, but more subtle differences in comfort food preferences do exist among age groups. For example, cheese - either by itself or with a bread or starchy food - seems to elicit the most passionate response across generations, but Boomers cite artisan cheeses while Gen X craves cheese crackers, according to a study from the Center for Culinary Development, San Francisco, and Packaged Facts, a Rockville, Md., research company.

Boomers prefer classic comfort foods such as braised meats, casseroles and ice cream, but many also enjoy gourmet choices such as high-quality dark chocolate and fancy cheeses. They crave foods from their childhoods such as peanut butter, popcorn, foods made with canned tuna fish, chicken noodle soup and hot oatmeal.

Gen Xers are more accustomed to commercial fare, and crave fast food (especially hamburgers) and burritos. They cite branded foods more often than the other generations, including favorite packaged cookies, ice creams, candies and snacks.

Gen Yers are also partial to burritos and ramen noodles, but in contrast to other cohorts, many also include healthier foods, including sushi and fruits, among their favorite comfort foods. They are less inclined than Gen X to associate specific brands with comfort foods.

Sweets dominate category choices regardless of age. Nearly half of men and women across the Boomer, Gen X and Gen Y segments say they turn to baked goods, sweets and desserts for comfort, versus entrées (19 percent), salty snacks (14 percent), side dishes (13 percent) and breakfast foods (4 percent). Women favor sweets even more than men (51 percent of women cite sweets as comfort food versus 36 percent of men). Among respondents who cite sweets, 26 percent chose ice cream as their top comfort food, 23 percent chocolate and 21 percent brownies.

Within entrées, roasted meats are the top choice across generations; within side dishes, macaroni and cheese and potatoes are nearly tied in popularity; and within salty snacks, chips rule (cited by 60 percent of total respondents, followed by popcorn and cheese, at 10 percent and 8 percent, respectively). For more information visit www.packagedfacts.com.

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direct marketing to perform analyses for planning and carrying out marketing campaigns; automated data preparation; PASW Bootstrapping to estimate the sampling distribution by resampling with replacement from the original sample; nonparametric testing to make multiple comparisons within non-normal data; Interactive Model Viewer to explore and compare results and determine the best algorithm for a particular data set; and increased accessibility to open source. For more information visit www.spss.com.

Mosaic UK gets restored

Dublin, Ireland, research company Experian's consumer classification, Mosaic UK, has been updated to reflect demographic and social changes that have occurred in contemporary British society since 2003. The classification has been rebuilt to include additional data sources to encompass a more detailed understanding of the aging population, recent changes in household composition, the growth in ethnic diversity and the impact of the Internet in society. Mosaic UK 2009 is designed to draw on over 440 separate pieces of compliant public and proprietary sourced information for the U.K.'s 48 million adults - a total of 21 billion individual data items - to create a detailed picture of modern British society. Following the rebuild, the classification incorporates 15 lifestyle groups, 67 lifestyle types and 141 person types. Mosaic UK will be updated every six months. For more information visit www.experianplc.com.

Online tool aims to reform dial testing

Harvest Research Center, Des Moines, Iowa, has launched an alternative to traditional dial testing. Vibetrak, an online perception analysis system, is intended to reveal what consumers like or dislike about a video, commercial or other stimulus, and what motivates their interest or behavior. Vibetrak was developed to ease the process of dial testing, making the survey available to a wider sample of people via the Web. Its online platform allows for clients to receive instant feedback and observe what areas, words, phrases or pictures optimize a concept and what elements need modification. Vibetrack is designed to work in a Web browser from any location. For more information visit www.harvestresearchcenter.com.

New tool measure consumer magazine ad effectiveness

Mediamark Research and Intelligence (MRI), New York, has debuted AdMeasure, its ad ratings software for major consumer magazines. By providing reliable advertising audience estimates, AdMeasure aims to better gauge the effectiveness of magazine advertising campaigns and elevate magazine audience measurement granularity to the level of TV and the Internet.

AdMeasure's print ad ratings are derived using the following: MRI's Survey of the American Consumer, used for measuring the average issue audience of consumer magazines; the Issue Specific Readership Study, which measures readership for individual issues of magazines; and MRI Starch, a tool for ad readership research.

AdMeasure is designed to provide audience levels for all national ads one-third of a page or larger that appear in consumer magazine issues measured by MRI Starch. Metrics will include the number of readers who saw, read and took action to a given ad. For more information visit www.mediamark.com.

Nielsen increases panel size tenfold

New York researcher The Nielsen Company has launched an advanced panel and platform for measuring Internet audiences, taking Nielsen's measurement of Web sites from 3,000 to more than 30,000. The panel is intended to provide better representation of Hispanics, teens and cell phone-only households; and improve coverage of multiple personal computers in households.

The platform uses panel calibration techniques, including the use of Nielsen's TV/Internet convergence panel, providing more coverage of hard-to-measure Internet users. Nielsen's underlying methodology for the panel is in use in eight international markets. For more information visit www.nielsen-online.com.

Itracks creates a virtual "home" for online moderators

Itracks, a Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, research company, has launched the Itracks Online Moderator Community, a global initiative to support moderators as they move into the online market research world. The community's mission is to provide a place for online moderators to learn, discuss and generate ideas about online qualitative research. Moderators will receive their own account and training, receive 24/7 support and become a part of Itracks' RFQ process. It is open to moderators from all industries. The Web address for the online moderator community is http://moderator.itracks.com. For more information visit www.itracks.com.

Language Logic updates text categorization tool

Language Logic, a Cincinnati research company, has released version 6.1 of Ascribe, the company's multilingual verbatim and text categorization software platform. With Version 6.1, Ascribe offers integration of Language Logic's automated coding model, which is designed to allow non-technical staff to create sophisticated automated coding models for the categorization of textual comments including blogs, tweets, e-mails and survey responses in English, French, Spanish, German and Italian.

Version 6.1 also includes productivity enhancements, Web and desktop versions, and simplified integration with other research software platforms. Ascribe is offered as software-as-a-service and is free to try. For more information visit www.languagelogic.info.

Mobile research software updated

Techneos, a Vancouver, B.C., research company, has launched Entryware 6.4, an updated edition of its mobile survey software. Entryware 6.4 is designed for compatibility with

Windows Mobile devices and offers enhanced capabilities for mobile research, face-to-face interviewing and diary studies using a wide range of mobile devices.

Highlights of the upgrade include: improved look and feel for all handheld surveys; photo capture on Windows Mobile devices; five-way navigation for quicker and easier movement through a questionnaire; and an optional diary engine, which enables research managers to lock down Windows Mobile devices so that other applications cannot be accessed by mobile users. For more information visit www.techneos.com.

Briefly

Maktoob Research, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, has launched The Middle East Shopping Trends syndicated study to gather opinions of adult shoppers of various nationalities across Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The study will explore the psychographics of shoppers, shopping behavior and habits, perception of shoppers with regards to brand visibility and brand personality, satisfaction levels with shopping venues, influences on choice of brands and shopping venues, shopping trends and more. For more information visit www.maktoob-research.com.

SurveyHealthCare, New York, has developed a managed care database, which includes health care professionals from managed care facilities, hospitals and insurance companies who indicated that their responsibilities included at least one of the following: making formulary decisions, developing medication protocol, developing pharmacy programs, or maintaining pharmacy administration/cost controls. For more information visit www.surveyhealthcare.com.

Los Angeles research company OTX has integrated the simulated moderator software Socrates into its AdCEP product, a pre-testing product that aims to measure how emotion, message and context impact the performance of advertising. The integration allows Socrates language recognition software to conduct interactive one-on-one interviews with consumers who take OTX's quantitative online surveys. Respondents will interact with Socrates using an interface similar to an instant messaging box capable of carrying on a full conversational interview. For more information visit www.otxresearch.com.

Maponics, a Norwich, Vt., mapping company, has launched its full suite of zip code map data products. Updated datasets include five-digit zip code boundaries, zip+4 data, postal carrier route boundaries, neighborhood-to-zip code correspondence and custom postal datasets, including zip+2 boundaries. Maponics' offering is designed to integrate easily with ESRI, MapInfo and Web-based applications. Data can be delivered in several file formats or on a transactional basis via the Maponics Spatial API. For more information visit www.maponics.com.

Nuremberg, Germany, research company The GfK Group, has increased the size of its German panel from 20,000 to 30,000 households. The company has also expanded its single-source approach from 7,000 to 15,000 households. For more information visit www.gfk.com.

R.L. Repass and Partners, a Cincinnati research company, and McMillion Research, Charleston, W.Va., have partnered to launch a joint venture online omnibus survey. The omnibus, dubbed MindField Poll, will be conducted quarterly and include a nationally-representative sample of 800 respondents. Depending on the nature of the question and the analysis required, the cost ranges from $500 to $1,000 per question. For more information visit www.repasspartners.com.

20/20 Research Inc., Nashville, Tenn., has introduced QualJournal, a blogging engine built for online journaling and immersive research. The software is designed to pro-

YOUR GUIDING LIGHT TO BETTER RESEARCH
Marketing research tools and ideas in print and online.
QUIRK'S
Marketing Research Review
www.quirks.com

vide researchers and their study participants with a safe and private virtual venue for conducting in-depth qualitative research. Similar to popular blogging sites, QualJournal also provides the researcher with a management console to monitor and communicate with all participants, as well as a button for downloading transcripts. For more information visit www.2020research.com.

Survey Sampling International (SSI), Shelton, Conn., has expanded its research capabilities in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. SSI has also launched mobile and landline samples in Mexico, and landline sample in Brazil. For more information visit www.surveysampling.com.

TVG, a Dresher, Pa., research company, has created a marketing analytics team to offer integration of primary and secondary research where data from multiple sources is layered with primary quantitative and qualitative research and outsourced, on-demand services. For more information visit www.tvg-inc.com.

Vision Critical, a Vancouver, B.C., research company, has released Eclipse, its online full-service community panel offering for the consumer packaged-goods industry. Eclipse is designed to provide the latest techniques for gaining deeper consumer insights while maximizing cost, timing and research design efficiencies. Built upon Vision Critical's community panel technology Sparq, Eclipse aims to extend proprietary panels by offering virtual shopping and analytics typically only available in custom research engagements. For more information visit www.vision-critical.com/eclipse.

Decipher, a Fresno, Calif., research company, has introduced Video Analyzer, a tool aimed to give clients who utilize dial testing the ability to view survey results in an interactive reporting environment. Using Video Analyzer, dial testing users have the option to customize reporting by a single question, or any combination of

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* 2007 Impulse Survey released 4/08. We're consistently #1 in Houston (Overall Rating - 83) since opening in 1995 (and have been named "Top 10" worldwide more than any other facility). Dallas, opened in 3/06, garnered a high Overall Rating of 88.

questions, asked during a survey. They also have the ability to run survey reporting parallel to the test media in an interactive overlay environment. For more information visit www.decipherinc.com.

Anderson Analytics, a New York research company, has launched AA-Social Media, an offering intended to enhance community building, widgets/application development, strategic/tactical social media consulting, social media research and SNS marketing. For more information visit www.andersonanalytics.com.

Prompt Research Insights, Bryanston, South Africa, has introduced ADGist, an eye-tracking tool for measuring print and billboard ad effectiveness at a glance. For more information visit www.prinsights.co.za.

The U.K. division of Chicago research company Information Resources Inc. (IRI) has released Liquid Modelling, an analytics solution designed to provide granular data collection and analysis for manufacturers and retailers. Data collection algorithms and the underlying architecture have been restructured to allow data to flow more quickly from EPOS devices in-store to IRI databases and analytics systems. IRI Liquid Modelling is packaged as a managed service with an IRI expert assigned to answer questions. For more information visit www.infores.co.uk.

MarketTools Inc., a San Francisco research company, has introduced ZoomPanel Tech, a panel of information technology professionals. ZoomPanel Tech uses TrueSample validation technology. Participants are pre-profiled on more than 100 business-to-business-specific attributes and another 30+ IT-specific areas of expertise. For more information visit www.markettools.com/zoompaneltech.

Copenhagen, Denmark, research company iMotions has updated its Emotion Tool software to be compatible with the SMI iView X RED remote eye tracker with the goal of providing a solution for marketing pre-testing scenarios. For more information visit www.imotions-global.com.

Invoke Solutions, a Waltham, Mass., research company, has released Engage Analytics II in an effort to lower costs for market researchers. Engage Analytics is designed to allow firms to outsource tasks with non-integrated solutions that have added time, cost and effort to the delivery of projects to end clients. For more information visit www.invoke.com.

TRC Market Research, Philadelphia, has updated its Web site to provide users with free access to 35 market research white papers and published articles. For more information visit www.trchome.com.

Aggregate Knowledge, a San Mateo, Calif., research company, has released its Audience Discovery Engine, designed to find and validate audiences, optimize impressions and uncover audience insights. On every ad impression, the ad viewer is mapped against proprietary and third-party data providers. The Audience Discovery Engine works on top of any existing media buy and optimizes inventory from publishers, ad networks and ad exchanges. The Audience Discovery Engine is available in three offerings: Audience Insights, Audience Validation and Audience Optimization. For more information visit www.aggregateknowledge.com.

Visible Technologies, a Bellevue, Wash., research company, has updated its TruCast platform for social media researchers and marketers. TruCast 2.8 is designed to allow marketers to monitor, measure and participate in social conversations with one interface. Marketers can listen in on online consumer conversations and add their input or correct misconceptions about their brand. The TruCast platform also sends clients information about what is said about a brand or product. For more information visit www.visibletechnologies.com.

Webtrends, a Portland, Ore., research company, has introduced Webtrends Analytics 9, a data interface that aims to uncover customer trends and cross-channel insight from RSS-enabled overlays of company news, sales and other business data on top of trended Web metrics. Key Web metrics are automatically translated to plain English text, shared throughout an organization and viewed in any interface. Current Webtrends On Demand customers have access to Analytics 9 at http://insight.webtrends.com. For more information visit www.webtrends.com.

Cambridge, Mass., research company MarketSight has launched version 7.7 of its line of data analysis tools. Version 7.7 includes new charting capabilities, greater flexibility in the design of crosstabs and improvements in workflow automation. MarketSight 7.7 is a software-as-a-service-based solution. For more information visit www.marketsight.com.

(Editor's note: The following are corrected versions of two entries from the August issue.) Digital Research Inc., Kennebunk, Maine, has introduced its Waggle service, a private, social networking community platform designed to listen to consumers and anticipate trends without asking questions. For more information visit www.driwaggle.com.

Denver research company iModerate has introduced a revised version of Optimum!nsight, an instant message-based, in-depth qualitative solution designed to provide maximum flexibility and customization of consumer insights. Optimum!nsight utilizes iModerate's live, moderated, online one-on-one interview sessions to deliver the results to the client in a flexible manner. The solution has no set number of participants, time limit or geographic boundaries. For more information visit www.imoderate.com.

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Redmond, Wash.-based **Microsoft** and Reston, Va., research company **comScore** have collaborated to design a digital media-planning service dubbed the Reach and Frequency Planner. The goal is to combine Microsoft's ad data with demographics from comScore's research to provide advertisers with the same tracking information they would have with an offline campaign.

The Kantar Group, the Fairfield, Conn., insight arm of London communications company WPP, has begun merging the online panel business of **Lightspeed Research**, Basking Ridge, N.J., with the 6th Dimension panel service from Horsham, Pa., research company **TNS**. The merged business will operate under the Lightspeed Research name.

Kantar-affiliated research companies **Dynamic Logic**, New York, and **Compete**, Boston, have partnered to combine digital advertising campaigns with online consumer behavior metrics to evaluate online marketing effectiveness.

Research firms **Vovici**, Dulles, Va., and **Omega Management Group Corp.**, Billerica, Mass., have partnered to use customer experience management strategies and enterprise feedback management to help organizations improve ongoing customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Under the agreement, the companies will cooperate on Web-based marketing, visibility at industry events and other programs to develop new sales opportunities.

Association/organization news

The Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies (AHAA), McLean, Va., has joined the **Media Rating Council** (MRC), New York, an industry-funded, self-regulatory body that audits and accredits audience rating services. The AHAA board of directors unanimously approved membership in the MRC to insure accurate representation of the Hispanic market in audience measurement.

Awards/rankings

Research companies **The MSR Group**, Omaha, Neb., and **iModerate**, Denver, have been named to *Inc.* magazine's Inc. 5000 list of the nation's fastest-growing private companies at numbers 3,608 and 718, respectively.

New accounts/projects

Carbonview Research, Jupiter, Fla., has selected Westport, Conn., research company **RelevantView** to enhance its real-time respondent quality technology and validation process using RelevantView's RelevantID solution.

Scarborough Research, New York, has incorporated cell phone-only users into the sample frame for its syndicated local market studies. Scarborough Research will employ an address-based sample to identify cell phone-only populations, and the sample will be combined with the company's traditional landline telephone sample frame. Scarborough will use the new treatment in 10 local market studies initially.

Cologne, Germany, research company **Globalpark** has committed to sponsoring the research industry's sixth-annual international survey into market research technology. The survey, formerly sponsored by Norway-based software maker Confirmit, will be called The Globalpark Annual Market Research Software Survey and will continue to be designed and carried out by **meaning ltd**, a London research consulting company.

Dallas research company **e-Rewards Inc.** has entered into an agreement with **Mexicana Airlines**, Oxnard, Calif. Members of the airline's loyalty rewards program MexicanaGO will have the opportunity to enroll in e-Rewards' opinion panels and earn MexicanaGO points in exchange for time spent participating in online market research surveys.

Columbia, Md., research company **Arbitron Inc.** has commercialized its Portable People Meter (PPM) radio ratings service in the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood, Fla., market. The PPM radio audience estimates for this market may be used as the basis for buy/sell transactions of radio commercial time among subscribing stations, agencies and advertisers.

Stockholm, Sweden, research company **Cint** has been selected by **panelbase.net**, a division of Northumberland, U.K., research company Dipsticks Research, to market its U.K. panel to Cint's global network of market research buyers. The panel will be accessible in Cint Panel Exchange.

Additionally, Cint has been selected by **United Minds**, a Stockholm, Sweden, analytics company, to conduct a national poll to gauge public opinion toward each of the main political parties in Sweden. Results are published by *Aftonbladet*, a daily newspaper in Sweden.

The **Surrey Chambers of Commerce** has chosen **EasyInsites**, a Surrey, U.K., research company, to build, maintain and utilize its online Advisory Panel. EasyInsites has also been selected to provide research design and analysis, as well as all online qual and quant fieldwork services for the organization.

London research company **Verve** has been appointed to take over the management of the **Which? Survey Panel**, London. Verve has taken over the contract from incumbent provider, Lightspeed Research, Basking Ridge, N.J. The Which? Survey Panel will be rebranded Which? Connect.

New companies/new divisions/relocations/expansions

20/20 Research Inc., Nashville, Tenn., has expanded its project management services to include a West Coast desk. The location will be staffed Monday through Friday until 7 p.m. PT.

Survey Sampling International, Shelton, Conn., has opened local client services in Hong Kong and Singapore, led by Keaton Fong and Kien Hoo Yap, respectively.

Reston, Va., research company **comScore** has expanded its relationship with New York media company **GroupM**'s Interaction APAC to include the entire Asia-Pacific region.

New York researcher **The Nielsen Company** has launched a business consulting services group in India. Asitava Sen will lead the group.

Majestic Market Research Support Services, New Delhi, has commenced full-service operations in Jakarta, India, with 20 employees at the location.

Phoenix research company **Cambiar** has launched its research transformation consulting practice. Ian Lewis will serve as director of the practice.

Ipsos Reid, the Vancouver, B.C., division of Paris research company Ipsos, has remodeled and reopened its focus group facility.

Paul Kirch has launched **ActusMR Inc.**, a sales management firm for the marketing research industry, located at 401 E. Corporate Dr., Lewisville, Texas. The firm is online at www.actusmr.com.

Dallas research company **e-Rewards Inc.** has opened an office is Paris. Katia Levy and Virginie Le Rat have joined the Paris office as sales managers.

Research company earnings/ financial news

GfK Retail and Technology, a division of The GfK Group, Nuremberg, Germany, has increased its stake in its Indian joint venture with Nielsen from 40 percent to 50.1 percent. The joint venture company will be included in the consolidated accounts of The GfK Group. The joint venture will be renamed GfK-Nielsen India Private Limited.

Globalpark, Cologne, Germany, reported revenues for the second quarter of 2009 at EUR 2.5 million, a 35 percent increase over the same period in 2008. During the quarter, Globalpark added several new customers, in addition to growth from its existing customer base.

Research Now, London, released its interim statement for the six months ended April 30, 2009. Revenue rose 24 percent to £23.6 million (£19.1 million in 2008), and the company saw growth in all markets. Repeat business generated 92 percent of revenue. Operating profit rose 46 percent to £4.0 million (£2.7 million in 2008), and operating margin increased to 16.9 percent (14.3 percent in 2008). Basic earnings per share increased 33 percent to 12.5 pence (9.4 pence per share in 2008).

Nunwood, Leeds, U.K., announced a 14.9 percent rise in sales in the first half of 2009 compared to the same period last year. The agency's turnover stands at almost £5 million. This has been driven by solid performance from its North American and European insight businesses, coupled with growth from its Fizz knowledge management division.

Arbitron Inc., Columbia, Md., announced financial results for the second quarter ended June 30, 2009. Revenue was $185.3 million, an increase of 7.3 percent over revenue of $172.7 million for the same period in 2008. Net income for the quarter was $3.5 million, or $0.13 per diluted share, compared with $600,000, or $0.02 per diluted share, for the second quarter of 2008. Revenues were $86.8 million, an increase of 10.4 percent over revenue of $78.7 million during the second quarter of 2008.

IMS Health, Norwalk, Conn., reported financial results for the second quarter of 2009. The company reported net income of $62.9 million and diluted earnings per share (EPS) of $0.34, compared with net income of $77.7 million and EPS of $0.42 in the second quarter of 2008. Revenue was $522.8 million, down 13 percent or 7 percent constant dollar. Including the $25.4 million asset impairment and other charge, operating income in the 2009 second quarter was $69.3 million, compared with $131.4 million in the year-earlier period.

Revenues for the first half of 2009 were $1,049.8 million, down 11 percent, compared with revenue of $1,174.9 million for the first half of 2008. Including the $25.4 million asset impairment and other charge, first half 2009 operating income was $170.2 million, compared with $247.8 million in the year-earlier period.

Forrester Research Inc., Cambridge, Mass., reported results for the second quarter ended June 30, 2009. Total revenues were $61.6 million, compared with $63.5 million for the second quarter of last year. On a GAAP-reported basis, Forrester reported net income of $6.2 million, or $0.27 per diluted share, compared with net income of $8.6 million, or $0.37 per diluted share, for the same period last year.

For the six-month period ended June 30, 2009, total revenues were $118 million, compared with $118.4 million for the same period last year. On a GAAP-reported basis, net income was $8.8 million, or $0.38 per diluted share, compared with net income of $13.7 million or $0.58 per diluted share for the same period last year.

Kadence International, London, reported a 40 percent increase in U.K. sales to £4m for the financial year 2008-2009.

ComScore Inc., Reston, Va., announced financial results for the second quarter of 2009. Revenue was $31.4 million. GAAP income before income taxes was $2.6 million, and non-GAAP net income was $5.2 million.

InfoGroup, Omaha, Neb., reported preliminary unaudited financial results for the second quarter ending June 30, 2009. During the second quarter, infoGroup delivered revenue of $122.2 million, compared to $148.5 million for the same period in 2008.

Operating income for the second quarter of 2009 was $1.5 million, which included $12.5 million of restructuring, non-recurring and non-cash charges, compared to $8.1 million in the second quarter of 2008, which included $8.3 million of similar charges. Net income for the second quarter of 2009 was $0.6 million, or EPS of $0.01, compared to net income of $4.3 million, or EPS of $0.08 in 2008.

SPSS Inc., Chicago, reported results for the quarter and six months ended June 30, 2009. Second-quarter revenues were $69.7 million, down 8 percent from $75.7 million in the 2008 second quarter. Excluding the unfavorable effects of currency exchange rates, total revenues were flat compared to 2008 second quarter revenues. Operating income for the 2009 second quarter was $11.3 million, or 16 percent of revenues, compared to $10.9 million, or 14 percent of revenues, in the 2008 second quarter. The 2009 second-quarter operating income and operating margin were the highest in company history. Net income for the 2009 second quarter was $6.2 million, down 12 percent from $7.0 million in the 2008 second quarter. Diluted EPS for the 2009 second quarter was $0.32, down 14 percent from EPS of $0.37 in the 2008 second quarter.

Revenues for the six months ended June 30, 2009, totalled $141.8 million, down 8 percent from $153.9 million for the same period in 2008. Excluding the effects of unfavorable currency exchange rates, total revenues were flat compared to the first six months of 2008. Operating income was $28.5 million, or 20 percent of revenues, compared to $24.8 million, or 16 percent of revenues, in the 2008 six-month period. Net income was $15.5 million, down 3 percent from $16.1 million in the 2008 period. EPS was $0.80, a 5 percent decline from $0.84 EPS in 2008.

Datascension Inc., Las Vegas, announced financial results for the second quarter ended June 30, 2009. Earnings were $875,325 over the prior-year period and total net revenues decreased to $3.8 million from $4.7 million, a decline of 18.7 percent year-over-year and 2.3 percent sequential increase over first-quarter results. Net income was $201,434 for the quarter, compared to a net loss of ($673,891) for the three months ended June 30, 2008. Basic and diluted income per share was $0.01, compared to basic and diluted loss per share of ($0.02) for the prior-year period.

The Nielsen Company, New York, announced financial results for the three and six months ended June 30, 2009. Reported revenues for the three months ended June 30, 2009, were $1,227 million, a decrease of 6 percent over reported revenues for the prior-year period of $1,304 million. Reported operating income was $184 million, compared to $169 million for the prior-year period. These results were negatively impacted by $6 million and $9 million of charges relating to restructuring costs, respectively. Adjusting for these items, operating income, on a constant currency basis, increased 15 percent.

Reported revenues for the six months ended June 30, 2009, were $2,360 million, a decrease of 6 percent over reported revenues for the six months ended June 30, 2008. Excluding the impact of currency fluctuations, revenues for the six months increased 1 percent. Reported operating income was $293 million, compared to $284 million for the prior-year period.

Vision Critical, Vancouver, B.C., achieved a 75 percent increase in year-to-year gross revenue in the first half of 2009.

The GfK Group, Nuremberg, Germany, increased sales by 10.6 percent to EUR 292.8 million in the second quarter of 2009, compared to the first quarter. Overall, sales amounted to EUR 557.5 million (down 5.5 percent on the prior year). Organic sales were down by 8.5 percent. Acquisitions contributed a total of 2.2 percent to sales growth. Currency effects, mainly resulting from the devaluation of the U.S. dollar and revaluation of pound sterling against the euro, increased sales by 0.8 percent.

Adjusted operating income increased to EUR 36.8 million, compared to EUR 14.8 million in the first quarter of the year. In the first six months of 2009, income totaled EUR 51.6 million, compared to EUR 66.8 million in the same period of the prior year.

National Research Corporation, Lincoln, Neb., announced results for the second quarter 2009. Revenue for the quarter rose 14 percent to $13.6 million, compared to $11.9 million for the same period in 2008. Net income for the second quarter increased 6 percent to $1.6 million, or $0.24 basic and diluted EPS, compared to net income of $1.6 million, or $0.24 basic and $0.23 diluted EPS, in the prior-year period. Operating income increased 6 percent to $2.7 million, compared to $2.6 million for the same period in 2008.

Revenue for the first half of 2009 increased 20 percent to $30.3 million, compared to $25.4 million for the same period in 2008. Net income increased 19 percent to $4.3 million, resulting in $0.64 basic and $0.63 diluted EPS, up 21 percent and 22 percent respectively, over the prior-year period.

Harris Interactive, Rochester, N.Y., announced financial results for the fourth quarter and full year fiscal 2009. Total revenue for the fourth quarter of fiscal 2009 was $43.5 million, compared with $63.5 million for the same period in the prior year. Operating loss was ($0.1) million, compared with an operating loss of ($87.7) million for the same period in the prior year. The operating loss included $0.2 million in restructuring and other charges. Net loss was ($0.7) million, compared with a net loss of ($85.7) million, for the same period in 2008.

Total revenue for the full year was $184.3 million, compared with $238.7 million for the prior year. Operating loss was ($56.4) million, compared with an operating loss of ($84.6) million for 2008. Net loss was ($75.3) million, compared with a net loss of ($84.6) million, for the prior year.

Names of Note

continued from p. 12

Morpace Inc., a Farmington Hills, Mich., research company, has made the following appointments: **Lorie Dietz**, vice president, financial services; **Tom McGoldrick**, vice president, retail; **Kelly Wennik**, vice president, technology and telecommunications.

Dietz **McGoldrick**

Wennik

Chicago research company *Information Resources Inc.* has hired **Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey** and **Ed See** as senior partner, consulting and innovation.

Everything Channel, a division of United Business Media, London, has hired **Joe Ambrogio** as research analyst. Ambrogio will be based in Manhasset, N.Y.

Polaris Marketing Research Inc., Atlanta, has appointed **Kristopher Bober** to its project management staff.

Healthcare Research Worldwide, Oxford, U.K., has made the following hires: **Sam Martin**, trainee research executive; **Lily McMullen**, field controller; and **Emily Hancock**, research assistant. The company has also promoted **Nicola Vyas** and **Gillian Newbold** to director, research.

EMI Music, a New York music management company, has hired **David Boyle** as vice president, consumer insight and validation.

Reston, Va., research company *comScore Inc.* has named **Ellen Marzell** senior director, marketing solutions, comScore Europe.

Terry Kent has been named general manager of *TNS Media North America*, a New York division of Horsham, Pa., research company TNS.

OTX, a Los Angeles research company, has hired **Donna Sabino** as senior vice president, kids and family insights. **David Klein** has also joined OTX as senior vice president, TV entertainment.

Dulles, Va., research company *Vovici* has named **Greg Stock** chairman and CEO.

Chris Lynch has joined Austin, Texas, research company *Bazaarvoice* as corporate controller.

The Advertising Research Foundation, New York, has elected five new members to its board for a three-year term: **Paul Donato**, executive vice president and chief research officer, The Nielsen Company; **Ronald Franklin**, president and executive producer, NsightsWorldwide; **Gayle Fuguitt**, vice president, consumer insights, General Mills; **Donna Goldfarb**, vice president, consumer and market insights, Unilever Americas; and **Jim Thompson**, worldwide president and CEO, Ipsos ASI.

GfK NOP, a London division of Nuremberg, Germany, research company The GfK Group, has made the following appointments: **Phyllis Macfarlane,** chairman; **Richard Jameson**, managing director and global board member, GfK Custom Research; and **Colin Strong**, managing director, business and technology sector.

The Kantar Group, the Fairfield, Conn., insight arm of London communications company WPP, has hired **Marita Carballo** as president, Latin America, and **Fiona Keyte** as global account director, Procter & Gamble.

Kantar Health, a New York division of Fairfield, Conn., research company The Kantar Group, has expanded its senior leadership team in China. **Scott Davies** has been named general manager, China; and **Kelly Wong** has been hired as business leader, Shanghai, and head of research, China. Both will be based in Shanghai.

Millward Brown, a Naperville, Ill., division of Fairfield, Conn., research company the Kantar Group, has promoted **Malini Pani** to chief client officer, greater China. The company has also hired **Rupam Borthakur** as managing director, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

David Gray has joined *eDigitalResearch*, Hampshire, U.K., as senior Web developer.

RivalWatch, a Sunnyvale, Calif., research company, has named **Marty Hodgett** president and CEO.

Omaha, Neb., research company *infoGroup* has selected **Roger Siboni** as the next chairman of the board of directors.

MarketTools Inc., a San Francisco research company, has named **Amy Millard** senior vice president, marketing.

London research company *Verve* has hired **Amyas Peto** as director, U.K. operations, and **Paul Ferreira** as manager, technical design.

Janet Morrison has been named manager, business development, of *Confero*, a Cary, N.C., research company.

Bellomy Research Inc., Winston-Salem, N.C., has named **Joseph Ottaviani**, vice president, Midwest region.

Andrew Davidson has been named senior vice president of *Mintel Comperemedia*, a Chicago research company.

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By Joseph Rydholm
Quirk's editor

Wanted: your stories, story ideas

I know it's only October, but I'm already thinking about 2010. When fall rolls around we finalize the editorial calendar for the coming year, adding topics, deleting some, moving others around. I've garnered a number of story ideas from phone calls and conversations with readers at conferences, via e-mail and through our reader survey but I'm still hungry for more.

Thus I chose to devote this month's Trade Talk to our upcoming editorial calendar and some changes in our offerings that I hope will increase our capacity to serve as a voice for researchers.

Many things will stay the same for 2010: two issues focused on qualitative research (May and December); two on online research (January and July); and returning topics such as ethnographic research (February), advertising research (April), health care/pharma research (June), customer satisfaction (October) and international research (November).

Among the things changing: our report on our second-annual research salary survey will move to July (from August this year); we have moved our focus on the hospitality industry to March; and we added a focus on financial services/insurance industry research to the October issue.

I'm excited about two of the new topics we've added for 2010. The first, mobile interviewing (June) is one I've seen pop up more and more in the media and on the docket at industry conferences. Same goes for social media research and marketing, which we have added to the slate for the August issue.

In addition to welcoming Content Editor Emily Goon to our editorial department last year (now there are two of us!), which gave us the capability to do more staff-generated articles based on reader suggestions, we are also expanding our e-newsletter to be twice-monthly, thereby increasing our need for (and space available to publish) interesting, research-related content for the e-newsletter.

Historically, since the magazine's mission has been to help readers do research more effectively, most of our articles have been written by those of you in the industry, the practitioners out there doing research day in and day out. That won't change. While Emily and I hope to have more of our bylines in the print magazine and e-newsletters, our focus remains on having Quirk's, in all its forms, function as a peer-to-peer information exchange.

All of this is my long-winded way of saying that I would love to hear from you with any story ideas you may have, either for us to pursue or for you to submit for consideration.

We're not looking for any new columnists (it's amazing how many "Hey, how about if I write a column for you guys?"-type pitches we get in a year) but with the expanded e-newsletter schedule, and the flexibility that the e-newsletter format adds, we are no longer limited to requiring prospective authors to hit our preferred 1,500-word count for articles.

Prior to adding the e-newsletter, we didn't really have a venue for some of the shorter-form (1,000 words or fewer) articles that readers have submitted. But now, things like a 500-word thought-piece on the changing role of research, or a short journal entry-style story on a recent ethnography project you conducted could be excellent candidates for publication in the e-newsletter.

Really, just about any idea related to marketing research is of interest to us, as long as it's not promotional toward a research company's proprietary products or services. Case studies of successful (or unsuccessful!) research projects; explorations of new or established research techniques; lessons learned or knowledge gleaned; joys or frustrations; never-agains or wish-I-would-haves - it's all fair game.

You can reach me at 651-379-6200 or at joe@quirks.com. Emily can be reached at the same number or at emily@quirks.com. We will also be at the IIR Market Research Event in Las Vegas this month, so feel free to stop by our booth for a chat. We would love to hear from you! | Q

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Coming in the November issue...

The impact of excessive survey invites

Researchers from Bruzzone Research and Kaiser Permanente grilled online research providers about their survey-invitation practices. Which firms were the most forthcoming with information?

Quantitative research in China

Find out why door-to-door research is still a preferred way of conducting research in China and why language barriers and respondent fraud are two prevalent problems.

The survey burden factor

How important is a respondent's perception of survey length?

Eating chicken in China

Ethnographic researchers found that consuming chicken in China involves an array of sensory experiences profoundly different from Western experience.

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before you go...

online and offline

News about Quirk's and quirks.com

Don't miss Quirk's at The Market Research Event!

Quirk's is serving as the premier media partner of IIR's The Market Research Event on October 18-21 at the Red Rock Casino Resort and Spa in Las Vegas! We will have a booth at the entrance to the exhibit hall, and five members from our team will be there manning the booth and taking in conference events. We hope to see many of our readers and editorial contributors - we're always happy to put a face to a name and hear firsthand what researchers would like to see from Quirk's in the future. It's not too late to register for the Event! Visit www.themarketresearchevent.com and use code TMRE09QUIRK to save 15 percent off standard rates.

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Quirk's updates e-newsletter format and frequency

Quirk's monthly e-newsletter has a new look! Starting in November 2009, the redesigned newsletter will be sent out bi-weekly and will include a new section of online-only content that features never-before-seen articles from industry experts. To submit an article for consideration for the newsletter, please send materials to Content Editor Emily Goon at emily@quirks.com. If you aren't already receiving the e-newsletter, log in to Quirk's Subscription Center at quirks.com and click View and Edit Your Account Information and then Edit Online Account. Then check the Receive Our E-Newsletter box and watch for the next edition at the end of this month.

Call for submissions!

The 2010 editorial calendar will include new feature topics: mobile interviewing, social media research and marketing and financial services/insurance industry. Visit tinyurl.com/quirksedcal to check it out. To submit an article for consideration, send materials to *Quirk's* Editor Joseph Rydholm at joe@quirks.com. Additionally, to submit a press release about company goings-on for one of the *Quirk's* departments (i.e., Names of Note, Product and Service Update, Research Industry News, etc.), send materials to emily@quirks.com. Quirk's reserves the right to edit any materials submitted for publication.

cover-to-cover

Facts, figures and insights from this month's issue

If one phrase is sinking a concept, or one image is misleading respondents about your product, change it and see if you can create a winner. Hearing the same issues or criticisms group after group doesn't move you any closer to the finish line, but taking the time to answer objections by modifying the stimulus often can. *(page 20)*

There is and there will continue to be resistance to the [fuel-efficient] technology, such as these hybrid electrics, because of the upfront cost to purchase. People really aren't going to buy these types of vehicles unless it makes some economic sense for them - and that's generally as gas gets closer to $4 per gallon. *(page 32)*

Here's a simple but quite effective test to explore automotive brand depth: Ask yourself about the "-ness" of it. For example, what, exactly, is BMW-ness to you? When we do this in qualitative research the richness of data might surprise you. *(page 39)*

When the goal of surveying customers goes from pleasing the customer to pleasing the organization, you know that customer satisfaction has been inappropriately applied. *(page 48)*

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Congratulations to August's winner, Digna Davila of the Internal Revenue Service, Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. August's prize was a free four-hour coaching session with Naomi Henderson of the RIVA Market Research and Training Institute.

To become a future contest sponsor contact Evan Tweed at 651-379-6200.

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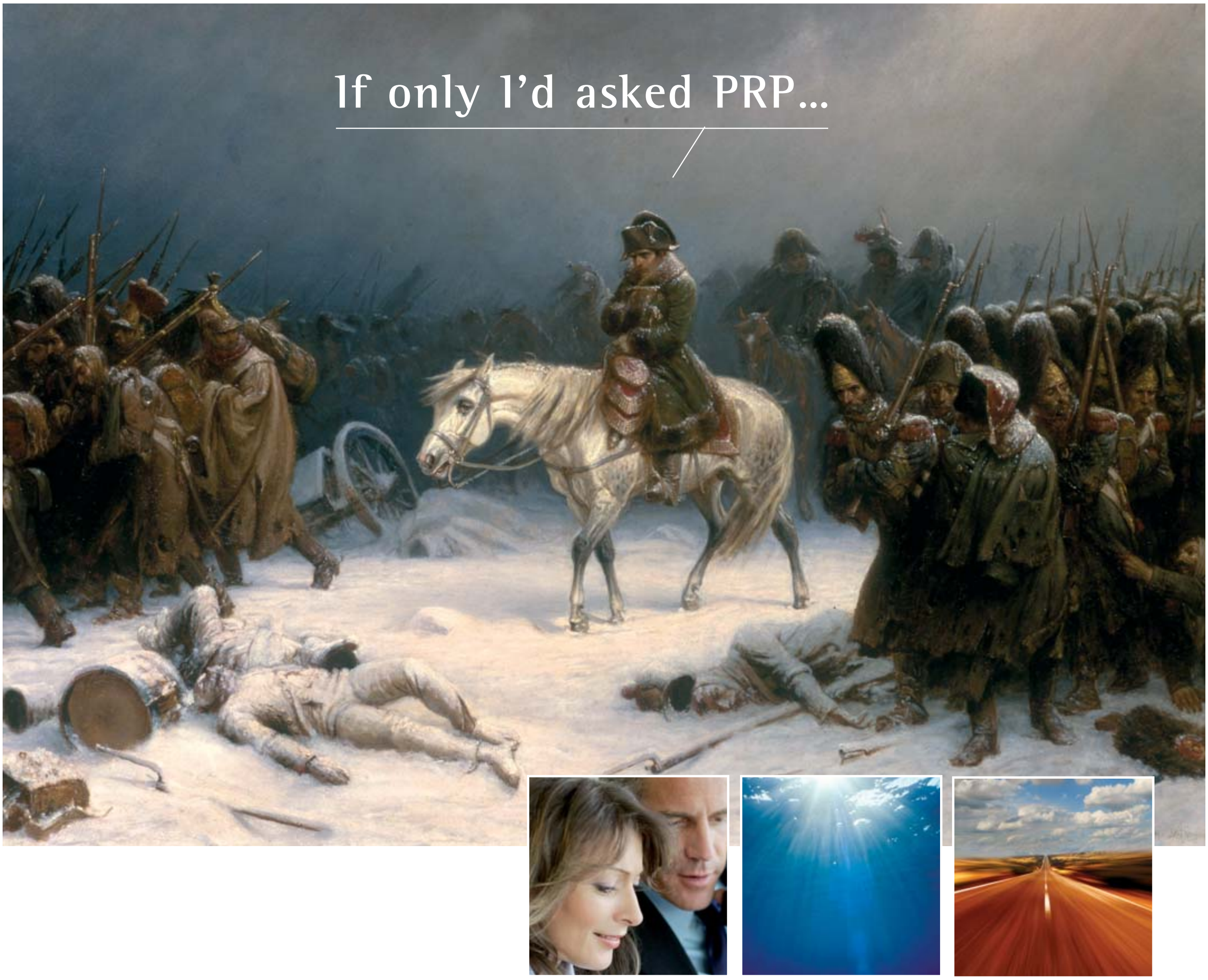
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