

Stop, Collaborate and LISTEN: Market Research with Ears Wide Open

By: Peter Harris, EVP & Managing Director Australia - Vision Critical



So I am a trained marketer and a Qualified Practicing Market research professional (QPMR) working in Australia for an international strategic interactive research agency, Vision Critical. I am on a quest to make market and social research more engaging and useful to business as I have seen the outcomes of good research really help drive business and government decision/policy making.

Last year I [wrote and spoke](#) about the research profession needing to learn from Vanilla Ice (of all people), when he asked us in his 1989 classic Ice Ice Baby to **Stop** (doing what we have always done), **Collaborate** (with other professions and with consumers) **and Listen** (much much more as it is an opportunity).

I believe that our profession across the world is starting to stop and realise the benefits available through collaboration and now I would like to extend the discussion to listening, defining what I see as the opportunity.

The Problem Defined

In Australia (and certainly other markets)

- Advertising is not listening to research as its considered boring and gets in the way of creativity,
- Marketing is not listening to research because it's expensive, takes a long time to do and often takes too many slides and charts to tell them what to do.

- Business is not listening to research as it can't get through the marketing department
- Some research buyers can get in the way by being too traditional in their requests/briefs and many researcher buyers are often ex research suppliers and brief in, receive research proposals and select suppliers that focus on sampling, methodology and research problems
- Research problems stem from the 5-year business plan which is often out of date before it starts or a marketing plan which is often an outline of what the business wants to do, or launch, not what groups of customer are talking about.
- Nobody is listening and this needs to change.

Does this story sound familiar to your experience?

A New Model that Starts with Listening and Ends in Conversation or Co-Creation

Social media has already started to blur the boundaries between what marketing, research and the agency can/should focus on. The marketing and research professions need the tools, people and focus to listen first, design and implement a conversation with consumers which is engaging and then the skills to synthesis and put together an impactful story. This is a continuous cycle.



Listening

The responsibility of the research, marketing and brand team.

Using tools and technology that are freely available, marketing needs to establish an agenda and strategy based on the issues and discussions that customers are having. Research needs to do what we are good at, add value to this listening by providing understanding. Imagine drafting a research plan based on what customers are talking about? Instead of asking people why they do stuff when they probably have no idea (Mark Earl), instead researchers need to listen to what their issues are and then devise a research program based on solving these problems (via innovation, communication or something else).

A research practice spawning from listening requires:

- **Bravery:** to accept negative or seemingly irrelevant feedback
- **Skill:** analysis of what customer mean vs. what they are saying
- **Diligence:** stick with it, it's continuous
- **Solid Understanding of the Marketplace:** to synthesis listening into a research plan for the year

There is a key role here for research in shaping the conversation and providing value through sharp, insightful interpretation. By listening we are observing behavior, looking for when consumer behavior starts to change and remembering that true innovation is led by the consumer – not technology.