



# Listening and Understanding in an Integrated Way

Simon Fraser, VP, Insights and Consultancy, InMoment

“The price of light is less than the cost of darkness”. American market analyst, and founder, Arthur Nielsen shared this insight over 60 years ago about the risks businesses take in not investing in better understanding their customers. Or to put it another way, getting smarter with your decisions costs less than stumbling around in the dark.

You would not find many who would disagree with his point today, and yet some approaches to the collection and analysis of data can create missed opportunities or wrong turns by failing to evolve. In this article I will explain why I believe that having an emphasis on evaluating new approaches, and taking an integrated approach to listening and understanding, is the surest way forward today.

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## BEYOND TRADITIONAL SURVEYS

Businesses are recognising that the solution for better listening is not to be found in simply launching another survey. The constant requests for feedback risk turning consumer life into a burden. The declared decline in participation rates Post-Covid signals the need for a more nuanced and modern approach. From review sites and web chat interactions to digital behaviors and purchasing patterns, businesses can access multiple signals, without the intrusion, and hold the potential for a more unified and robust picture of the customer.

There is a temptation to declare the age of the CX survey to be dead, but this also misses a couple of key points. Many customers are still engaging in completing surveys, and many do so because they want to be heard. The customer experience programme that you run is part of the Brand experience that you offer. Your survey should be as important to your marketing team as to your insights and operations teams. Don't forget this when considering the way forward.

## BALANCING CX DATA: CONVENIENCE MATTERS

That is not to say that optimising the process should not be high up the list of considerations for CX leaders, but the consequences as well as the options for change need to be fully understood. As customers you may have seen the approach taken by some in the retail and hospitality industries to move away from online surveys to pin pad surveys at the point of purchase. The promise of high data volumes which can reach the silent majority, and that can be tied to other operational measures as well as transaction details, without the need to take too much of customers' valuable time, has its undoubted appeal.

This is however negated by factors such as inconvenience at a critical point of the customer journey, that data quantity is being prioritised over the quality of the insights provided, and the failure to think about the confusion and challenges caused by this methodology for both colleagues and customers. It feels like some have forgotten one of the golden rules of customer experience: "When the customer wants to pay, get out of their way".



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**Did you know that in the UK whilst 78% of shoppers wear glasses (or contact lenses), less than half of them wear their eye wear in the shops? That means on average 40% of shoppers may not be totally clear what is happening in front of them.**

Small black font over a dark background on a small screen, when the customer simply expects to wave their card and pay, is not a great way to end an experience when really it should be peaking.

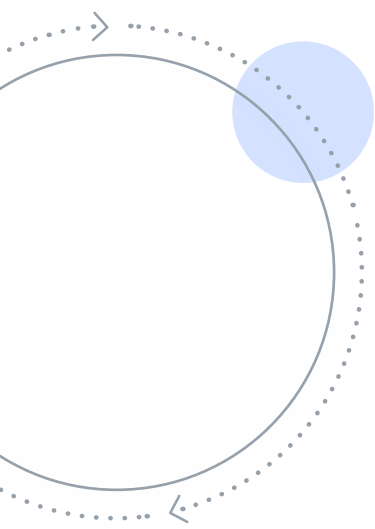
### **Beyond the Moment: Timing and Data Insights**

There is also evidence to show that the better predictor of future customer behaviour is where there is a delay between the experience and the transaction, and not 'in the moment'.

In the words of Tom Goodwin, "Precise, useless, cheap data is everywhere" and we need to guard against its proliferation within our organisations.

## THE POWER OF HOLISTIC CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

What is also clear is that no business can survive on survey data alone. A complete understanding of markets and customers requires integrating diverse data sources like social media metrics, sales data, customer feedback, industry trends, and competitor analysis. While surveys offer valuable insights, their efficacy amplifies when



integrated with a spectrum of other data sources. This holistic approach empowers businesses to navigate complex markets, adapt more effectively, foster innovation, and deepen connections with customers.

To illustrate this point, let's talk about Football and statistics, two of my favourite topics, and Rasmus Ankersen's terrific 2018 Tedx talk in Manchester.

Rasmus talks about how Newcastle's fifth-placed finish in the Premier League under Alan Pardew in the 2011/12 season did not tell the full story. Whilst Mike Ashley was convinced enough to offer 8 year unbreakable contracts for the coaching team, what was missed was the context available beyond that commendable league position. This included data such as goal difference, expected goals, and shot differentials. As he puts it, "the gamblers were very skeptical" about Newcastle's league position. "Their analysis showed that this was a fragile bubble that could burst at any time."

He continues: "Newcastle's fifth place is the equivalent of a public trading company having a high share price and a very low customer satisfaction at the same time. You can have that for one year, but you can't maintain that over time."

In other words, the team had been incredibly lucky. The following season, with no investment and a similar number of goals scored, Newcastle nearly got relegated. The owners had not created an integrated and data led view on what had actually happened. They may well not have been aware of Twyman's Law that is dear to all insight professionals." Any data or evidence that appears interesting or unusual is likely to be wrong".

Check out the full video here, well worth 15 minutes of your team even if you don't care for football: <https://youtu.be/FaLBcSMVvU>

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## PRIORITIZING ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

My summary is that we all need to prioritise what we really need to know and will take action. Avoid bothering customers with unnecessary surveys where you can integrate feedback as part of a broader understanding of customer experiences. Oh, and always remember to express gratitude to customers who take the time to share their voice. The best way to do this is both by telling them what you are doing with that feedback, and by them experiencing those positive changes. More on this another time.

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