

How to build a 'learning culture' in your organisation

 By [Al Mackay](#)

4 Sep 2013

Leading organisations centre everything they do on consumer insight. Most marketers understand the importance of real, deep, intuitive insight into their markets - it helps them create messaging that resonates and produce products and services that meet functional, emotional and social needs.

Understanding your market is the foundation of brand relevance. But a sustained competitive advantage in any consumer-facing industry requires that those outside of marketing understand the consumer too.

Insight needs to be embedded across the organisation in order to stay on the pulse of consumer sentiment and remain relevant. It's not possible to be a leading organisation without first becoming a learning organisation.

The whole business needs to listen, learn and connect with their consumers to remain relevant. Keeping consumer insight trapped in a marketing department misses half the point of learning from consumers in the first place. IT needs to understand the consumer. NPD needs to understand them. The sales team needs to understand them.

So how do you do it? How do you ensure that you're building a learning organisation?

1. Ask why

So much consumer research is presented as tables, stats and data. Those figures are incredibly useful to plot trends and quantify behaviour, but the real trick of consumer insight is to figure out why consumers are doing something.

What is the motivation for their shopping behaviour? Keep asking "why" until you understand their emotional needs and drivers.

2. Empower your employees

Many of your employees will have an intuitive grasp of your customer segments, and many may come from the target market. Employees that interface with your consumers - such as social media managers, front of house staff or call centre agents - may have valuable nuggets of insight or great ideas of new ways to meet emerging customer needs.

It's important to make your employees feel safe enough to share with others in the organisation. Build a culture that encourages sharing and flatten your hierarchies.

3. Experiment

Keep trying out new and different research methods to enrich your customer insight - like neuroscience or ethnographic studies. Test new product or communication ideas with different groups. Run beta-testing. Incentivise innovation and be open to failure - it's a necessary part of the learning curve to successful innovation. Keep leaping and learning from mistakes; it's important not to just stick with the safe option that has always been done.

4. Cross-fertilise ideas

Coordinate regular cross-functional team brainstorming. Different teams will undoubtedly have different experiences and insights about your target customers, and these points of view may trigger new ideas for relevant marketing.

5. Make it engaging

No matter how interesting you find the customer insight, it probably needs to be made more user-friendly in order to spread quickly through an organisation. People don't like reading long, copy-heavy documents or sitting in on dull, lifeless presentations.

Find engaging ways to share customer insight across the organisation - think infographics and soundbites, customer vox pop videos, and workshops with people from the target segment interacting with your teams.

Make the sessions conversational and ask for ideas - it helps make them memorable. And consider placing reminders all over your business - from posters for each segment in the lifts to screen savers and quiz nights.

Turn insight into an asset

Great marketing is built on solid customer insight, but this insight does not need to be complex or scary. Some of the best campaigns and products come from simple human truths. To ensure your organisation is in touch with your customers' human truths, build a culture that listens to your customers and learns from their feedback - whether this is directed at you or about you (for example, on social media).

Turning insight into an asset that drives business success requires you to use it across your business. Use insight to build platforms to connect with your customers.

Marketing has an important role to play in building these platforms. It should plan for and execute the ideal customer experience at every touch point, and this is made so much easier if everyone in your business understands what you are trying to do.

Put in place the systems and people to ensure that customer insight, based on constant learning and sharing is embedded across your organisation - and you will be well equipped to deliver brand experiences, products and services that resonate with your target market, satisfy their physical and emotional needs and generate goodwill.

What your customers will feel is a brand that 'gets me'. The work that goes on in the background of that experience is building a responsive, learning organisation.

ABOUT AL MACKAY

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