The Art & Science of Interpreting Market Research Evidence

D.V.L. Smith and J.H. Fletcher

Contents

Foreword

It is a great pleasure to write a foreword to this book. I believe that the contents have the potential to lead a major step forward in the way in which managers in organizations use and apply evidence and fact-based knowledge to make decisions.

It is stunning that across wholly diverse industrial sectors – for example, look at market leader characteristics all the way from high technology at Dell Computers to marketing grocery and household products at Tesco stores – we are finally realizing that those who *know* more outperform the rest. Superiority in learning and sustaining that advantage through the constant search for new insights and better understanding of the drivers of customer value in the marketplace has proved to be one of the most critical corporate competencies. Yet, it is a source of competitive advantage we have underestimated so much that we have not even found a name for it.

We do know, however, that enhancing capabilities in learning faster and better than the competition to build sustained competitive advantage through superior knowledge requires far more than acquiring techniques and technology for data collection and analysis. The volume of data that the technology can produce, and the precise measurement that data collection and analysis tools can provide are important resources. However, at best they are part of the total array of clues and insights that build superior understanding of the marketplace. To believe that they are the only ways to generate and test new ways of doing things is as fatuous as pursuing the tired debate about the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative research designs. Such introspective obsessions lead us to miss the real point.

That point is the prime goal of: building understanding and insight; sensing and anticipating change; and value innovation for superior performance. Important progress towards meeting this elusive goal can be made by emphasizing the interpretation of the whole array of evidence available, regardless of type, not simply reporting data, and working with decision-makers to develop effective and sustained learning processes. The approach in this book provides a valuable framework for implementing these priorities.

There can never have been a time when the need for evidence-based knowledge as the basis for management decision-making was greater. It is timely for

market research professionals to consider their future in this new scenario and the ways in which they can best add value to decision-making processes.

Professor Nigel F. Piercy
Warwick Business School
The University of Warwick

Preface

The last few years have seen the arrival of 'new' market research. Gone are the days when market research posed as a quasi-academic activity that only flirted with the business decision-making process. Today, market researchers are much more focused on improving the quality of business decision-making.

This arrival of new market research has presented the industry with an exciting challenge. This is, how best to communicate to its client base (and also to new graduates entering the industry) exactly how new market research operates. This book addresses this issue.

- It provides a comprehensive review of the frameworks that today's new market researchers use to draw together different types of, often imperfect, qualitative and quantitative data, and explains how they apply this evidence to successful information-based decision-making.

This introduction to how new market researchers now interpret data will be of interest to those fascinated as to why so many of the existing textbooks on market research bear little resemblance to how market research really operates in practice. Specifically, our account will be of particular benefit to:

- University graduates who have recently taken up posts as market research practitioners, either on the client or agency side.
- Users of market research data who need an overview of how modern market research now operates.
- Lecturers on, and students of, market research, who may wish to incorporate our practical insights into their courses.
- Individuals working in central and local government involved in evidence-based decision-making.

In sum, the book is aimed at individuals who want a simple synthesis of the way in which market research analysts are now going beyond their traditional methodological approaches, and are today operating with a more powerful set of data analysis techniques in making sense of customer evidence.

Supporting training module

To help educationalists and trainers who wish to run a module on the data analysis principles raised in this book, we have prepared a ten-unit lecture course that mirrors the content of this book. This is available in the form of a series of Microsoft PowerPoint charts. For details on how to obtain these charts visit Wiley's website: www.wileyeurope.com/go/smith. This supporting training module will:

- Help trainers in market research agencies convert the ideas in this book into a training course that could be used to introduce their new graduate trainees to the principles of 'new' market research.
- Assist lecturers on market research courses in colleges and universities to supplement their 'orthodox' teaching on market research with an up-to-date account of how many market research practitioners now operate.

In addition – working in conjunction with the supplementary points we make in the 'Notes' section – the training module will help bring alive, with concrete worked examples, many of the general principles outlined in this book.

Acknowledgements