

A brief guide to...

Brand Research

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Our guide looks to share various learnings gleaned from the real-world delivery of countless brand equity, health and benchmarking programmes within the tech space. It isn't, by definition, intended as a war-and-peace style tome, nor a single source of truth on brand research.

What it provides is a quick reference point for good practice, helping you avoid the bear traps, whilst simultaneously delivering a source of inspiration and illumination - directly informing the shape (or evolution) of your brand research programme.

Brand research, why bother?

First things first, let's acknowledge the real-world, commercial, context that we operate in. Any such brand research activity must have a positive impact on the bottom line.

When expertly implemented, such an insight programme demonstrates its inherent ROI through:

- » **The provision of directional, contextually rooted, brand benchmarking - across awareness, consideration and reputational dimensions; identifying where any challenges lie**
- » **Delivering a clear view of brand perceptions and unique value associations (across customer and prospect audiences); helping diagnose drivers of brand enhancement**

In essence, the fundamental business benefit of brand research is that it can help to prioritise, as well as deprioritise, areas of activity and investment. Enabling the shoring up of perceived proposition weaknesses, as well as the hammering-home of areas of competitive advantage and brand distinctiveness.

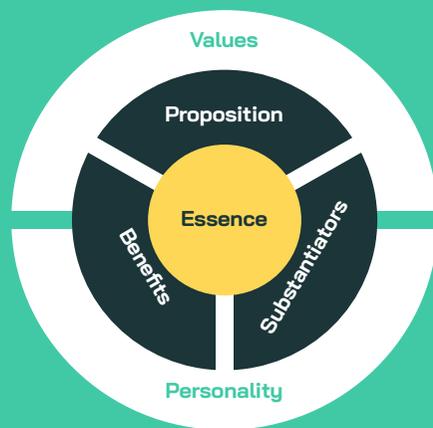
Ultimately, driving greater organisational agility and accessibility. Leading, in turn, to less time troubleshooting, more time innovating - enhancing customer loyalty and value, whilst deepening brand engagement. The classic virtuous circle!

Where to start?

The start point for any such insight programme is to understand the core brand architecture - with its associated attributes.

This is no different regardless of the vertical territory (hybrid cloud, cybersecurity, digital transformation, etc.). From this, a bespoke question framework can be constructed - albeit covering the key areas of brand awareness, image and experience/usage.

Typical 'bullseye' brand positioning



Survey synthesis and construction



To ascertain where the brand offering is strong and where gaps/weaknesses may exist, the proposition must be assessed across its core attributes - encompassing its current, as well as 'ideal' positioning. Based on our experience, these brand attributes are likely to incorporate most, if not all, of the following:



Stability

Reliability

Reassurance

Heritage

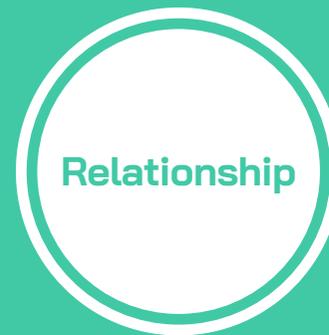


Benefit

Effectiveness

Integrity

Authenticity



Relationship

Honesty

Personal

Candour

Empathy



Innovation

Vision

Insightful

Context is all

Measuring and monitoring your standalone brand metrics is fine as far as it goes, but what does it truly mean without any contextual, competitive set rooting?

Our strong recommendation is therefore, wherever possible, to include competitor benchmarks. Most certainly against the marketing leading, power, brand - to establish your relative performance; but also incorporating your immediate competitive set.

It is though rarely practicable to capture views on all competitors. Hard decisions and trade-offs often have to be made as to which competitor brands are to be included for benchmarking purposes. In this decision process, it's worth asking yourself these questions:

Does my brand compete with a small number of larger players?

Should I include second-tier competitors? Does it matter if they are excluded?

Are local competitors strong in certain geographies?

If grouped together, are the 'other' brands a significant consideration?

Effective participant targeting

As always, any respondent sampling framework should ultimately be shaped by the research need.

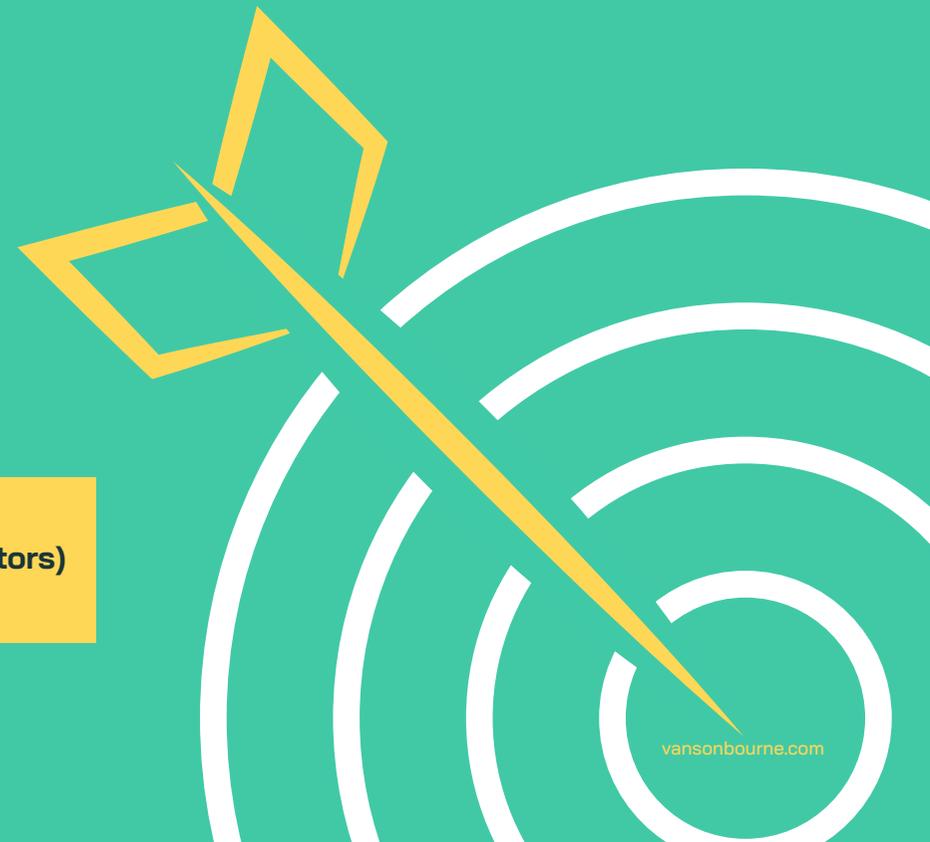
That said, encompassing a robust number of customers and non-customers/prospects will be paramount to programme success.

A customer sample helps identify:

- » **Brand strengths**
- » **Key prompts to loyalty**
- » **Areas of potential differentiation and/or distinctiveness**

Whilst a non-customer/prospect audience establishes:

- » **What the brand needs to do better**
- » **Where the offer is less compelling or less well-known (vs. competitors)**
- » **The areas of focus in order to win market share**



Successful insight distillation and illumination

In our experience, there are three key foundations in the successful distillation of brand research outputs into insight illumination. These being:

1. Appropriate analysis of the data
2. Judicious charting and visualisation
3. Shaping a compelling, commercially-focused, narrative

Simply put, collecting data does not unleash its business effectiveness. It is not the amount of data that is important, it is what a business does with the insight that matters. That said, certain research techniques, when appropriately applied, can be incredibly instructive.

Key driver analysis helps to:

- » Focus resource deployment upon key improvement areas
- » Map levels of brand importance (vs. performance)

Positional benchmarking and mapping helps to answer underpinning proposition questions:

- » What does brand success look like within the tech space?
- » Where does my brand sit within the current market context?

In summary, any such brand research activity should never lose sight of its central purpose, to inform leadership decision making and catalyse action.

The fundamentals of success



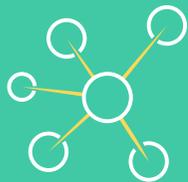
Invest the time in honing your objectives

As with any such insight exercise, time invested shaping and then nailing down your objectives - gaining full stakeholder sign off - is rarely wasted. It ensures resource and time efficiency, helping remove much delivery 'pain'.



Retain programme focus, being watchful for mission creep

All flows from your research objectives, so if these are 'tight' the survey question construction should be infinitely more straightforward. That said, it is important to remember that the questionnaire coverage should be concise, focused and relevant. In our experience, the optimal survey completion time is circa 12-minutes or less; after which point respondent fatigue starts to kick-in and data quality gradually degrades.



Be holistic in your perspective

Let's not view any such brand research exercise in isolation. In the age of big data, it is important to triangulate brand performance metrics with other data sources - be those CX, operational, or financial in nature. Furthermore, it's important to frame your analysis within the context of relevant external factors - key competitor marketing activity/spend, seasonality, geo-economic 'shocks' - such as a pandemic!

The fundamentals of success



Deliver insightful, commercially framed, reporting

The reporting of any such brand research outputs should always look to delivery clear, directional, guidance - informing strategic, tactical and/or operational decision making. If it doesn't, the research conducted has - in pure and simple terms - been an utter waste of investment. Any such insight should also be commercially nuanced - wrapping the outputs in the realities of the current, competitive, category landscape.



Build trusted partner relationships

If you are working with a research partner, 'let them in' - viewing the agency team as an extension of your marketing function. In keeping the agency at arm's length, you fail to fully leverage their insight skillset. Investing time to get the agency up-the-learning-curve (in relation to your brand and business context), as quickly as possible, tends to pay major dividends - particularly at the questionnaire design and analysis/reporting stages.

Execute right first time

If your current (or proposed) activity is not delivering across some, or all, of the areas mentioned, ask yourself 'why?'; then do whatever is needed to implement change.

We would be very happy to talk things through with you, as an expert sounding board, if guidance is required. After all, Vanson Bourne has been supporting tech businesses in the delivery of market research and insight programmes for over 20 years.

Want to know more? Get in touch with us to discuss how we can help your brand grow:

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vansonbourne.com

