1. **Denyse, you are a consultant in Customer Centricity. Why do you think this is necessary?**

I don’t just think it is necessary, I know it is vital to every business, big or small! So many organisations talk about the importance of delighting the customer, yet most don’t deliver a great customer experience. According to research by Lee Resources, 80% of companies say they deliver "superior" customer service, but only 8% of people agree that they do. That’s a huge gap!

Another study from Walker, showed that by the year 2020 customer experience will overtake price and product as the key brand differentiator. Why? Because it helps companies retain their customers, improve their satisfaction and enables cross-selling and up-selling. They become a trusted partner of their customers, which protects them from competitive activities.

As you can see, customer centricity makes good business sense. Customer-centric companies are 60% more profitable compared to companies that are not focused on the customer. (source: eConsultancy.com) And Forrester has shown that leaders in customer centricity grow revenue almost seven times faster that the laggards. No executive board should doubt that it’s time they adopted a customer-first strategy. In fact, if they haven’t already done so, they are already behind their competitors!

1. **You have many years experience heading up client-side research departments. Would you share a few of your learnings?**

Yes of course. Before I founded C3Centricity, I was global head of consumer excellence for Nestle and also had similar positions in Philip Morris International and Gillette, which is now a part of P&G.

These three companies have very different approaches to consumer satisfaction. In fact, one board member, whom shall remain anonymous, once asked me “Why do we bother to ask consumers their opinions about anything? We know better than them.” No wonder their results are lagging others in the same industry!

A lack of deep customer understanding is one reason why many large organisations are struggling in today’s digital world, where everything is openly shared on social media – the good, the bad and the downright ugly. Being customer centric means thinking customer first in everything you do.

Having had the chance to work in these global organisations that treat their customers’ satisfaction so differently, I have been able to identify both best practices as well as the major errors that companies often make. This means I can support my clients with proven strategies, no matter how poor their current customer satisfaction and understanding is.

1. **Retailers are much closer to the consumer than manufacturers are, so they probably know better what the consumer wants. Has that been your experience?**

It is certainly true that not only are they physically closer to their customers at the point of sale, but most of them also have a wealth of data about their habits too. However as I am often quoted as saying “Your data is only as useful as the questions you ask of it.” In other words, unless you know what answers you are looking for, any result will be acceptable.

Whether you are a manufacturer or a retailer, your journey to customer satisfaction starts with understanding them intimately. And that is the data you need to analyse first. Not just who they are, but the why of their attitudes and behaviours. I have found so many organisations lacking in this area that I developed a simple visual persona template for them to complete for each of their brand users or shopper types. (It can be downloaded for free on the C3Centricity website in the resources section.)

1. **There are so many tools, which can help organisations to follow the consumer when he is shopping online. For example, we have the panel data of GfK and Nielsen and we have a huge possibility to do ad hoc research too. What kinds of market research do you recommend?**

Great question, but not easy to give one simple answer. The market research you need to run in any situation is the one that will answer the questions to answer. In order to identify that, you must start by reviewing everything you already know about your customer.

In my “Insights to Action” workshops I teach a 7-step process for turning data and information into knowledge and understanding and then into actionable insights. And you know what? Data gathering and market research is step 6! There are a lot of other things to do before you run market research. They are the foundational steps that most companies miss, which is why they struggle to develop insights.

Many of my new clients are running unnecessary market research projects simply because they don’t know what they already know! A simple review of that first will save a lot of money. That’s great for the client-side researchers, perhaps less so for the suppliers. However I believe it is good for the agencies too, as it means that they can run more interesting and more useful studies, rather than endlessly repeating the same projects month after month, and year after year. They also then have more time to become the true partners that their clients desire. Advisors who can help them sift through the tsunami of information that is flowing into the organisations from many sources other than just from market research surveys.

1. **Is it, in your opinion, necessary for FMCG Manufacturers or Retailers to have an in-house research department?**

Another great question. My answer would be yes and no. Yes, to a department that analyses information and delivers actionable insights and recommendations. No, to a traditional market research department. Let me explain.

I already mentioned that thanks to the IoT and smart products, companies are inundated with information. Who better than market research to help in its analysis? But in order to become this new business decision support group, new skills are required.

Insights 2020 by Kantar-Vermeer spoke about the need for researchers to have five critical capabilities:

* Research & analytics mastery
* Business acumen
* Creative solution thinking
* Storytelling
* Direction setting

This study is now a few years old and the world is changing fast. A more recent study by GRBN resulted in a Handbook to help organisations report on the ROI of Insights. They found that those who measure their ROI have found a seat at the decision table, increased budgets, and more control. Those are the department functions that the FMCG world needs today, be they in a manufacturing or retail environment.

1. **What would you expect this in-house department to do? What kind of Position should it have in the organization?**

I have already answered this question in my previous response, but I would like to add that any department is only as good as the ROI it brings to the business. This goes for market research just as much as marketing or sales. Until recently, organisations didn’t bother to measure the value they received from research, which is why it has always been a department that suffered from budget and personnel cuts. Hopefully this new role providing strategic counsel to top management will ensure a secure future for the whole profession. I sincerely hope so.