

Get a new angle on brands

Insights are a valuable source of inspiration for creating relevant and profitable brand ideas. In our research with marketing directors, insights were voted one of the top three drivers of growth.

But there is still a reliance on traditional qualitative and quantitative research to generate these insights. Relying on conventional research limits your chances of uncovering a real nugget of insight and requires big budgets.

There will always be a place for focus groups and quantitative studies but having a more open, 360° approach can increase your chances of success while also cutting costs.

So what is this 360° approach? One way to visualise the idea is 'opening different windows into the world of your consumer'. Conventional research, which tries to understand the consumer through direct questioning – such as asking people why they buy specific brands – has limited effect. But 360° insight focuses on trying to be the consumer to generate a more emotional and powerful understanding (see figure 1).

New insight, new thinking

The 360° approach requires a change in culture, where research is seen as a creative process to produce potent 'fuel' for idea generation, rather than a rational process used to check and evaluate.

One of the hardest challenges for brands is making teams comfortable with the approach. I've seen this when working on a vision and innovation project for the sanitary protection market as part of a large multinational organisation. The initial reaction was: "What the hell?"

The proposal was to talk about menstruation to depilators, gynaecologists and – wait for it – prostitutes. By talking to people with an interesting, different view on the issues the brand was addressing, we hoped to get a fresh angle on the market. We also wanted to look at cultural attitudes to menstruation over the past 2,000 years as a source of new ideas.

To her credit, the marketer in question backed the proposal, although it was a hard sell at first within the organisa-

Figure 1: Traditional research versus 360° insights

Traditional research

- Assumes people know what they want – and want to tell you.
- Uses consumers as key source of information.
- Entails limited personal involvement/immersion.
- Involves artificial environments.
- Tries to understand the consumer.

Source: the brandgym

360° insights

- Assumes much information is hidden.
- Uses different information sources.
- Entails much higher personal involvement to win empathy.
- Involves the real world environment.
- Tries to become the consumer.

tion. After almost four weeks of doing "weird stuff", as the client described it, the team got together in a three-day workshop to share all the insights gained.

The lessons learnt were the catalyst for a new brand positioning idea about 'celebrating femininity'. This came from the insight that when menstruating, women feel more sensitive, and treating themselves (for example, eating chocolates and not going to the gym) helps them to be more at ease with themselves.

This take on the market had not emerged before when the sanitary brand had questioned women directly about their issues. It offered the brand a chance to create a more differentiated position because other brands weren't looking at marketing in this way.

The brand was relaunched with a product that aimed to be more comfortable with a cute, feminine design instead of the clinical packaging that is the market norm. The client intends to take it further by creating new communications material encouraging women to do what they feel like during their menstruation days, in contrast to the brand's competitors, who suggest women deny it and treat it like any other day.

Opening new windows

A list of 360° insight techniques is shown in figure two but several of these can be discussed in more detail:

● **Immersion in the consumer's world:** This is a great place to start because it is a rich source of insight – and it's free. The best method is to hire people who are consumers of the category, and therefore potential customers too, as is the case with Nike. Marketing ideas such as the 'Run London' competition have come

from employing people who are active users. They perfectly understand the consumer because they *are* the consumer. It also explains why Nike does not pre-test any of its communications.

But it is not always possible to be the consumer – you can't be a child or pet, for example – so the next best approach is to immerse yourself in their world. One of the owners of kids' confectionery brand Haribo said he was able to know children well and understand them because he spent one hour per day either watching TV programmes aimed at them or talking to young people.

● **Experts:** A marketing team working on a haircare brand in Latin America was trying to come up with great ideas for women who were heavy users of straighteners and regularly dyed their locks. The target consumer definition in use in the company was "women concerned about damaging their hair", which sounds flat and uninteresting. A more vivid picture of the core target came from conversations with hair stylists. The language they used helped to craft the insight and research in a way that was more inspiring for the marketers. The target definition was rewritten to be: 'Real divas who want to stop the traffic anytime they appear.'

● **Brand peer group:** Many companies spend a lot of time analysing the direct competition in their market. This can lead to copycat marketing, resulting in a lack of clear differentiation. A more inspiring source of insight can be to create a 'peer group' of brands who operate in different categories but who are targeting the same consumer with a related benefit.

For example, Dutch fruit drink brand

Consumer insight Research

Dubbelfriss gained inspiration on how to develop new flavour launches by looking at the Lynx/Axe deodorant rotation strategy. Each new body spray or sub-brand, such as this year's Vice, is not just a new fragrance but a fully developed concept based on a new piece of insight about being a young man.

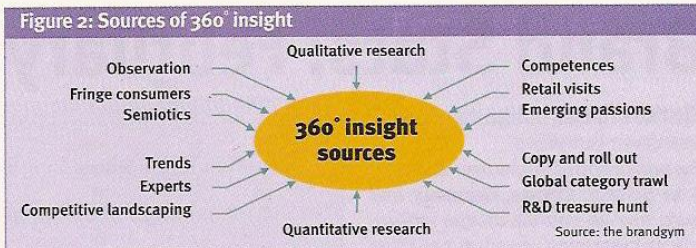
A major benefit of developing distinct communications concepts for products within a line is that it is far harder for other retailers to copy, which was a major issue for Dubbelfriss. It led to the creation of two limited-edition flavours, Cool Citrus and Wild Berry, each with its own personality, which was much more difficult for own-brands to imitate.

● **Fringe consumers:** If you really want to see the problem magnified, talk to 'extreme consumers' – heavy users or total rejecters. This can be a useful way to discover issues that are invisible to 'ordinary' consumers.

For example, a traditional Latin American brand of cakes was suffering from being perceived as similar to junk food. The brand learnt from a super-heavy consumer that the mother's idea of what was 'good for her kids' was what she herself used to have when she was a child. This led the brand to add in extra milk, seen as a traditional, healthy ingredient in cooking, in a bid to make the product more nutritious. The brand also decided to leverage its heritage credentials across all its marketing channels to make this nostalgic 'good for you' positioning more credible.

● **Ethnography:** This technique involves filming consumers as they go about a certain task. Instead of asking them to try to remember what they did and why, you see it at first hand.

This proved to be a powerful tool on a project for an out-of-home coffee brand that supplies roast and ground coffee to places such as supermarket cafes. By filming people going to coffee shops, it saw how important the whole experience was. The coffee itself was only as important as the cup it was served in, the extras (chocolate powder, sugar and so on) and the ambience. The brand was being judged on more than its taste. It was evaluated on how people felt about it when consuming it. The marketing team decided to invest more in advising their retail customers on how to upgrade



the coffee-drinking experience to compete with high-street chains than just looking at the product itself.

● **Semiotics:** This is the study of 'codes' used in design and communication. By understanding how meaning is communicated, a brand can highlight ways of tapping into or deciphering societal or psychological codes.

When we worked on a project to launch a brand of beer in Russia for SAB Miller, insight came from an unusual source: a TV programme shown every year at Christmas. The film showed a group of four men on a stag party in a sauna. To refresh themselves, they drank beer. As the party wore on, one of the men produced a bottle of vodka and the tearful toasting began. This showed the marketers that in a hard-drinking culture like Russia, beer needed to be positioned as a light, refreshing drink and this could then be used as a guide for creating new communications.

● **Global category trawl:** Many multinational companies tend to launch new products in selected markets and roll them out into other geographies. This means that one way to get insights is to study the same category but in a more developed country. As management consultant Peter Drucker used to say: "The future is happening today in other industries or countries."

Wrigley, for example, gained insights from the successful launch of Listerine mouth-refreshing strips in the US and was able to use what it had learned to launch its own version of the product in the UK under the Extra brand.

● **Technical treasure hunt:** This technique is ideal for innovation projects. The classic theory of innovation is that insights from consumers inspire new product ideas. However, as with all marketing, the truth is much less tidy.

Many great product successes work

the opposite way round, starting with a technical breakthrough and then looking for a way to market it. Solero Shots ice lolly balls came out of a research and development manager dropping fruit-flavoured juice into liquid nitrogen with no clear brief.

A sausage brand team in Argentina had its "Eureka!" moment when the head of research explained that each sausage had the equivalent protein of one-third of a beefsteak, seen in the country as a nutritious food for kids. This technical insight led to the claim: "Three sausages has the same amount of protein as a beef steak," and a new marketing campaign that helped to build brand sales.

Getting started

The first step in using 360° insight is to start with a clear brief. What is the marketing task and what sort of insight is needed? The next step should be to look at all the existing research that has been done. This will lead to a series of insight gaps to be filled. You can then see which techniques might be able to help you.

For a first project, it may be wise to start slowly, combining new techniques with conventional methods. This worked well on the out-of-home coffee project. Quantitative research was used to confirm the importance of different factors in the coffee experience that were highlighted initially in the ethnography.

If nothing else it's worth generating new thinking on your brand by taking a different angle on the issues. Next time you are about to press the button marked 'focus group', see if there isn't a different window you can open into the world of your consumer. You might find the view is much more inspiring.

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