

# Market Intelligence, Consumer Relevance

**With increasingly more choices in the marketplace and the pace of business requiring quick decisions, there has never been a better time to truly know your consumer**

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Hollywood wants you to sign the licensing deal before they've gone into movie production, investors want you to create an online multiplayer in 18 months with a story line that will keep players subscribed for three years, and you're looking at the concept for *Tag Team Fighter XIV*. Even with the gaming industry on the rise, one gets the feeling everyone's using the same crystal ball. The avid gamer is still the best bet on the table, but with only 24 hours in a day, popular game sequels, expansion packs, new hardware, and subscriptions, gamers will be more selective in what they purchase and what they leave behind. The key ingredient to successful games will be directly correlated to those brands most relevant to consumer interests.

Mainstream consumer adoption of the gaming console/DVD player and with the casual gamer sitting "on deck" for future online gaming, relevance to consumer interests will be the most important factor in determining which games are purchased vs. rented. The relevant games will be purchased and for subscription-based games, there is no alternative. The release of EA's *The Sims Online* will give us a good idea of what the mainstream thinks about massive multiplayer online games. Tied into the online version, will the *Sims TV* show provide entertainment for those who aren't playing the online game or just be an outlet for those participating "gods" to watch their creations in action? The answer depends on the percentage of "players" vs. "watchers" and how many watchers turn into players.

The current popularity of reality TV is based on what I call "Same Shoes Semblance": Humans enjoy thinking about how they'd do something differently in another person's situation. People don't just watch *Survivor*, they think and talk about what they'd do differently (or the same) from the comfort of their chairs. Reality TV shows have relevance in people's lives (regardless of how ridiculous some of them are) because the audience can see themselves in those situations and respond with their own ideas. Gaming has the potential to take Same Shoes Semblance to the next level and provide people with the chance to put their skills where their mouths are...without leaving their chairs.

Here are four things (from the comfort of my chair) that I would do to maintain intelligence about and relevance with the gaming consumer.

## 1) Establish a cultural connection with your consumers. It will keep your brand young, fresh, and relevant.

The success of your company depends on the creation of products and services relevant to your consumer's ever-changing interests. Ten years in the games industry won't make up for not knowing your customer right now. Not everyone working in the industry is a gamer and although many of your customers think it should be a crime, it isn't. Some of you are excited to see the launch of G4 this spring. "All games, all the time? Oh, heaven," you said with a smile when you heard of the new all-games cable channel. Those of you have it easy because you share the same interests and values as your consumer. It doesn't make the rest of us ignorant, it just means we have to do our homework to stay relevant.

Find a new connection with your consumer and have fun with it. This won't require any piercing or new haircuts. Listen to their music, read what they read, attend their events, and look for answers to things you don't understand about them. It's guaranteed you'll learn something!

## 2) Gather intelligence from those closest to your customer.

Focus groups and market research formats generally don't call for

anyone inside the industry to participate. Market research results are supposed to come from fresh and unbiased consumers. Game editors and retail employees are on the frontlines of the gaming war everyday and can be an invaluable resource for information. Gather their ideas and include them in the market research process.

I made 25 quick phone calls to game retailers randomly across the United States and asked five questions to whomever answered the phone. Of the 25 I spoke with, only three had been asked to participate in marketing research for their opinions, and 19 said they were open if given the opportunity. Stealth market research, while not new in marketing, is highly effective if executed properly. Alcohol companies interview bartenders and servers for their market research, why wouldn't you ask the people who speak with your consumer on a daily basis?

## 3) Market while you're researching. When you have consumer attention use it wisely.

So you have invited participants in for focus-group research to learn something from them and have received some helpful information. While you have their attention, educate them about your brand and create a connection. If you think they're going to keep quiet about the fact that they were just paid for their opinions, you're wrong. You can have a positive effect on their experience by educating them and solidifying your relevance to them at that moment.

I recently spoke to a 19-year-old who had just participated in a focus group for a new energy drink. When asked about his experience, he said "at the end of the session they passed out a free can of the drink and a sticker to each of us while they thanked us for coming. It was pretty cool that they just gave us something. I walked away feeling good about the company, tried [the drink] again later, and now I drink it all the time." The drink company acquired a new consumer and made a positive connection with someone who is going to share the word. The power of viral marketing is ever present.

## 4) Research while you're marketing. The best time to find out what your customer thinks of your marketing message is the moment they see it.

One of the greatest tools in marketing is the simultaneous "give-and-take" of information between brand and consumer. A brand can project a marketing message, observe consumer response, learn from the response, and improve the message for future executions. This process makes event promotions the most undervalued form of marketing. Promotions can turn a passive message into an experiential marketing science. Discovering what the consumer thinks at that moment can be the greatest asset to market research. Don't just hand them a sticker and let them walk away. Ask them what they like and don't like, and what they'd change. Two-way brand-to-consumer communication is imperative in maintaining relevance.

Consumer intelligence is everywhere, and it's the core value in finding lifestyle relevance. Relevance makes us laugh and admire, but most importantly it makes us buy. Stay in tune with your customer and make connections with them at every opportunity. Doing so effectively will help you get the highest score in a game we'd all like to win, *Gaming Industry Tycoon*. □

*Chandler is the president and cofounder of Attack!Marketing, a youth marketing services company specializing in market intelligence and promotions. He also shares the name of a character in Enix's Star Ocean: The Second Story for PlayStation.*



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