AN INSIDE LOOK
ADAPTING TO THE
DIGITAL BRAND
LANDSCAPE USING
RESEARCH

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“Branding is what people say about you when you’re not in the room.”
- Jeff Bezos, CEO, and Founder, Amazon

Known as the father of advertising, David Ogilvy hung his hat on the notion that a company’s brand, or “the intangible sum of a product’s attributes,” is the most valuable asset they have. Many companies do not invest enough in their brand and skip critical research steps that would allow them to truly understand their customers. This ultimately leads to a brand becoming devalued and decayed.

Alongside key research conducted by award-winning marketing software vendor Bynder and market research thought leader Research Rockstar, this guide will provide you with a comprehensive look into the current changes happening in the marketing research industry, what companies are doing to adapt to those changes to collect relevant data, and how to put the data to use in everyday practice.

There may be a change in consumer’s buying habits, it’s brand impact, and how we collect data on such, but it’s not as intimidating as one might think. The common denominator to success: conducting brand research.
What is a Brand?

*Far more than three decades it has been argued that the brand is an important value creator and should be a top management priority. However, the definition of what a brand is remains elusive.*

For the basis of this guide, we are aligning the narrative with the interpretive paradigm -- or the understanding the world as it is from the experiences of individuals -- which is based on the scientist, paradigm expert, and author of The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, *Thomas Kuhn*’s philosophy. For the purpose of our position, when we refer to “individuals” we are speaking specifically about the context and impact of consumers.

A company’s brand can be thought of and defined as what your prospects and current customers think of when they hear the brand’s name, according to branding, sales, and marketing contributor *Jerry McLaughlin* at Forbes. The thought or feeling that is invoked when an individual hears your brand’s name could be heavy in fact and tightly tied to one’s emotions; combining both the subjective and objective. Your brand may be remembered for how it is packaged, such as it comes in frustration-free packaging but also be felt as being happy.

So why does your brand need to be backed by supporting data and longitudinal research?

Thanks to emerging technology and individuals’ on-demand expectations, brands need to adapt to these shifts continually, and fast. Brands today are put under an extreme level of pressure “to succeed, innovate, and adapt to consumer’s buying habits without the slightest bump in the road, all the while operating in a global marketplace,” according to another Forbes contributor, *Doug McMillon*.

To do this with not only an agility and flexibility, you also need to keep the research engine well oiled. Throughout this guide, we will provide useful advice on how to do this.
Branding: Part Art, Part Science

It’s an age-old debate in the marketing world -- Are we artists? Are we scientists? Are we neither or both? Traditional marketing is seen as artistic, deeply rooted in gut instinct, great design, and creativity to power a campaign and fuel advertising.

In the digital world, every action, campaign and yes... every brand needs to have a strong support system built on data insights -- the hard and fast facts that can only be found in metrics. Not only do these insights help us prove our digital marketing ROI to our bosses, but it helps digital brands stand out among the vastly deep digital ecosystem.

So, for this ebook, the debate is settled on this notion: marketing is part art and part science; where each part is mutually exclusive of the other. Without supporting data insights behind a campaign, a creative may not know where to steer the campaign’s direction to achieve a goal.

Put simply, data and business analytics should drive the creative strategies of a brand; the number’s story should be told by the supporting creative visuals.

Steve Brinker of Search Engine Land has been a constant voice in this debate and has broken it down into four main quadrants.

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<th>Data-Driven Decision-Making</th>
<th>Empirical Pattern Recognition and Model Building</th>
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<td>Move aside Don Draper. Hello, Data Scientist. Let’s base our brand on what the numbers say.</td>
<td>Data from personas and granular micro-segments to classify customers, prospects, and influencers.</td>
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<th>Controlled Experimentation: Hypothesize, Test, Refine</th>
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Since the four elements of brand identity are studied with very different methods, make sure that you differentiate and carefully select the right methods to study each of the four elements of brand identity.

- Initiate a long-term continuous reputation of research. Use a combination of surveys, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews.
- For the study of image, initiate the research with explorative qualitative methods, where free association methods subtract all potential feedback and associations. Finalize and make the results useful to guide managerial decisions by using quantitative methods to uncover the salience of the complete list of feedback until narrowed down to a few central insights.
- For the study of the internal elements, plant the research, ensure the full access to all meetings and processes. Without full access, you will not get a complete and accurate picture of the organizational identity or the corporate identity.
- Immerse yourself in the everyday environment of the objects: watch, listen, learn and act.
- Initiate the process of changing the object that is observed (mainly organizational identity) according to the observations made already. Changes should not be stand-alone activities but should be implemented in everyday processes.
- Observe how existing routines or other manifestations of organizational identity are affected.

- Make sure to include all levels and functions in all actions and observations, not only in the process of collecting data but also in the data interpretation process. This will ensure a more accurate and deep understanding of organizational identity and its interplay with the corporate identity.
- Reflect on how the initiated changes were received, what can be done differently to improve results. What have you learned about the organizational culture that is new and requires new methods of observation and maybe new actions?
- Make sure that all the four elements are studied simultaneously and that the results from the four studies are merged in an overall plan for how to respond to the results.

SOURCE: Adapted from Heding, Knudtzen, and Bejerre (2016).
Collecting Data to Build and Sustain a Brand

- Research the image elements of brand identity - insights into the cognitive processes that consumers and stakeholders go through when evaluating a brand identity
- Requires methods from cognitive psychology

Shedding light on a company’s identity -- often referred to as corporate identity -- is a fundamental part of a strategic vision and visual identity of the brand, according to Heding. Gathering data for these two crucial company elements -- while synonymous with each other -- are different.

**Strategic vision data sources:**
- Semi-structured interviews
- Storytelling
- Heuristic Analysis
- Any other historical sources

**Visual expression data sources:**
- Measuring and comparing how the visual expressions reflect the positioning of a brand and its competitors

“Having uncovered the sources of visual and strategic identity representing the more formal aspects of identity expressed by the company, the behavioral and cultural aspects of identity must also be uncovered”, says Heding, such as informal cues and symbols.
Exclusive Q&A with Bynder

In December 2016, Bynder -- a digital asset management software vendor -- surveyed 562 global brand managers on the challenges they face, their priorities for 2017, and their approach to technology. Their report gives branding and marketing professionals insight into how brand marketing is evolving in a consumer-centric, digital age. The results of the survey were culminated into the company’s “State of Branding Report 2017” and is the focus of this interview.

Why should brands big or small begin to manage their brand using key research and why is this so important?

Consumer demands and expectations are constantly changing at an alarming rate, and the only way to stay on top of these trends is by listening to your customers. Ultimately, these are the people who will decide the future of your business.

As a small brand, it’s imperative that you understand your ideal customer’s pain points to ensure that your product or service addresses a market need.

As a big brand, it’s important to guard against complacency, keep your finger on the pulse and even provide a solution for your customers before they even have a need. Not only does this foster innovation, but it also gives you an advantage over your competitors by being a game-changer in your industry.

What challenges have you faced in doing key research to support the Bynder brand?

We have over 150,000 brand managers, marketers, and creatives using our portals each and every day. We recognized a need for a report that identified and efficiently summarized how brand marketing is evolving in this customer-centric, digital age.
What are some key strategies that brands can take away from your findings?

This year’s report debunked some of the myths surrounding brand marketing in 2017. Namely:

1. Marketers see value in new technologies, but are hesitant to invest -- despite all the trend reports, the marketers we surveyed said that were unlikely to invest in cutting-edge tech such as VR, AR, and AI.

   Takeaway: Brands willing to take the risk can be early pioneers of this tech.

2. Better understanding consumer personas are at the top of many marketers’ to-do lists -- we found that organizations are actively trying to gain more consumer insights in 2017.

   Takeaway: Consumer insights should be a strategic priority to avoid being left behind by competitors.

3. The majority of brands are still not going mobile-first -- despite all the reports of mobile consumption rising exponentially, only 35 percent of marketers surveyed take a mobile-first approach to marketing campaigns.

   Takeaway: Tailoring campaigns exclusively for mobile might result in higher engagement.
David Aaker’s Top 5 Branding Challenges

David Aaker of Prophet Brand Strategy is a renowned author and professor emeritus at the Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley.

- **Possessing a compelling vision**
  With all of the noise in the marketplace, your brand needs to cut through it all while resonating with customers and inspiring employees. Many brands fail because they do not adapt to change, so when you start building your brand, think about keeping it flexible enough to couple well with new tech and consumer’s buying habits. When doing this, Aaker recommends employing: brand personality, organizational values, and a higher purpose.

- **Treating brands as assets**
  Brands need to have a return on investment. Don’t let this pressure dilute the brand by focusing solely on tactics that carry an easy measurable. While important, you must not forget one of the main branding objectives of building assets that support the brand (logo, identity, tone, etc.)

- **Building your brand internally**
  With all of the noise in the marketplace, your brand needs to cut through it all while resonating with customers and inspiring employees. Many brands fail because they do not adapt to change, so when you start building your brand, think about keeping it flexible enough to couple well with new tech and consumer’s buying habits. When doing this, Aaker recommends employing: brand personality, organizational values, and a higher purpose.
• **Generating breakthrough brand building**
As the saying goes -- no idea is a bad idea. It’s the execution of the excellent ideas that make a difference. This is where most find themselves saying that good is simply not enough, which means the more ideas for, the more sources, the better; yet, build in a process for acting on the winners of each ideation session.

• **Achieving integrated marketing communication**
From advertising and sponsorships to digital and social media, communication can get complicated and highly nuanced quickly. Take time to narrow down which channels are best for your brand, so the message never is lost in translation or mixed in amongst the noise of your competitors.
Top Marketing Challenges

According to the State of the Branding Report published by Bynder, the top three challenges for global brand managers and CMOs are:

- Proving the ROI of marketing activities
- Collaboration between departments/offices
- Adapting to changing consumer behaviors

“While proving marketing ROI remains a top challenge, marketing departments are struggling to keep up to pace with changing consumer behavior,” the report concludes.

To gather consumer insights on a brand, the report suggests many do this by tapping into their personas to help target and understand ideal customers.

“Clearly, organizations are actively trying to gain more consumer insights,” the report concludes. This is validated by the 34% of respondents who stated that new customer acquisition is their top marketing priority for 2017.
Key brand development stages that require research:

STAGE 1 - Identify target clients

STAGE 2 - Research the identified target client group

STAGE 3 - Develop brand position

STAGE 4 - Develop message strategy

STAGE 5 - Develop logo, tagline, and name

STAGE 6 - Develop a content strategy

STAGE 7 - Develop a website

STAGE 8 - Develop a marketing toolkit

STAGE 9 - Track and measure, constantly

Research Methods

• Surveys

• Focus groups

• Employee interviews

Top brand research tips

• There is no such thing as a stupid question

• Look for emotional and rational responses

• Remove your own bias

• Best presentation methods for your organization
One Sentence at a Time: Language That Bridges the Gap Between Brand Managers & Market Researchers

Brand Managers have a tough job. Cutting through the “noise” to successfully position a brand. Finding golden opportunities to create and sustain differentiation. Plowing through volumes of competitive mayhem -- and we expect them to also digest and apply market research data with flair? Yeah...right.

Are You a Brand Manager?
So, for brand managers seeking to get better use from market research data, I have a tip for you: work with your team. If you work in a company with $10M+ in annual sales/revenue, you probably have a Market Research Department (often also called “Customer Insights” or “Shopper Insights”). These folks can help you quickly and objectively identify your best options for any business data needs—they are your data Sherpas. They know how to collect data that your organization may need (using tools such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, ethnography, etc.). But just as important, they know when and how to collaborate with your organization’s other data hubs (various analytics functions may include Customer Analytics, Data Analytics’, Ecommerce data, etc.).

No matter how big or small your question is: if you want data to help inform a decision or craft a strategy, you can get unbiased advice on your best options from your Market Research Team.

Are you a Customer Insights/Market Research Manager?
For Customer Insights and Market Research Professionals who work with brand managers, you have a challenge: these Brand Management types are usually working at 100 miles per hour. As much as they value fresh, high-quality customer insights—they are drowning in data.

So how can we help them take the time and attention to apply market research data?

By making it easy for them. That may sound trite, but it is true.
And how can you make it easy for a brand manager to harness the power of your amazing research? The first big step is this: speak their language.

You can help them engage with your research findings by using brand management language. Many market research professionals, like those in any specialty field, use a fair amount of jargon. We casually use phrases like “incidence rates,” “clusters,” and “significance”—too often expecting the Brand Manager will speak our language. Why make them work that much harder in deciphering what the ask is?

Instead, speak their language.

How? Write (and speak) your key findings in the context of brand management job responsibilities.

To get you started, here are two key responsibilities that nearly all Brand Managers have:

- Creating and promoting value propositions for the brand.
- Creating and promoting marketing initiatives that will meet market share goals.

There are, of course, other initiatives brand managers may have as top responsibilities, but these two are universal—and often supported by market research data.

**Translating Market Research to the Language of Value Propositions**

While there are various definitions of “value proposition,” the essence is this: A value proposition is a statement that clearly describes why your target market would want to spend money with your brand.
“Brand managers are often responsible for making sure the brand’s value proposition is differentiated from the competition and currently viable. “Current” is important, as many product categories evolved rapidly: yesterday’s differentiated value proposition might become tomorrow’s ho-hum.”

- Kathryn Korostoff
  Lead Instructor & President, Research Rockstar LLC

For some brands, this might be about superior service; for others, about a unique product attribute. For some, the value proposition is simply about being the low-cost option. And for others? It may not even be something that is “rational”; it may be a purely emotional trigger the brand taps into.

Brand managers are often responsible for making sure the brand’s value proposition is differentiated from the competition and currently viable. “Current” is important, as many product categories evolved rapidly: yesterday’s differentiated value proposition might become tomorrow’s ho-hum.

Customer surveys are often used to uncover or test value proposition assumptions and options. So how does the market researcher speak the language of value propositions? Here are two paths:

**Seek to highlight brand attributes that are perceived as “unique.”**

Does the data show that the proposed value proposition “is perceived as unique”? And we aren’t talking about marginal uniqueness—the brand manager needs slam-dunk uniqueness. If your data has relevant key findings that can be used to “identify Brand X’s unique, defensible value proposition options,” they will love you.

Conversely, if the research finds that the brand lacks a defensible, unique value proposition, your brand manager needs to know that too. It’s bad news, but it’s an important reality check for a brand manager who may need help getting an executive team to pay attention to “valid marketing challenges.”

**Identify ways to optimize the value proposition by country.** Does the data show that the value proposition needs to be modified by country or region (“country-specific value propositions”)? Or can the brand effectively use a “universal value proposition”? 
This last point turns out to be very common: if your client represents a multinational brand, they may very well face this challenge. In their 2014 article, “Designed with you in mind,” Scott Garrison and Jet Kruith of SKIM, describe a case study of a cleaning product that was successful in the US with an “easy” theme, but succeeded in Italy with a cleaning “deeply” one: two very different value propositions! And a great demonstration of how value propositions sometimes vary by country.3

Want to really thrill your brand manager? Identify value propositions that work both universally and find ones that may be country-specific: that gives them the best of both worlds from which to choose. For example, “Brand X has four unique, defensible value proposition options. Two are universal; two are country-specific” (followed, of course by your awesome data).

Translating Market Research to the language of Market Share Goals
Market share goals can vary quite a bit, but usually are along the lines of, “Our goal is the be number 1 in our market.” Or a newer entrant might be aiming for “10 percent market share by 2020.” These are examples of the very precise, measurable goals for which a Brand Manager may have responsibility. And because many executive teams use market share as a KPI (Key Performance Indicator), this can be high visibility work for the brand manager.

To speak this language, any research that can be used to advance the stated market share goal needs to be explicit. Here are two research statements that use language a market share-driving brand manager would love:

- “Brand X has potential to gain market share from Competitor Y. Research results reveal that of the top competitors, Competitor Y has notable weaknesses that align with our strengths. Its customers already have high awareness and positive perceptions of our brand. Further, more than 50 percent of Y’s customers are frustrated by its product’s “ease-of-use” and “personalization features” -- two attributes on which Brand X can objectively demonstrate superiority.”

- “We have an opportunity to boost our market share momentum by being the first of our competitive set to meet emerging need A. The research reveals a previously-unrecognized need for a product that does A. None of our competitors currently address A, and our best competitive intelligence suggests that it isn’t in current product roadmaps.” That’s a lot more powerful than “Our research has uncovered a new, emerging customer need for A.” Work in the phrase “first-mover advantage” and they will be delirious with delight!

One Sentence at a Time
Brand managers want to apply your fantastic market research data to their work. But if you want them to really use it, make it easy: use the keywords and phrases that they use in their day-to-day work.
References


About Bynder
Bynder is an award-winning digital asset management vendor. Their software allows brands to easily create, find, and use content, such as document, graphics, and videos. More than 150,000 brand managers, marketers, and creatives use Bynder’s brand portals every day to collaborate globally, produce, review, and approve new marketing collateral, and circulate company content at the click of the button. The company’s headquarters are in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

About Research Rockstar
Research Rockstar delivers training and staffing services to busy professionals seeking Market Research excellence. Their 25+ training classes are offered in both online and on-site formats, and include options to earn Insights Association Certificates. Their Rent-a-Researcher staffing services place qualified market research experts, covering temporary needs due to project fluctuations, maternity leaves or other staffing disruptions.
About SurveyGizmo

Founded in 2006, SurveyGizmo is a powerful insights solution that empowers business professionals to make informed decisions. It provides data insights in over 205 countries, with 50,000 new surveys created and 7.5 million responses collected every week, for customers like Fedex, Microsoft, Bloomberg Television, GE, and ESPN. SurveyGizmo is recognized as a leader in the survey industry for its innovation, service, and value.

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