

How to build the internal reputation of your insight team

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A Data Science Foundation Blog

March 2018

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Why do some customer insight teams have a better internal reputation than others? Did some insight leaders just get lucky, with a great culture & receptive directors?

If so, then it appears many did not get so lucky. I say that because lack of internal influence, being neglected or treated as just a service function – these are common concerns raised in coaching sessions with insight leaders. Ironically, given that many customer insight teams are located within Marketing functions, one of the causes is a lack of intentional marketing. Are you marketing your customer insight team internally? Do you know how to build awareness or manage PR for your ‘insight brand’?

Before writing this post I did scour popular blogs (insight & leadership), as I was keen to share a range of views. However, this appears to be a neglected topic, certainly for customer insight teams. So, in this post I’ll share my experience (of leading such teams & ideas I’ve seen work for my peers). My focus will be on communicating the good work & skilled capability that exists. It almost goes without saying that you need to be delivering before declaring, so ensure you deliver on your promises first.

Here are 6 things to get you started on celebrating your insight team success & improving your internal PR:

1. Envision, Prioritise & Plan

A great place to start it to envision or imagine the ideal state you want to achieve. If your customer insight team had the great reputation & internal influence you seek, what would that look like, sound like, feel like?

Once you have that clear, you will need to prioritise where to focus your efforts. Stakeholder mapping can be a useful tool at this stage. Who are your most important stakeholders (considering both power & level of interest)? It’s worth also thinking about current business strategy, issues & focus – where could insight team capabilities or output align with such business priorities?

You want to get to stage that you are clear where you want to get to and have prioritised your audience & topics.

2. Know your communication tools

Then, consider your capabilities to ‘sell in’ your team benefits. Here, I mean both the best assets (best

outputs, strongest capabilities, most relevant etc) & best communication options (eloquent speakers, visually engaging material, interesting stories etc). Go for 'low hanging fruit first'. Plan to share some of your best material with a warm audience at a relevant time; that experience will help build your confidence.

Your communication tools & opportunities may be quite diverse (from informal/formal meetings, intranet/blogs, bespoke events, videos, reports, coffee/lunch times etc).

One good idea is to think of testing a mix of both popular communication vehicles & under-utilised ones. The former may get you greater potential reach, whilst the latter may offer greater cut-through compared to all the other internal messages vying for attention. For instance, perhaps pioneer blogging to [vlogging](#) internally, together with a standard agenda item at key meeting.

Whatever mix you choose, remember your own database marketing capabilities: Test & learn. Record the methods trialled, monitor impact and keep testing & refining.

3. Be as visual as possible

This is especially true in lengthy team meetings, internal conferences or debriefing sessions. A scourge of modern life is 'Death by PowerPoint', which is still a pitfall that many research agencies fall into. So, there is opportunity to generate standout & goodwill by doing things differently.

How could you use analogy & photography to communicate key points without bullet points? Could your analysis be presented with more compelling [data visualisation](#)?

For those feeling braver still, you could be more innovative & draw things by hand to get your point across. One of the lessons from the '[design thinking](#)' school of leadership is that people are most engaged with analogy & imperfect representations, so the brain can go to work 'joining the dots'. David Sibbet's work on [Visual Leadership](#) is particularly interesting.

4. Make it fun & inspiring

The good news for insight leaders here is your specialist subject = customers. There you have rich resources for funny situations, heartwarming stories or bringing to life how your organisation actually makes things better in people's lives.

[Vox-pops](#), that enable senior leaders to see real customers & hear them in their own words, can be powerful. But do can engaging stories that bring to life customer journeys or moments of high satisfaction or huge irritation for customers ([see Storytelling resources from Stephen Denning](#)).

Wider use of video, including recording interactive ‘insight generation’ workshops or key moments in projects can also be effective. Plus, don’t forget the power of getting people up & moving in some form or interactive exercise or quiz (most leaders are highly competitive after all).

One of the communications that worked best at a Board level for me was bringing in life-size aluminium cut-outs of customer personas into a board room. Together with covering the walls with related visualisations & using actors in bespoke videos, it truly emerged the directors in their target customer segments. You know a session is working when people don’t want it to stop.

5. Be proactive about collaboration

Another very effective way of building a strong reputation for your insight team is being known as collaborative.

Most people need to know ‘what is in it for them’, fairly early on in any conversation. Most insight teams will also need to partner with other teams, to get anything they discover acted upon.

So, rather than waiting to be invited to other team meetings or to join others projects, it can be a good idea to proactively suggest it. On the basis of your earlier planning, contact your priority teams or projects & offer to help. Few leaders will turn down an offer to educate their teams or share relevant content/resources if it doesn’t require any effort on their part.

The secret to being asked back, of course, is to be interesting. So, for any new meeting, ensure you find out [what is already on their agenda](#). What are they currently worried about? Then hone your content to focus on that topic. It may not be the most important insight you could share with them, but it is more likely to get you a listening ear, then & in the future.

6. Don’t over communicate, just be consistent

Leaders & managers today are drowning in information.

eMails, tweets, blog posts, intranet news, webinars, papers for meetings, performance reports etc etc. So, don’t add to their problem.

Ensure you spread your efforts appropriately, so no one internal stakeholder is over solicited. Plus, consider timing. Is there a most relevant time in the day/week/month or one when that leader or team is likely to be less pestered?

Whatever your chosen media (from monthly report to blog post to ‘coffee mornings’ to updates on

meeting agendas) another key is to be consistent. Many of us cope with the complexities of life & [infobesity](#) by being creatures of habit. We like familiar routines & for services or sources of information to be reliably available at the same time.

Once you have discovered the media & format that works best for your audience, persist & ensure that they can be sure of that information being updated every week/month.

Conclusions

I hope those internal reputation building ideas help. There is no one silver bullet & each organisation's culture may call for a slightly different solution.

But my single biggest advice would be clear on the goal of your communication. Right back to that planning section. Identify the most important message to land first (perhaps it's awareness that your team exists, or more need for analytics not just research, or action needed on insights already provided). Whatever it is, stick with that goal until it's achieved. Find new examples and ways to say it, but be a bit 'broken record' about your key message. Perseverance does pay off.

Best wishes with your communication journey. Your insight team brand reputation is worth the effort!

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