



To: Clients & Colleagues  
From: Scott Kotchko, Whitman Insight Strategies  
Re: Research & Insights Trends from the Summer 2019 Greenbook GRIT Report  
Date: August-September 2019

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Friends,

Earlier this month GreenBook.org released results from its latest [GRIT Report](#), a comprehensive survey of the market research industry.



**GreenBook**  
GRIT REPORT

For those of us within the industry, and for anyone whose organization commissions, conducts, or utilizes any type of research or insights – the GRIT Report is an incredible wealth of information.

Here are some key insights from the most recent report that we found especially interesting:

**>>> The Market Research industry is optimistic about its future and fixated on the buzz generated by a number of future trends.**

According to the report, more than two-thirds of industry insiders say they're optimistic about the future of market research and insights. This is unquestionably good news for an industry that all-too-often seems to believe that the proverbial sky is falling (and for those of us who lived through the 2008-2009 era of slashed budgets and tabled projects when it quite nearly was).

When it comes to future trends, leading the way are Artificial Intelligence, Automation, Behavioral Science, Machine Learning, and Big Data/Analytics.

But not every buzz-generating future trend will end up making a real difference, and we believe it is important to separate the hype from those that have real potential.

Here's our take on industry buzz:

BUY	SELL	HOLD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Automation</li><li>Big Data/Analytics</li><li>Machine Learning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Behavioral Science</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Artificial Intelligence</li></ul>

**Automation** has already made a big, disruptive dent in the industry and because it offers increased efficiency and lower labor costs, it is only going to grow. We feel the same about **Big Data & Advanced Analytics** (of which **Machine Learning** is a component). Advanced Analytics has *always* played a major role in the MR industry, and the explosion of client-side customer data sources that can be integrated with survey data, appending digital data onto survey respondents, and other technological advancements have made its role larger than ever before (as anyone who has recently tried to hire a data scientist recently can attest).

**Behavioral Science** re-emerged on the scene in the past decade with the popularity of books like *Thinking Fast & Slow*, and *Freakonomics*. At its core, Behavioral Science is a combination (and clever re-branding) of fundamentals from the fields of psychology and economics. While it has had a noticeable impact on the MR industry to date, we are bearish on its ability, by itself, to be a “game changer” for two reasons. One, there are massive cracks in its foundation (see: psychology’s replication crisis) upon which many Behavioral Science-based research techniques are derived. And two, because we see Behavioral Science as just a bit player in a broader push towards implicit response measurement that is primarily being driven by technology and another academic discipline...**Neuroscience**.

At WINS, we’re a solid HOLD when it comes to **Artificial Intelligence**. We agree with our colleagues that AI holds tremendous potential for truly game-changing disruption. But so far, all we’ve gotten in the research world is sentiment analysis and surveybots – novelties that are scraping the floor of AI’s incredibly high ceiling. We are certain that AI will, at some point in the future, revolutionize how we collect and analyze data. We are less certain that this future is tomorrow, or that the market research industry will be among the first to build and deploy this technology.

## >>> **The biggest challenges facing the industry today are SPEED, INSIGHT, and INNOVATION.**

One of our favorite aspects of the GRIT Report is all of the questions they ask of research consultancies and the client-side insights departments that hire them around challenges and opportunities. And in looking through the most recent data, the big challenges facing our industry boil down to three things:

1. **SPEED:** Clients need answers on tighter timelines than ever before
2. **INSIGHT:** Clients want *real insights*, not a bunch of data
3. **INNOVATION:** Research consultancies complain that many clients tend to be “stuck” in traditional ways of thinking and doing, are risk-averse, and have an apprehension toward adopting innovative research approaches

The Speed vs. Insight challenge is nothing new. There are too many companies in the industry that promise quick turnarounds, but can’t deliver much beyond a pile of data. Similarly, there are talented consultancies that can deliver true insights, but on a timeline so elongated that by the time they’re shared with clients, the world has moved on.

At WINS, our business exists because we believe that clients shouldn't have to "trade off" between Speed and actionable Insights. Coming from the world of Politics, this is in our DNA. If brand teams need their insights *tomorrow*, political campaigns need their insights *yesterday*.

Here's how we've seen success in integrating **Speed**, truly actionable **Insights**, and **Innovation**:

- 1. We invest in innovative approaches, frameworks, and technologies that are replicable, flexible, and efficient.** Clients deserve research customized to their needs, objectives, industry and organization. But re-inventing the wheel every project not only wastes time, but can also lead to inconsistency in the quality of engagements over time if you're not constantly learning, tweaking, and improving. The solution is to invest in approaches *and* technology that are powerful enough to consistently deliver results, but flexible enough to be deployed across clients and industries.
- 2. We deepen client relationships to add value AND to unlock timeline efficiencies on the front-end.** Almost everyone in our industry is focused on improving speed on the back-end (fieldwork and analysis), and a plethora of new technologies have emerged to help do so. But research consultancies shouldn't ignore opportunities for shaving off weeks (or even months!) on the front-end by developing deeper and more proactive client relationships. By the time a typical research RFP hits your inbox, the client teams may have spent weeks identifying a problem, deciding research is the solution, drafting, editing and revising the RFP, and so on. By being pro-active in client relationship management, and cultivating a trusted advisor mindset, there is a tremendous opportunity for research firms to not only speed up the process, but add value along the way helping to identify problems that good research can solve *before* clients are even aware of them, and ensuring that you can help solve them on the timeline needed to truly make a difference.
- 3. We're Innovative, but also Transparent.** The GRIT Report is clear that many clients are wary and skeptical of innovation. One big reason for this is because a lot of "innovation" on the supplier side is served up to clients as a complicated, non-transparent, "black box". As one senior research client told us years ago over drinks, "When I hire an insights firm, I don't want everyone on my team to have to study and learn *their language*. I want them to learn *our language*." To get client buy-in on innovation, research consultancies need to be much more transparent in explaining clearly to clients what they're doing, and why it matters. Further, the tools, techniques, and technologies they use must be customizable to the client's industry and organization (not the other way around).
- 4. We tell compelling data-based stories that always end with what the client should do next.** People don't remember charts, or crosstabs, or real-time dashboards. They remember stories, and they especially remember stories that have a point. Being able to communicate findings, implications and recommendations this way is predicated on not only knowing how to do so, but also taking the time to truly understand the client's business, and being able to separate true insights from "nice to know" data in the research. And not stopping at insight. After all, insights without clear recommendations are just observations.

## >>> **Supplier Side revenue has grown more than Buyer Side Budgets**

In the GRIT Report, Seventy-one percent of research consultancies say that revenue is up year-over-year, but nearly a third (32%) of client-side buyers say their budgets are decreasing (just 5 years ago only 10% said budgets were decreasing).

From our experience there is a clear reason for this: Traditional client-side insights departments (e.g. the folks who responded to the GRIT survey) are no longer the only ones at their organizations buying research services.

While many of our own clients sit in corporate insights, others come from Marketing & Communications, CX/UX departments, Innovation & Strategy, and even Advertising agencies.

For research firms, this means that new business opportunities aren't exclusively siloed under Insights, and instead may exist across various departments within the same company. For client-side Insights professionals, we view this as more of an opportunity than a budget-threat. It says to us that your own expertise is valued (and needed!) across more facets of your organization's business than ever before.

## >>> **There is a "Success Disconnect"**

According to the GRIT report, both suppliers and buyers say that the majority of the research projects they conducted in the past year were successful. Great news!

However, companies that supply research services tend to define success based on adding value by utilizing new or innovative research approaches. In other words, its about THEM.

Clients who commission research, on the other hand, say that success is most often defined by tangible business results – the impact that the project and its recommendations had on their business.

We see this as a positive wake-up call for insights firms. If most of your work is successful, and clients are telling you that your work is successful because it accomplished what matters most to them (business results), there is intuitively a huge opportunity to bolster your own credentials and case studies by talking not only about how unique and innovative a certain project was – but also that it drove business results!

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*We hope that you found this summary (and our perspectives on key industry trends) helpful! Feel free to email or call us with any questions, comments, thoughts, disagreements, or to share your own perspectives!!!*