



By Richard D. Czerniawski

## **ASK, LISTEN AND OBSERVE**

There's a place and time for the formal, projectable kind of marketing research. However, the wrong marketing research can put a drag on momentum, suck-up marketing support funding, lead to the wrong conclusions, inaction and even paralyze the organization with useless facts.

Marketing research should lead to knowledge. And, knowledge is a *practical understanding* that leads to the right course(s) of action.

It's amazing to me how much time (months), money (hundreds of thousands of dollars) and effort (dozens of slides and frequent presentations) have been going into the patient journey and segmentation studies. Yet they don't appear to provide a competitive advantage in that (in many cases) they tend to reveal non-actionable facts, which, by the way, every competitor who engages in these same studies have.

We might feel we're at a competitive disadvantage if we don't have the same info as our competitors. But we must ask ourselves, "what action did we take, or will we take as a result of the information?" "What impact will it have on our brand's success knowing that patients have X-number of migraines per month?" Or, that someone has labeled an HCP (health care practitioner) segment as "science-driven?"

The topper is that the information may be made readily available to us without these costly, time-consuming studies.

We need to weigh the value of these formal, quantitative marketing research studies to gather facts that make everyone feel s/he is smart versus *informal detecting* of our own to generate knowledge in creating future success. It's about making it a practice of getting out to "ask, listen and observe," leading to "right" action and improving our likelihood for success.

Want to understand the patient journey? Ask people who have gone through it. If you want to get at segmentation, ask people involved in a category about their attitudes and usage.

Engage in deep listening to what target-customers have to say. Deep listening involves follow-up with additional questions that address and reveal new hypotheses, leading to real understanding.

Also, make it a practice to observe. While people may report one thing, their action is more telling

than words. Inquire about incongruities you observe and listen to responses.

Ask, listen and observe. Observe, ask and listen. Trust the learning. But verify, where appropriate, with quantitative marketing research.

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