

Why listening to what your customers want is a terrible idea

 By Jonathan Cherry

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In traditional marketing circles there is a growing love affair with data. Everyone wants to 'analyse the data' before making a decision; data which is harvested from recorded customer behaviour patterns, focus groups and market research.



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Brands increasingly want to make sure that they are listening closely to what customers want and need and then aim to generate some kind of commercial value into that insight.

The problem with this way of thinking is that a brand is then constantly creating value into what a customer apparently wants today, rather than boldly creating something new that the customer will want in the future.

A well-trodden path to conformity

Future-focused brands don't really care about what their customers want today – they'd rather spend their time imagining what they can create that will be desirable tomorrow.

An over-reliance on market research and insights generated from data positions a brand as a follower, and ultimately entrenches its place as a commodity with limited product pricing power.

In the short-term it might appear to be a business strategy that's safer than actually boldly creating market-leading ideas and innovations, but puts the business at a terrible future risk.



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The idea of ignoring what your customers want is obviously one which will draw chortles and loud guffaws from many MBA-educated marketers who want (efficiency and scale and low risk), but the reality is that everyone is reading the same insights; everyone is following the the same well-trodden path to conformity.

Trying to then differentiate your brand when what you are selling is the same as everyone else, is an expensive and complex exercise.

Stop listening to only what the masses want, and start using your imagination and power of creativity.

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