Conducting Research

Answering questions is relatively easy. Asking the right question is more difficult.
- Michael Cronan

Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought.
- Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

Thorough research includes three core stages: exploration, data gathering, and testing.

Exploration
Outlines broader issues surrounding the subject matter or elements being studied.

Data Gathering
Collect and convert the data into information and eventually into knowledge

Testing
An interaction between individuals and ideas or concepts, meant to identify or create a higher level of confidence.

Marketing Research

Market research is the gathering, evaluation, and interpretation of data affecting customer preferences for products, services, and brands.

Qualitative
Qualitative research reveals customers' perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and motives. Findings may offer new insights about the brand and are often a prelude to quantitative research.

Temper Bias // Bulletin boards // Ethnography // Focus Groups // One-on-One Interviews // Field Studies

Quantitative
Quantitative research creates statistically valid market information. The aim is to provide enough data from enough different people to enable companies to predict - with an acceptable level of confidence - what might happen.

Online Surveys // Usability Testing // Product Testing // Eye Tracking // Segmentation // Equity Tracking // Scraping

3 Elements of Understanding any Marketplace

The three research fundamentals are people, objects, and culture. No conclusions can be drawn without understanding how they influence each other.

People
The individuals whose actions and personalities influence - and are influenced by - the experiences of others. Listen to them or observe their behavior.

Objects
Things we interact with everyday, the physical devices that impact our lives. Hold, handle, dissect. Watch how people interact with them and how they affect our lives.

Culture
Comprises all the history and patterns that make up the human race. Study the history, traditions, and values of the community.

Competitive Research

Keep your friends close; keep your enemies closer.

A competitive audit is a dynamic, data-gathering process. Simply put, this audit examines the competition's brands, key messages, and identity in the marketplace, from brandmarks and taglines to ads and websites. More than ever, it is easy to gather information on the internet; however a company should not stop there. Finding ways to experience the competition as a customer often provides valuable insights.

The greater the insight into the competition, the greater the competitive edge. Positioning the company in relationship to the competition is both a marketing and a design imperative.

Marketing challenge: "Why should the customer choose our products or services over those of others?

Design challenge: "We need to look and feel different."

Primary, Secondary, Tertiary

Primary

Primary competitors have brand values that overlap yours in a significant way. Often products in a category have similar features and benefits. It's important to find something unique.

Secondary

Secondary competitors include all those above, below, or just outside your client's competitive circle. The brands offer a realistic alternative to your client but aren't competing directly. Because they offer an alternative, changes in marketplace dynamics, economic conditions, or other uncontrollable factors could change how they compete with your client.

Tertiary

Tertiary competitors are like newborn siblings. They don't compete directly for quantifiable things, but they do take away attention that would otherwise go to your client. They offer similar distribution or communication channels, but they can't take away the marketshare, just the mindshare. Tertiary also includes the pocket of potentials. This future group can offer potential threats or interesting opportunities.

Understanding the Competition

Who are they?

What do their brands stand for?

What markets/audiences do they serve?

What advantages (strengths) do they have?

What disadvantages (weaknesses) do they have?

What are their modes of selling and cultivating customers/clients?

How do they position themselves?

How do they characterize their customers/clients?

What are their key messages?

How do they use brand identity to leverage success?

What do they look and feel like?

What are similarities and differences in the language and presentation of each brand?

Are there any patterns forming?

Customer

When you can speak authoritatively about target markets and demographics, it reflects well in your design. Identity needs to simply reflect the brand attributes and audience.

Consumer. Target Market. Shopper. Simply describe one thing: the customer.

Labeling customers seems important, but understanding them is far more important.

When decoding customers, context reveals quite a bit. Get context by spending a day as you imagine the customer would. Walk in his or her shoes. See what he or she sees. Feel what they feel. Then observe the customer to see how they behave in the same context.

Raw observation studies natural behavior and not formulated response.