WHAT PRICE RELEVANCE?

RESEARCH TRANSFORMATION AND HOW WE GET FROM HERE TO THERE

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Larry Friedman, former Chief Research Officer at TNS NA said in a recent interview that he hopes in five years our industry mindset will no longer be "What questions should I ask in my survey?" but "What is the right type of data and where do I get it?" "Sometimes surveys will be part of the solution," he adds, "but they will be shorter, more focused, and integrated with social and digital data."

That would be quite a transformation in just five years – especially since research transformation is often discussed, but there is less clear evidence of it. For example, the industry has been slow to take up mobile technology to capture opinion in the moment. Researchers "get" the possibilities, but seem to lack resources to experiment and experience the benefits. Two thirds of respondents say they are doing mobile surveys. Yet less than a quarter of the studies SSI supports are suitable for mobile – in spite of the availability of tools like SSI QuestTest to ease the transition.

There are some contradictory messages here. The need to transform is clear (76% of insight providers believe they will have to transform to stay competitive and the same percentage of insight buyers say they will have to transform to deliver value to their internal clients). But how that will happen is less clear: only 37% of all responders say they have a formal process to spur innovation in their organization. Three quarters of those interviewed think change will happen via evolution rather than revolution. Is transformation possible within five years given an evolutionary pace of change?

What's lacking in the transformation discussion is specifics. How exactly does a company go from managing labor-intensive, survey-centered projects to delivering a stream of integrated information and insights from multiple sources, with surveys just one element in the mix? Researchers not already far down this path, with a technology infrastructure to support it will struggle to make the change within five years.

Are buyers in a better position to change?

A third of respondents think 50% of current full service market research firms will be out of business within five years – yet only 4% of insights providers and 5% of buyers think their company will be one of the victims. More buyers have advisory boards than providers (38% v 24%). Are providers less aware of their environment and therefore the scope of change required?

Perhaps asking which group "gets it" is entirely the wrong question. We segment research into buyers and providers – and, further within providers, into researchers and service suppliers. If we are serious about transformation is it time to look beyond this linear "supply chain" view? The real transformers may be the ones who "blow up" this decades-old model, creating a cooperative eco-system, where multiple contributors deliver value where it's needed most.

What will a transformed company look like?

Transformed companies will use technology to enable agile action. One example at SSI is a technology platform allowing new panels in new countries to quickly and seamlessly integrate with existing panels. The company of the future will likely offer solutions on a modular basis – turnkey yet scalable, with standalone parts – or a single all-encompassing solution depending on the particular customer need. The product set will be more complex in many ways and this complexity can only be achieved with technology to power it.

GRIT is a global report, yet discussions about research transformation often neglect the importance of globalization as a key driver of change. Global research places additional demands on technology to support the complexity and (increasingly important) the legal requirements inherent in global research.

Transformation in the medium for the message

Finally, with more data visualizers being hired according to this report, maybe we can call time on dull, chart-filled presentations. SSI research shows more decision-makers – especially those under 35 – prefer to view data infographic-style. We know our data's solid—we need to be bold and let it shine with creative, visually sharp delivery.

What to make of the sometimes mixed messages in this report? We may not have all the answers but the need to challenge current beliefs is clear. Are we ready for what's next?