



# Leaders of Change

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How influential researchers reimagine  
customer relationships and insight

***By Ray Poynter***

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# The time to focus on customer relationships is now

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According to Forrester Research, insight-driven companies—those that use customer insight in all areas of their business—are set to gain \$1.2 trillion every year in market share by 2020<sup>1</sup>.

Companies are hungry for insight, and the smartest ones know that insight comes not just from transactional data, but also from understanding the “why” of customer behavior. Market researchers are experts in bringing this customer understanding to enterprises. That's why now is a great time for researchers to shine.

This e-book features 10 researchers who are rising to the challenge and opportunity at hand. They are transforming the way some of the biggest companies in the world foster customer relationships. In the process, these leaders of change are driving customer-led decision-making, helping increase the customer lifetime value and reimagining the role of research in the enterprise.

These influencers are already making a big impact to the industry and the organizations they work with. How do you measure up to these research leaders? Perhaps you are already doing as much as they are? But more importantly, perhaps you can learn from this group to supercharge your own career and help your organization to become an insight-driven business.

# What makes an influential researcher?

The researchers featured in this e-book were selected using the following criteria:

They help build customer relationships that enhance long-term customer value

They have widely demonstrated the ROI of market research in their organizations

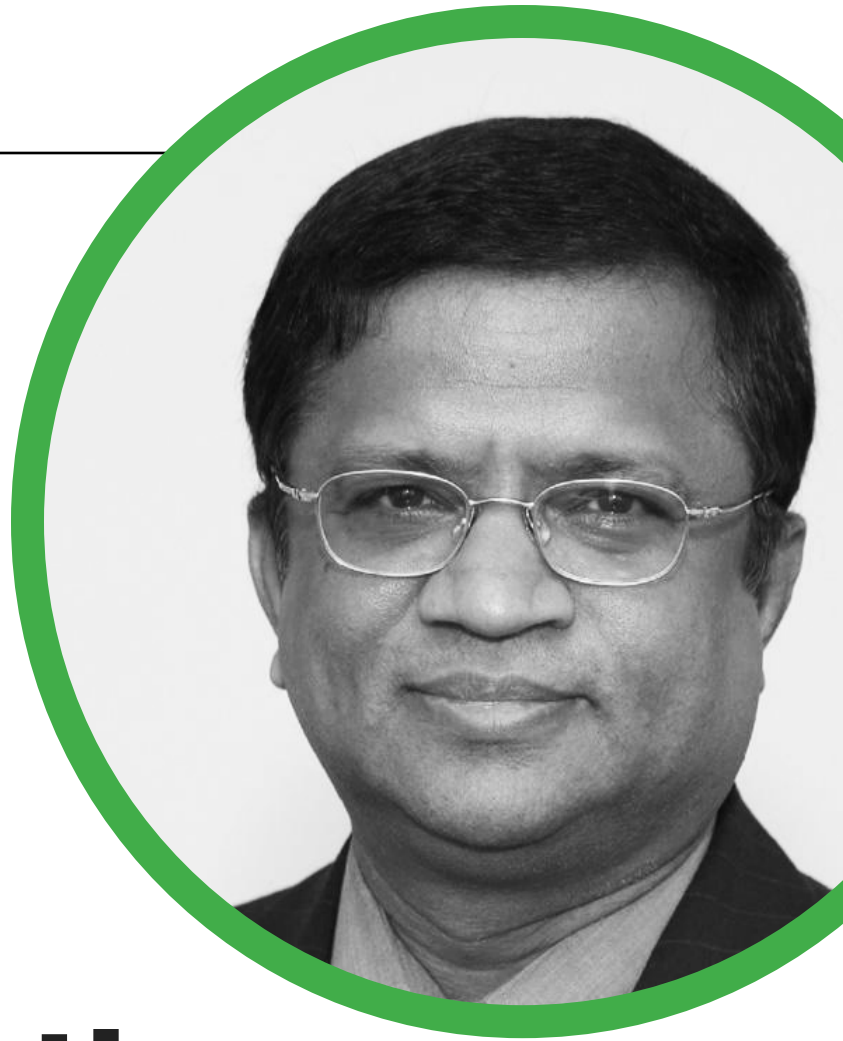
They are helping shape the future of customer relationship intelligence

They pioneer methodologies and new ways of gathering and distributing insight

# 10 influential researchers

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These industry leaders are transforming how companies make customer-led decisions and get more value out of customer insight.



# Stan Sthanunathan

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Executive Vice President, Consumer & Market Insights  
*Unilever*

Stan is one of the industry's most widely known client-side insight leaders. His deep experience, vision and candor (even if it sometimes ruffles feathers) makes him an authority in the space.

One issue that Stan is passionate about is doubling the impact of the research function in half the time and cost. Recently, he co-authored the popular

*Harvard Business Review* article, "Building an Insights Engine," where he shared how he transformed the role and impact of the insights team at Unilever.

In addition to this current role at Unilever, Stan's impressive career includes a long stint at Coca-Cola and spans diverse regions, including Asia, the Middle East and North America.

***As an insight leader, one of my biggest challenges is ensuring people feel confident expressing their point of view clearly and strongly—however popular or unpopular it is. At Unilever, transforming a high-caliber insights team into a proactive and brave group of people was a significant part of our transformation journey.***

—Stan Sthanunathan



SHARE STAN'S QUOTE



# Madhumita Chakraborty

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Associate Director - Consumer Insights  
*PepsiCo*

Madhumita is helping drive growth for some of the world's most recognizable consumer brands. At CPG giant PepsiCo, she leads a team responsible for insights on household names like Lays, Doritos and Cheetos.

A fixture in the industry in Asia and globally, some of Madhumita's expertise include innovation and research growth. At conferences, she frequently shares her perspective on how researchers can build

effective networks in their organizations and foster better relationships with other business units like marketing. One of the biggest imperatives for researchers, according to Madhumita, is to educate executives on how and when they should leverage insight for better business decisions.

Madhumita is the India representative for ESOMAR, the global market research society.



***Insights is integral to decision making at PepsiCo. The recognition of this is reflected in multiple ways, the most important indicator being that insights is a separate function reporting directly to the CEO's office. This is a testament to the importance and the added expectation from the insights function to impact wider business decisions.***

—Madhumita Chakraborty



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# Shannon Chenoweth

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Senior Market Research Manager, Strategic Insights  
*Stanley Black & Decker*

Shannon is a seasoned market research and product innovation leader in consumer goods. She manages and develops consumer insight initiatives at DEWALT, the \$5-billion professional power tools division of Stanley Black & Decker.

Collaborating with many different stakeholders, her work involves a wide range of research methodologies and includes looking for product expansion opportunities. By adopting new ways of

gaining consumer insight, Shannon helps Stanley Black & Decker save about \$1 million in research costs per year while getting actionable insight faster than ever before.

Her work has influenced the successful launch of hundreds of products in the market. Shannon's illustrious career also includes a 22-year stint at Procter & Gamble.

***Our team aims to be a credible resource for our internal stakeholders, and because of that we've elevated our influence and visibility within the company. While our product managers still rely on field research, they also know that they can turn to us if they need a quick gut check. Because of tools like our insight community, we've been able to provide insight to our product managers about our customers within a few hours.***

—Shannon Chenoweth



SHARE SHANNON'S QUOTE



# Sjoerd Koornstra

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Global CMI Planner  
*Heineken International*

Sjoerd is a leader in consumer and market intelligence at Heineken, the number one brewer in Europe.

One of the factors driving Sjoerd's success at Heineken is his ability to align different stakeholders to support global projects. In one recent example, Sjoerd's team increased the scale of the company's brand health tracking in 110 markets, working with stakeholders from local markets to understand their needs

and balance conflicting requests. The result was a system that was leaner and also more beneficial for the entire company.

Passionate about new methods and innovation, Sjoerd is a longstanding member of the research community. He leverages his experience at Heineken to challenge the industry to rethink perspectives on the agency-client relationship.

***A lot of research is related to risk assessments, which makes measuring ROI difficult. At Heineken, one approach we've taken is to calculate what would have happened if we would have made the 'wrong' decisions. With certain global research systems, we have been calculating savings as ROI, as well savings for projects that were replaced by our knowledge management system.***

—Sjoerd Koornstra



SHARE SJOERD'S QUOTE



# Jake Steadman

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Senior Director, International & Agency Research  
*Twitter*

Jake works at social media and tech giant Twitter. Because Twitter is both a client and provider of market research, Jake's current role requires the creative blending of different tools and methodologies to meet the diverse needs of his colleagues, advertisers and other stakeholders.

Jake is a board member of the MRS, the UK's market research society. With Twitter, he pioneered #IPASocialWorks,

a project by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, MRS and Marketing Society that seeks to establish good practice in social media effectiveness for the industry.

Jake has 15 years of experience in research, the last eight years of which has been on the client side working with telecommunications and technology brands.

***At Twitter, we put as much effort into how we deliver and package our research as we do into doing it. We focus on creative delivery and inspiring others, not death by data. Even your most enthusiastic colleague doesn't want to sit through 50+ PowerPoint slides of numbers and graphs!***

—Jake Steadman



SHARE JAKE'S QUOTE



# May May Wong

Customer Experience Strategist  
*Asia Miles*

May May is bringing her expertise in ethnographic and qualitative studies to help improve the end-to-end customer experience at Asia Miles. She's a leading proponent of the design thinking process, helping researchers in Asia understand and adopt it in their roles.

In 2014, May May advocated for the creation of Asia Miles Members' Voice Insight Community. Servicing both the customer experience design and

analytics teams at Asia Miles, the insight community helps deliver on CEO Stephen Wong's mandate to enable customer-led decisions through integrated quantitative and qualitative insights.

Prior to joining Asia Miles, May May was at Cathay Pacific Airways, where she used her design-process expertise to help shape strategic elements of the customer experience.



***To take research beyond its typical silo, researchers need to lead strategic planning and employ better storytelling when talking to other business units. Expanding the influence of research requires work, but it pays off when it enables different teams to align and continue the discussion based on customer insight.***

—May May Wong



SHARE MAY MAY'S QUOTE



# Tyler Kettle

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International Insights Program Manager  
*Google*

Tyler leads Google's International Insight Program and manages a team focused on scaling International UX Research for over 100+ Google products.

A self-professed "marketer of insight," Tyler is passionate about understanding the strategic goals of his stakeholders and using agile methodologies to deliver actionable insight faster.

Tyler's impressive career includes stints at Johnson & Johnson and IBM, where he developed new methodologies and programs that reduced project timelines by 75%. During Tyler's tenure at IBM, 84% of the company's insight community members indicated that they were more likely to buy from the company as a result of their participation in the program.

***Accelerating research requires recognizing when good enough is good enough. The ultimate goal of market research is to reduce risk, and often research with 70 percent or 80 percent certainty is better than being late in the market. Research teams need to educate themselves that for certain business decisions, traditional research—those that take five to eight weeks to field, for instance—may not be appropriate as stakeholders don't always have that amount of time to wait for that decision.***

—Tyler Kettle



SHARE TYLER'S QUOTE



# Rebecca Haller

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Managing Director, Audience Insights and Data,  
*POLITICO*

Rebecca is helping POLITICO, a leading media organization focused on politics and policy, engage its current audience, expand its market and deliver more value to advertisers.

A recovering journalist, Rebecca uses her extensive background in media to translate data into compelling insight about POLITICO's audience and their

unmet needs. Rebecca's work is having impressive impact on the company, helping drive a 75% increase in podcast listeners and \$5 million in revenue in just eight months.

Her immense contributions led POLITICO to invest in a new audience insights and data team, which Rebecca now leads.

***At POLITICO, audience insight is all about getting to know the audience better. Through tools like our insight community, we get to learn about where our audiences are and what they're doing when they're not engaging with POLITICO. My goal is to help unify and deepen our understanding of our audiences, and solve for unmet needs.***

—Rebecca Haller



SHARE REBECCA'S QUOTE



# Sam Trimboli

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Consumer Insights Specialist,  
*Price Chopper Supermarkets - Market 32*

Sam is bringing innovative thinking to the traditional grocery industry.

Sam isn't afraid of trying new ways of engaging with shoppers. He brings creativity and an experimental mindset to his role that boosts response rates and engagement, which gives Sam and his stakeholders more confidence in the insight he delivers.

One of the research industry's rising stars, Sam's work drives strategic corporate decisions. For example, when the company rebranded some of its stores to Market 32, Sam provided customer-validated insight to relevant teams. Some of Sam's recent contributions include helping drive a 5% increase in customer traffic as a result of a flyer redesign and a 7% increase in sales after a rebrand of a line of private label snack items.

***Having the right tools, like an insight community, is key. You need to be able to test your hypothesis without doing long studies. Deploying activities quickly—and getting results in a matter of days, or even hours—allows me to provide insight and influence strategic decision-making early. If you can provide stakeholders with valuable insight about the customer quickly, you build your reputation in the company and they start coming to you more often for strategic insight.***

—Sam Trimboli



SHARE SAM'S QUOTE





# Kate Pinkham

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VP of Consumer Insights and Market Intelligence  
*Wolverine Worldwide*

Kate helps shape the product innovation strategy at Wolverine Worldwide, the \$2.7-billion manufacturer of iconic brands such as Merrell, Sperry, Chaco and Saucony. She leads the company's best-in-class consumer insights and market intelligence department, which today collaborates closely with more than 60 stakeholders and 10 Wolverine brands. In addition to providing timely insight on

product development, Kate's team also drives sales by helping the company's retail partners validate their purchasing decisions using feedback from consumers.

Prior to Wolverine, Kate spent 10 years at global brands like Unilever and Mars Inc. Her experience includes working on a portfolio of household names that included Dove, Axe, Suave, Skittles and Orbit Gum.



***Fashion, and consumers themselves, are changing quickly. Insight communities allow us to bring the perspective and needs of our consumer into the product development process early on. We understand their footwear desires and frustrations, and ensure that insight is at the core of a new product launch.***

—Kate Pinkham



SHARE KATE'S QUOTE

# Lessons and learnings

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Examining the profiles of these researchers, a few key themes and takeaways emerge.



# Build long-term customer relationships

Many customers are not happy with the way organizations interact with them, according to a 2017 GreenBook study<sup>2</sup>. Customers are complaining about the length of surveys, the relevance of the questions they are asked and the lack of authentic engagement.

It's time for researchers to focus on the experience people have when participating in research. High-quality data and insight is dependent on involving people in the way they want to be engaged.

We need to recognize that the research experience is part of customer experience.

The experience people have when they join your insight community, participate in a focus group or answer a survey needs to complement the brand experience.

Today, we have the technologies that allow us to start building authentic relationships with customers with shorter, more personalized activities. We need to leverage these platforms to deepen our understanding of what customers need and want. When we treat customers as people and not as mere respondents, the result is higher levels of engagement and better insight, in less time, with higher ROI.



# Create shared value

The leaders featured in this e-book have embraced a shift in mindset. They don't merely extract data and feedback from customers. Rather, they have adopted a mentality and approach that puts customer relationships above all else.

It is crucial that we create a mutual exchange of value. Customers need to feel they are getting more out of the research process than the company does. One example is through “sharebacks”—by providing information back to the customers and communicating how their input is helping the brand improve.

Sharing back what you've learned is important because more customers are demanding that you do so. According to Edelman<sup>3</sup>, 90% of consumers globally want brands to share, but only 10% of people think brands do it well.

Creating shared value opens big opportunities for researchers and companies. Instead of brands begging or paying customers to engage, if we embrace sharing as a way of building long-term relationships, customers will want to be involved—because they get value from the relationship.



# Lead the conversation and show ROI

Over the last five years, organizations have realized the need to be customer centric. As researchers, we have the opportunity to reclaim and own the connection with the customer.

But to earn that opportunity, we need to communicate better and find more effective ways of distributing insight. To echo Twitter's Jake Steadman's point, decision-makers aren't looking for long reports or decks—they need succinct, digestible stories with contextual information and clear, actionable takeaways.

Instead of focusing on process-related methodology, we need to begin with the business challenge we're trying to solve with our stakeholders. Insight has the potential to break down silos, but only if we tackle the big picture and provide timely, strategic insight.

To that end, we need to demonstrate the ROI of our work in a language that business leaders can understand.



# Embrace agility

The popular maxim goes, "Done is better than perfect." As Google's Tyler Kettle points out, long, cumbersome research projects that last weeks or even months are not fast enough to be useful. The days of long surveys are gone: new methods such as shorter surveys, non-survey alternatives and Relationship Memory™—the historical

insight you already have about your customers—are the way of the future.

By adopting methods that move at the speed of business, leaders like Sam Trimboli of Price Chopper have created programs that deliver timely insight to their stakeholders.



# Go beyond the data silos

The researchers featured in this e-book broke down silos and helped optimize the allocation of resources in their organizations. They consistently share actionable insight with their stakeholders, helping foster interdepartmental collaboration. They've proactively engaged in the core elements of the business, collaborating with other teams, delivering value and tackling strategic challenges. Shannon Chenoweth from Stanley Black & Decker and Rebecca

Haller from POLITICO both embody this concept, bringing the voice of the customer to product innovation, sales and other business units.

We need to be proactive, not passive. For example, we need to shift from validation to inspiration, from measurement to action. This requires adopting new ways of getting insight.

# Conclusion

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The forward-thinking researchers featured in this e-book are transforming how customer insight is used in business. They've reimagined their role: they've influenced strategy, uncovered new revenue streams and helped companies improve their long-term relationships with customers. Many of these researchers have pioneered new ways of getting agile and ongoing insight and have challenged traditional ways of engaging with customers.

The philosophies, strategies and habits of these researchers should provide inspiration for new approaches that will make you an even more effective part of the business.



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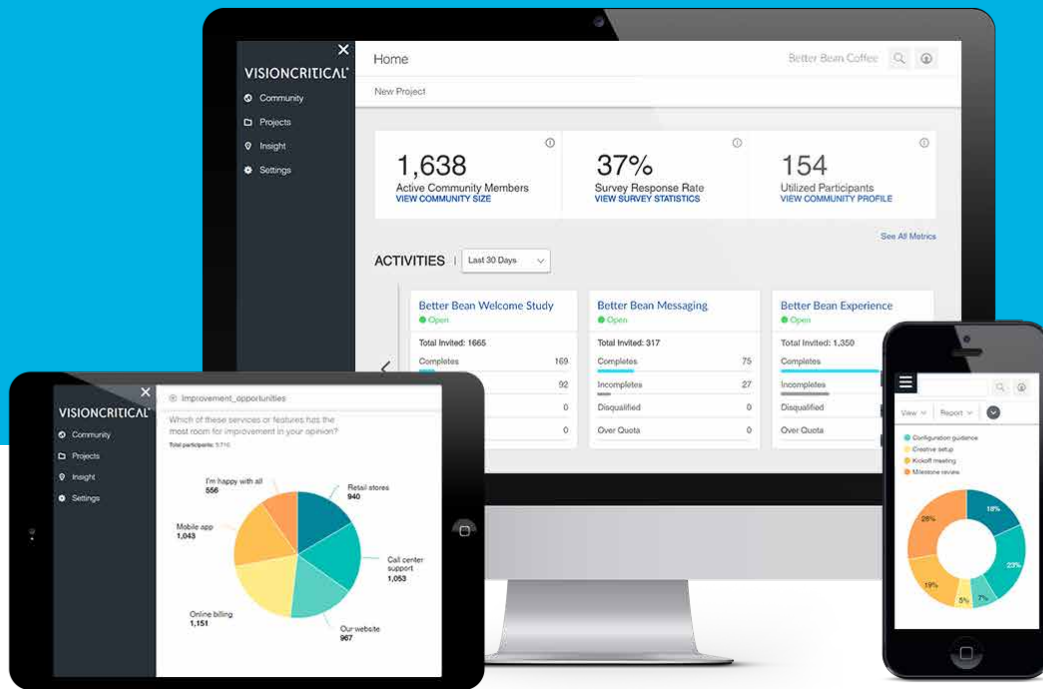


# Ray Poynter

CEO of The Future Place  
and Founder of #NewMR

*Ray Poynter is the author of **The Handbook of Mobile Market Research** and **The Handbook of Online and Social Media Research**, editor of ESOMAR's **Answers to Contemporary Market Research Questions**, content author for the University of Georgia's **Principles of Marketing Research** distance learning course, founder of NewMR, and a lecturer at Nottingham Trent University. A renowned speaker and consultant, Poynter frequently collaborates with Vision Critical to explore the latest trends and thinking in market research. Poynter is regularly regarded as one of the 10 most influential people in the research industry.*

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