

## Staying in synch with your market

In today's fast-moving landscape, market intelligence must become more dynamic to enable rapid strategy development and iterative action. As a result, many organizations are rethinking how they approach research to fuel the insatiable demand for fast insights about competitors and customers. Researchers are turning to flexible, quick-turn data collection methods including online surveys and blog mining, as well as immersive methodologies such as ethnographic research, to help them gain deeper insight about customers.

Companies are also investing in powerful analytics platforms to streamline the sense-making process. But collecting and aggregating insight is only half the challenge. It's not enough to answer the question of "What's happening"—research also has to facilitate discussions around "What should we do about it?" Piles of data buried in 100-slide PowerPoint decks won't cut it—busy executives need a concise summary of just the facts that will help them make more informed decisions.

A truly dynamic approach puts intelligence in context of actions to allow the organization to operationalize the insight. This requires a new skill set that is both analytical and intuitive, both strategic and tactical. The next-gen marketing strategist needs to be able to penetrate both hard and soft data to synthesize meaning, draw conclusions, and clarify priorities.

## Converting aha's into action

These three techniques can help you drive adoption of insight across your organization:

- **Actionalize intelligence** by going beyond reporting the facts to framing up possible actions. Attach to every finding an implication that makes clear the strategic options inherent in the data.
- **Facilitate knowledge sharing** through "communities of practice" that connect like-minded thinkers inside your organization. Consider wikis and portals to accelerate cross-pollination within and across teams.
- **Align insight into workflows** by publishing insights in the context of internal user needs. For instance, reconstitute competitive intelligence into weekly news alerts for executives, battlecards for the field, and category trend reports for product marketing.

*"Today's proliferating marketing environment creates opportunities to outsmart and outgrow competitors by generating and acting on cell-level customer insights."*

—"Insights," *McKinsey Quarterly*, 2006

## 3 THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

**1. Begin with the end.**  
Before designing any survey instrument, envision the outcome to clarify the actions that research will help inform. If the question isn't actionable, don't ask it.

**2. Soak in the details.**  
Try a new "immersive" method like anthropological interviewing or co-creation brainstorms with customers. Then create a "war room" to catalog artifacts—including video, audio, and pictures—and observations about the customer.

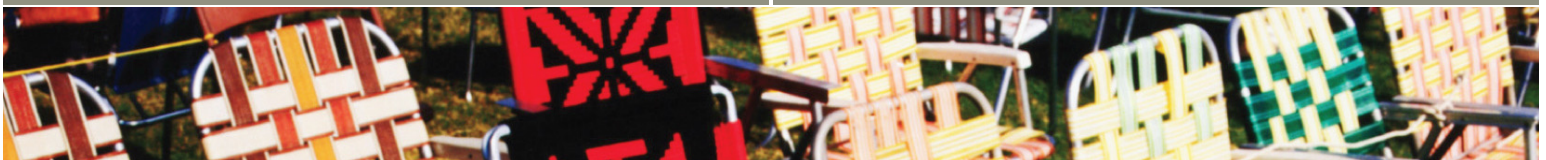
**3. Cut to the chase.**  
Boil research summary decks down to the key facts that will inform decision-making. Snapshot top-line findings and implications in two slides max, and add a key take-away to every drill-down slide that crystallizes the possible meaning of the data.

### Get ahead of competitors

- Make checking competitors an organizational habit; incent tracking behavior
- Reverse-engineer messages and conceptual frameworks
- Enlist partners in spotting trends
- Emulate competitors cautiously

### Stay aligned with customers

- Have a continuous feedback process
- Make customers an active partner in your course corrections
- Get them vested in your success
- Deliver value by connecting them to each other





## Keeping ahead of the curve

The need for rich, real-time market insight is growing ever more important. These four techniques can help you capture ongoing intelligence and infuse it into your everyday activities.

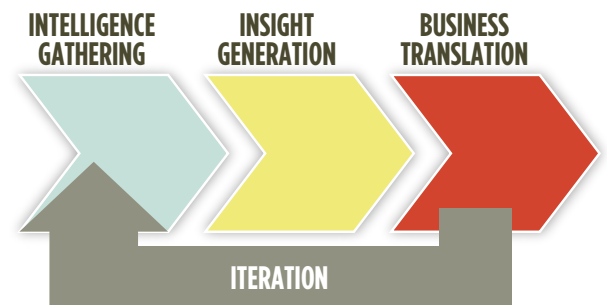
- **Blog crawling.** Track trends in conversations and buzz about your brand versus competitors with tools such as [visibletechnologies.com](http://visibletechnologies.com), [umbrialistens.com](http://umbrialistens.com), and [radian6.com](http://radian6.com).
- **Field pulse-check.** Host a quarterly call with top sales reps to probe on current buying dynamics, customer needs, and sales obstacles. Push top-line learnings back out to the field to deliver value-add they'll keep coming back for.
- **Customer discovery dinners.** Use customer insight sessions to get an early read on where customers are going and what they'll want next. Periodically host a dinner with key customers to create an ongoing dialogue around what they're thinking and doing.
- **Trend tracking.** Roll up data from primary and secondary research in a quick-read summary of key trends to help align your team. Include tidbits on macro market shifts, competitive investments and go-to-market activities, and changes in customer needs and spending priorities.

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*"Market research that gets described as 'interesting' has failed. It's only when it's 'useful' that it gets the pass mark."*

—*"Making It Useful, Not Just Interesting," April 2007*

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*"Knowing what to do, why it needed to be done, and having the persistence and courage to do it helped leaders turn knowledge...into action."*

—*Jeffrey Pfeffer & Robert Sutton, The Knowing-Doing Gap, 2000*

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## Following the shifting sands

Understanding what customers want and how competitors are delivering it can be a great challenge in a rapidly changing marketplace. Much of market research offers only a rear-window view of what already happened, when what you really need is a crystal ball into what might happen next. Trend tracker reports can create a picture of where your market is going by aggregating trends across the entire category over time—from category evolution to competitive vision and acquisitions to customer needs and buying dynamics.

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