

Deep consumer insight is the real competitive edge for your businesses and your brand

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Of course we all know this, it is Marketing 101, but a look at this year's Cannes reel made me think of precisely why we can never lose sight of this as marketers. Understanding our consumer is key not only to the way that we construct our offer, but also to the way we communicate this offer in the market. But what is the insight we are after? We all know consumers are notoriously bad at picking packaging or choosing a logo so how do we ensure that they are at the heart of our business and that we do get that competitive edge?

Well, while we can (and we must!) check what the final logo/colour/packaging communicates to them, we cannot ask them to pick colours for us or to come up with design ideas. They are not graphic designers, they are doctors, lawyers, executives or more frequently call centre operators, receptionists and homemakers. We need to rather focus on what they are real experts in, themselves! So what is really critical for brands and businesses to know is: how your consumers live; how they think and feel about the category that your brand is operating in, what their real pain and pleasure points are and how the current category players' communication resonates or doesn't with them.

Thankfully, our clients are making this shift and recognising that consumer research should inform product and packaging design as well as brand communication and not only test it once the design process is complete. This year we have done a lot more of the kind of research that aims to really understand consumers and what their lives look like, what their fears and frustrations are, their hopes and dreams and of course how they engage and interact with the category and brands in that category.

Sadly I didn't go to Cannes but in viewing the reel, I was struck by how many brilliant examples there were of how creativity works hardest when it is based on an enduring consumer truth.

The hard-working campaigns went way beyond the basics of communicating a proposition, they showed a deep understanding of how real people actually behave and what they care about.

Insight informs product and offer design

A rather lovely example of this is an ingenious fridge magnet which won the 2012 Cannes Mobile Lion Award.

It was designed and conceived of by a small pizza spot in Dubai. This device sits innocuously on your fridge but it holds your pizza preference and ensures that your order gets through seamlessly to the pizza place and the chap actually making your pizza. So how much time does it actually save, well realistically not that much, it is only the time that it takes to call that order through, five minutes at the maximum, it seems ridiculous that this would make a difference.

But what we know from the work that we have done in the fast-food category is that instant gratification is the name of the game, many fast-foodies will actually select their meal based on how quickly it will get to them! Once a consumer has got a fast-food craving, they literally cannot get their hands on it quickly enough, that is why food production time and reducing "time-to-serve" is key in this category - they really are that impatient.

What is abundantly clear is that the people designing this device and this campaign also had that insight, this was not only a gimmick and a talking-point but it really answers a very real issue that consumers have with fast-food and that is that it is simply not fast enough!

Insight should also inform brand communication

Then the very moving example of Chipotle's charming, animated film, "Back to the Start", which received the Grand Prix in both The Film Lions and the inaugural Branded Content and Entertainment category at the Cannes Festival.

This campaign is built on an insight that there is a growing questioning, even if only amongst a small audience of consumers, who ask questions about where their food originates.

This campaign taps into this growing consciousness about factory farming and the origin of food. Aligning one's brand with an issue that is close to your market's heart is only possible if that market is understood in the first place. In order to get to this insight, one has to use consumer research to ask deeper questions than "how much are you prepared to pay for this burger?" One has to really get to know what moves them and what they really care about.

These two campaigns are just two of the Cannes campaigns that got us thinking and reinforced what we already know about the power of true consumer insight to transform a business and a brand and its communication to consumers.

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