The space to think series

Raising the profile of

INSIGHTS

within your organization

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"Demonstrate value, elevate your team - gain a critical seat at the table"





Infotools | Harmoni

Agenda

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How can market researchers finally get a seat at the table?



The influence of market research

It's an exciting time to be in market research. The industry continues to evolve at breakneck speed, and it is ever more important that insights teams provide company leaders with data that drives impact - when and where it's needed.

importance of demonstrating how the insights function directly supports organizational goals and how collaboration across departments, and with external partners, enhances the strategic role of insights teams.

As data literacy and democratization increase, there are times when stakeholders may view market research and insights as non-essential, a distraction, or burdensome, rather than a critical tool for strategic guidance.

By breaking down silos, fostering joint ownership of initiatives, leveraging technology and ensuring seamless integration of insights into organizational processes and decision-making, insights teams can maximize their influence. It's our industry's challenge to ensure this happens and this paper is designed to help.

Overcoming such barriers requires a recalibration of sorts - creative strategies to demonstrate the value of the research function and foster greater trust and buyin. Insights teams must educate, engage, and build credibility through proactive relationship management.

We thank our podcast guests for their valuable contributions over the past three years, and our partners, clients and colleagues who have been on this 35-year journey with us in the insights sector. We look forward to a bright future for all of us!

In this paper we have rounded up the best advice from a range of guests on our "Now that's Significant" podcast, showcasing the

Horst Feldhaeuser
Group Services Director, Infotools





Perception





Perception

Challenges with stakeholder perceptions

Stakeholder skepticism remains a persistent hurdle for insights professionals, who are often met with questions about the relevance or necessity of their work. This can stem from misconceptions about the process, misaligned priorities, or a lack of understanding about the tangible benefits insights bring to decision-making.

Overcoming these challenges requires not only the delivery of valuable data; it requires insights professionals to foster trust, educate stakeholders, and actively engage them in the research journey. Proactive education is critical when it comes to building trust and conquering skepticism.

As <u>Elizabeth Oates</u>, author of More Than Just Interesting, explains on our podcast, insights teams have an obligation to ensure their work drives meaningful business outcomes. She emphasizes that "Insights should be more than just interesting and instead really push forward all of our businesses."

Another of our guests, <u>Jennifer Trich Kremer</u>, <u>PhD</u>, formerly of Logitech, emphasized the need to tie insights to traditional performance metrics such as revenue and

conversion to make the value of research more readily apparent to business leaders.

Kremer also notes the importance of involving stakeholders early in the research process as well as considering the needs of the ultimate audience "so people can really put themselves into the user's perspective and have more empathy." She recounts an example from a game development team observing а young user's emotional frustration during a playtest, which then transformed the approach. "At that moment, the entire team was fully invested in finding out more about their audience... they didn't want to be the team known as the ones who made the little girl cry."

Indeed, another guest, Aparnaa Rajasekaran of Georgia Pacific advises forming a deep understanding of your audience's decision-making lens to tailor insights that resonate with their priorities. She said that "being part of the solution and not the problem" has helped her think through the value she's adding to the conversation, while also focusing on presenting insights in a clear and concise manner.







Over our years in the insights industry, Infotools has seen first-hand the importance of empowering organizations to address stakeholder skepticism through innovative approaches. For instance, we worked with Samsung Electronics to streamline the insights process, using technology to make data more accessible and actionable across the organization through interactive dashboards and compelling visualizations. Such advancements illustrate how modern tools can transform the perception of research from a reactive function to a proactive, strategic resource - ultimately fostering stronger stakeholder confidence.

Of course, building credibility is another critical component of overcoming skepticism. <u>Emily Paladino</u>, formerly of Country Road Group, underscores the point that you have to constantly deliver value — "you're only as good as your last project." It's true: creating impactful research means prioritizing actionable key messages rather than simply overwhelming stakeholders with raw data. Insights should be digestible and immediately applicable to the goals of the leadership team.

Furthermore, to resonate with their own audiences, insights professionals must tailor their approach to resonate with a range of individual stakeholders. Insights expert <u>Febronia Ruocco</u> advises that appealing to stakeholder priorities and involving them in the research process can reduce resistance. On our podcast, she shared an example of conducting





Perception

qualitative workshops with the stakeholders in the room, so they had the opportunity to "listen to what the consumer is saying...They hear things that they had no idea the consumer was thinking," she notes.

As noted above, Kremer is in agreement; sharing her practice of connecting qualitative research findings with quantitative data to provide a holistic view of the user's experience. Adopting an integrated approach ensures that insights are both relatable and credible.

Ultimately, however, fostering trust and credibility is about more than delivering great research. It's about demonstrating partnership. By educating leadership teams, aligning with their goals, and presenting insights in ways that are compelling and actionable, insights professionals can overcome skepticism and position themselves as invaluable strategic allies.

Perception

Key takeaways

- Trust requires engagement: Educating and involving stakeholders early helps overcome skepticism and build credibility.
- Tie insights to business impact: Connecting research to revenue, conversion, and user experience makes its value clear.
- Make insights actionable: Clear, visual, and digestible findings drive stakeholder adoption and strategic use.



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Alignment

"It's often when you have time to sit back and relax and look at it that connections are made and you see a story develop and you can think about ways that you'll be able to share and tell that story in a meaningful way."

Jeffrey Hirsch, Right Brain Studio

Aligning insights with business objectives

It's worth diving deeper into one specific way that insights teams can build bridges with company leadership and other stakeholders: prioritizing organizational goals and objectives. Without this alignment, the risk is that the insights function is seen as tangential to core business functions or, worse, as a discretionary cost center. Demonstrating how research supports and advances key objectives is essential. Researchers must ensure strategic relevance is clear, and they must talk in terms of, and showcase, ROI.

Paladino emphasizes the importance of this, stressing that projects should "ladder up into business objectives" to demonstrate the team's expertise and value. Certainly, whether it's optimizing customer experience, improving product development, or driving revenue growth, insights professionals must ensure every project ties back to larger organizational priorities. Clear connections between research outcomes and business goals not only validate the team's role but also amplify the impact of the work being done.

<u>Jeffrey Hirsch</u> of the Right Brain Studio also advocates for framing insights in financial terms to secure attention and resources. He argues that there's no doubt that presenting data in a way that connects to revenue, cost savings, or market share helps executives to see insights as essential to achieving tangible business outcomes. When research is positioned as a driver of financial success, it is more likely to be seen as a priority, rather than an optional investment which risks leaving stakeholders asking: "What are the implications of that?"



Alignment

"It's often when you have time to sit back and relax and look at it that connections are made and you see a story develop and you can think about ways that you'll be able to share and tell that story in a meaningful way," he adds.

Yet to do all this successfully, insights teams need a deep understanding of how their organization approaches decision-making, including how this may differ in terms of nuances in local markets, as <u>Russell King</u> of Orange stresses. Besides, in companies with a strong instinct-driven culture, insights may need to support gut-based decisions by providing data as a safety net. Conversely, in data-driven organizations, research must be structured to influence evidence-based strategies. Tailoring the approach to fit the organizational mindset and its reach, or footprint, is key to ensuring that insights are not only heard, but acted upon.

During Infotools' collaboration with Orange, we addressed these nuances together by creating "Power Stations"—solutions designed to provide fast, accurate insights which supported the company's goal of delivering the right information to the right people at the right time. By integrating automated processes and user-friendly dashboards, the insights team was able to move beyond delivering static reports, instead empowering decision-makers with real-time, actionable intelligence. This approach highlights how aligning insights delivery with organizational priorities can enhance both relevance and impact.

Large companies such as Orange have an inherently complex task on their hands, of course, and <u>Vera Chien</u> shared on our podcast learnings around the diverse insights functions at another large organization: Warner Bros. Discovery. She underscores the multi-faceted role of insights in serving a variety of strategic and operational goals: "Some of us are a little more focused on the qual side, others are maybe more quant or stats oriented. But I love how we all come together," she says, noting that strategic alignment means connecting insights to high-level business objectives like entering new markets or improving brand equity. At the same time, insights must deliver operational value, such as optimizing day-to-day processes





Alignment

or addressing immediate challenges. Balancing these dimensions ensures that insights remain relevant across all levels of an organization.

As part of this overall effort, defining clear objectives for research projects is critical. Teams need to articulate how their work will address specific business challenges, test hypotheses, or guide decisions. This clarity and transparency around focus ensures that insights are actionable and that their relevance is immediately apparent. For instance, tying customer satisfaction data directly to retention strategies or linking employee sentiment research productivity improvements serves to demonstrate the practical utility and potential impact of insights.

In practice, aligning insights with business objectives also means adopting a consultative approach. Insights professionals should collaborate with stakeholders early in the process to understand their goals and define key performance indicators (KPIs). By designing

research that addresses these KPIs directly, teams can deliver findings that stakeholders see as indispensable to achieving their targets.

Whether presenting findings to C-suite executives or cross-functional framing insights in terms of what they enable the business to achieve is critical for reinforcing their value. It follows that, by ensuring their work ladders up organizational goals and presenting findings in ways that resonate with decision-makers in this way, insights teams position themselves as vital contributors to success.

And it isn't a one and done job. Insights teams must also strike between analyzing past performance and driving future strategy. Oates says, "The rearview mirror is a pretty great tool because it tells me where I've been and how I've gotten here. But I can also use the windshield which will help me understand what's ahead, where we're going, what obstacles we'll face, and help us really navigate that path forward."

Key takeaways

- Insights must be strategic, not siloed: Research should be integrated into core business functions, not seen as a standalone effort.
- Frame insights in financial terms: Connecting findings to ROI, cost savings, or market share increases executive buy-in and prioritization.
- Adopt a consultative approach: Collaborating with stakeholders early ensures research aligns with KPIs and drives actionable decisions.





Storytelling

"The data is the power source ... and the story is the means of passing that power on to other people."

Brian W. Robinson

Effective storytelling to drive action

Storytelling techniques can play a large role in accomplishing this critical alignment. Particularly when supported by clear visualizations, storytelling can make complex data more accessible and ensure the direct links to business outcomes are clear for all to see. Seasoned insights professionals know that the power of their work doesn't lie in the data itself but in how effectively they can translate that data into narratives that inspire action.

According to <u>Tom Johnson</u> of Jack in the Box and Del Taco, insights are only as powerful as the stories you use to communicate them – and insights teams must illustrate clearly how they are a 'strategic resource'. To this end, it's important that research is clearly applicable to the day-to-day rather than 'disconnected'; potentially leading others to ask: "How do I apply these insights to what I do?"

After all, without compelling storytelling, even the most groundbreaking insights risk being overlooked or misunderstood by stakeholders. As <u>Brian W. Robinson</u>, author and former leader of analytics teams at Meta and Yahoo!, tells us: "The data is the power source ... and the story is the means of passing that power on to other people." He warns against merely presenting raw figures, urging insights professionals to provide the necessary context and rationale for their findings in order to build trust and inspire meaningful action.

Robinson also highlights the pitfalls of delivering data without narrative clarity, noting that presenting figures without explaining their relevance leaves stakeholders questioning the value of the insights or doubting the analyst's expertise. To combat this, he advocates for providing concise, tailored narratives that resonate with the audience's needs and priorities, thereby ensuring that data is not only accessible but also meaningful and actionable.



Similarly, <u>Lauren Cheatham</u>, PhD, of Roblox stresses the role of researchers in making data approachable, sharing that success often hinges on building relationships with stakeholders. "It's about making people understand the value of research through collaboration and trust," she says, noting that researchers must also educate their audiences without alienating them. She advises researchers to focus on crafting narratives that both resonate with stakeholders and invite participation in strategic decision-making processes.

She also emphasizes the importance of being proactive and talking to cross-functional partners and asking: "I did this work with you. How did it change things?"

Lauren believes that the first step is to get to know people and build relationships and identify your allies. "It's long, slow relationship building, without a doubt," she says. "If somebody likes and trusts you they're more likely to listen to you... You need to know the people that you're dealing with... Figure out who the most difficult person in

the room is... and make them laugh."

In fact Michael Brereton of Michigan State University notes that storytelling has become such an essential skill in the insights field that he and his colleagues launched a dedicated storytelling course within their marketing research curriculum. He stresses the significance of this skill, noting that insights professionals must adapt their communication strategies to align with rapidly evolving expectations in the industry.

So, make time for storytelling, get to know those around you and take them with you on the journey. Make data accessible, relatable, and actionable. Whether through narrative techniques, tailored presentations, or interactive workshops, the goal is to ensure that insights resonate with stakeholders, driving the decisions and strategies that lead to measurable success. By mastering the art of storytelling, insights professionals can transform raw data into a catalyst for meaningful change within their organizations.

Storytelling

Key takeaways

- Data alone isn't enough: Insights professionals must translate numbers into compelling narratives that inspire action.
- Tailor stories to your audience: Providing context and relevance ensures insights are understood, trusted, and applied effectively.
- Build relationships to drive impact: Strong stakeholder connections enhance trust, collaboration, and the adoption of insights.





Elevating

"Make sure that you're always throwing a ladder down to help people up ... make sure you're giving out the accolades that you would like to see coming at you."

Lauren Cheatham, Roblox

Elevating insights teams requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes visibility within companies, alongside professional development opportunities. By enabling team members to showcase their expertise, fostering mentorship and learning opportunities, and equipping them with cutting-edge tools, organizations can transform their insights teams into strategic drivers of success. This commitment not only empowers individual professionals but also positions the insights function as indispensable to achieving organizational goals.

Raising visibility within organizations

Visibility is fundamental to ensuring that insights teams are recognized as strategic partners rather than isolated functions. Providing opportunities for team members to showcase their work through leadership presentations, cross-functional collaborations, or quarterly updates positions them as influential contributors to organizational success. Paladino emphasizes this point, noting that her team's quarterly presentations not only showcase expertise but also help individuals build their personal brands and raise the team's profile, ensuring insights are seen as a "driver of strategic decisions."

Encouraging team members to lead projects, present findings, and engage in crossfunctional initiatives not only enhances individual confidence but also solidifies the insights function's reputation as a strategic asset. Such efforts all help shift perceptions of insights teams from siloed units to indispensable organizational partners.





Elevating

Fostering professional growth

Professional development is of course essential for buildina robust and effective insiahts teams. Opportunities for learning and growth are among the most significant factors distinguishing highly satisfied market research professionals, according to research by the Market Research Institute International (MRII). As Ed Keller, MRII's executive director, notes, "Training and development should not be seen as a cost but as an investment that pays off." By prioritizing upskilling, organizations not only enhance job fulfillment but also strengthen retention and overall business performance.

To this end, together with its partners at University of Georgia, MRII offers targeted training programs covering essential topics like study design, data analysis, and advanced analytics, as a model for fostering excellence. Keller highlights, "Even when organizations are already doing something well, there's always room to climb higher and get better." Women in Research (WIRe) offers initiatives like WIRe Accelerate that also support professional growth. Jessica Sage of WIRe notes that the program equips women in research with tools to advance their careers while fostering community engagement, emphasizing the importance of holistic development. "It's about providing career-boosting content and creating opportunities to discuss and explore that content together," she explains.



Mentorship can also help team members to achieve professional growth. The WIRe Mentorship Program, which matches over 250 mentor-mentee pairs annually, exemplifies the transformative power of structured guidance. Infotools' Group Services Director, Horst Feldhaeuser, is a long-time WIRe mentor. He said, "Being a mentor not only helps me view my career in a different light through a fresh pair of eyes, but also gives me a chance to support someone else grow their career in a direction that will work best for them. As a champion for the next generation of researchers, this program fits with what - and whom - we believe will take this industry into the future."

To maximize success, Cheatham advises insights professionals self-advocate whilst demonstrating knowledge of their craft, although she warns that the process of gaining buy-in is 'not necessarily linear' and that it's important to educate others in a way that is neither condescending nor patronizing. She also believes in mentorship but suggests that it's important to identify appropriate mentors and points to the need to support others, too: "Make sure that you're always throwing a ladder down to help people up ... make sure you're giving out the accolades that you would like to see coming at you."



Elevating

Collaboration as a strategic driver

Collaboration is the cornerstone of any successful insights team. Breaking down silos ensures insights are not isolated but central to decision-making. Russell King highlights the need for a culture of joint ownership, where departments work together to align insights with organizational goals, while Kremer describes collaboration as a means of creating actionable insights by translating user feedback into guidance for solutions while respecting domain expertise. She notes that involving stakeholders in qualitative research sessions—such as observing live user testing—can deepen their understanding and connection to the insights process.

Johnson also reiterated the importance of having an intimate knowledge of the organization and how it operates. This means sitting down with key stakeholders from across the business to understand what is important for them, how success is measured, and so forth. Such an approach gives the market research team a wider contextual picture of the organization, which is critical as they seek to provide stakeholders with greater understanding of consumers and their environment.

Meanwhile, external partnerships can also enhance scalability and expertise. That said, they should complement internal capabilities - the aim is that, by collaborating with external analytics providers, teams can focus on strategic priorities while leveraging specialized resources.

By fostering effective collaboration both with external partners and across departments, insights teams can amplify their influence, ensuring their work drives meaningful and actionable outcomes for the organization.

Familiarity with mixed methodologies and data sets

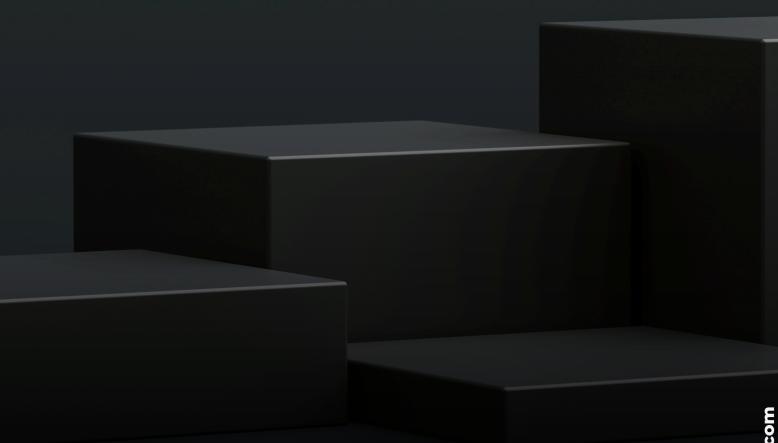
With organizations gaining access to more and more data sets, it's the role of the market researcher to help their organization make sense of all that disparity - when there are dots to be found, join them. When there aren't any dots, know when to move on so confirmation bias does not creep in. This holds true to consumer, research, transactional, and types of data.

The overlap between market and user research further exemplifies the importance of integrated methodologies. Kremer observes: "One thing that I've noticed and I believe is going to continue is the overlap and combination of market research and user research. We used to say years ago, market research tells us what people say they want and user research tells us what they actually do. That separation isn't there anymore."

Elevating

Key takeaways

- **Visibility drives impact:** Elevating insights teams requires showcasing expertise through leadership, presentations, and collaboration.
- Invest in growth and mentorship: Training, mentorship, and selfadvocacy empower researchers and strengthen team effectiveness.
- Collaboration fuels strategic value: Breaking silos and integrating insights across departments ensures research informs key decisions.









Technology

For brand insights teams, the ability to streamline workflows, integrate data, and deliver tailored visualizations is not just a convenience—it's a necessity.

Leveraging technology to maximize efficiency

Today's insights teams are under pressure to deliver actionable results faster and with fewer resources. Fortunately, researchers have a unique skill set, as Cheatham notes. At a time when technologies like AI can help us be more productive, she says that insights teams can "bring in the personal stories that can 'knock the socks off' of your leadership in terms of really feeling how that end user feels."

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that technology has emerged as a critical enabler, allowing insights teams to automate routine tasks and shift their focus toward high-impact strategic initiatives. Infotools' Harmoni software, for instance, is designed to help researchers collaborate with confidence by incorporating automation within a data-agnostic platform which can do much of the heavy lifting when it comes to data processing, whilst enabling the creation of beautiful charts, reports and dashboards – given that, while many budgets are shrinking, expectations are ramping up.

Certainly Coca-Cola's use of Infotools' Harmoni platform demonstrates how technology can bring messy, fragmented data to life. By utilizing Harmoni to analyze and visualize over 135,000 product reviews, Coca-Cola's Technical Consumer Research group transformed social listening data into actionable insights. This streamlined approach allowed for effective communication of findings and significantly reduced manual processing, making insights more accessible and impactful for decision-making.



Technology

After all, one of the perennial challenges for internal brand insights teams is managing the sheer volume of data while maintaining clarity and accessibility. So tools that integrate and harmonize data from diverse sources can empower teams to deliver cohesive, actionable insights. Victoria Sakal (formally of Wonder now at Ipsos North America) highlights the importance of techenabled storytelling tools; emphasizing that these solutions - when used wisely - can make data more accessible and engaging for stakeholders so that 'everybody knows that this is something that will inform their work' and is therefore worth spending time with. In this way, technology can transform vast datasets into compelling assets, enabling insights teams to communicate findings more effectively and stakeholder understanding.

But technology must always enhance, not replace, the human element of insights, as so many of our guests note. Hirsch reminds us that technology should handle efficiency, but the human element must guide interpretation: "It's up to us as human beings to figure out what it means". Insights professionals bring context and expertise





that automated systems cannot replicate. And by automating data processing and visualization, teams can focus their energy on interpreting results and aligning insights with broader business strategies. Oates seconds this, saying that while AI and automation are invaluable for processing large volumes of data, insights professionals play a critical role in contextualizing and interpreting that data. She reminds us that "our job as a consumer insights professional is to keep the human at the center" of our insights.

Certainly platforms that enable dynamic updates and on-demand reporting can help internal teams stay agile and responsive to changing market conditions. Paladino's experience with building a cost-of-living tracker in house to understand evolving customer behaviors, by way of example, exemplifies how technology allows insights teams to take control of their data and deliver tools tailored to specific business needs.

Additionally, democratizing access insights through centralized, user-friendly platforms fosters collaboration across



Technology

departments. When stakeholders outside the insights function can independently explore and interact with data, they become more invested in the process, reducing silos and improving decision-making. However, this democratization must be balanced with governance and oversight to ensure data integrity and consistency.

For brand insights teams, the ability to streamline workflows, integrate data, and deliver tailored visualizations is not just a convenience—it's a necessity. Leveraging technology allows these teams to overcome common pain points such as resource constraints, fragmented data, and delayed delivery. By adopting tools that harmonize data and simplify communication, insights teams can position themselves as indispensable strategic partners within their organizations.

Technology

Key takeaways

- Technology enhances efficiency, not insight: Automation streamlines workflows, but human expertise is essential for interpretation and strategy.
- Make data accessible and engaging: Tech-enabled storytelling tools help insights teams communicate findings clearly and drive action.
- Empower teams with smart tools: Centralized platforms improve collaboration, reduce silos, and enable faster, more informed decisions.





Conclusion

"Focus on delivering really powerful, game-changing and winning insights, influencing and challenging stakeholders, and driving that commercial agenda. Make sure the insight team has a place at the metaphorical table and is able to courageously communicate."

Febronia Ruocco

A final word

Elevating insights teams within an organization is no small feat—it requires a thoughtful, multi-pronged approach, as highlighted by the expertise of our podcast guests. From fostering collaboration and storytelling to leveraging technology and aligning with business objectives, each piece of the puzzle plays a crucial role in driving success.

When diving into this topic, we saw some clear themes emerge, such as the fact that building trust, creating actionable narratives, and integrating insights into organizational strategy are essential to transforming perceptions of the research function. By breaking down silos, empowering stakeholders with technology, and tailoring insights to resonate with diverse audiences, insights teams can position themselves as indispensable partners in navigating complexity and achieving growth.

As we reflect on the invaluable expertise shared by our podcast guests and the evolution of the industry, it's clear that raising the profile of insights is not just about elevating data—it's about empowering people, organizations, and decision-makers to realize their full potential. Together, through collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to excellence, we can continue to strengthen the role of insights and chart a bright, impactful future for the industry.





The space to think series

2025

Infotools was created by curious market researchers who wanted to uncover new ways to better understand the world. And we're still just as curious. We're acutely aware of how deep insights require time, and can't be rushed. That's why everything we do at Infotools is dedicated to giving market researchers more space to think. We trust this and other papers in this series will do just that. If you're interested in other publications in this series, feel free to check them out to the right.

The buyer's guide to market research analysis and reporting software

Insights and innovation:
The market research
software & tech landscape



The Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Handbook



Showstoppers: Elevating market research data quality into the limelight



<u>Tracking the future</u> <u>of brand tracking</u>



The state of Al in market research





Infotools Harmoni enables your team to:

Increase productivity. Spend less time processing research data, and more time analyzing it. Our platform uses automation to make your job easier.

Deliver real value. It's easy to provide valuable, actionable insights to stakeholders.

Rely on many levels of support. From our excellent Customer Services Team to our extensive Knowledge Base, a searchable site full of video tutorials and helpful "How to" tips.

Process your data. A data agnostic platform that understands research nuances, Harmoni supports most file types, and has APIs to Decipher, Voxco and others.

Report. Create beautiful charts, reports and dashboards with the click of a button. Highlight significant data points, suppress low sample sizes, and more.

Meet growing expectations. Market research budgets are shrinking, but expectations are ramping up. Slice and dice your data on the go, as the questions are being asked.

Analyze. With our platform processing complex tasks like calculating statistical significance, you have more time to dig and discover those magic insights.

Share. Share your insights with clients either in dashboards, story views or even exporting to PowerPoint or Excel. Plus, keep them informed of the latest updates with mobile data alerts.



