

## **“Just who do they think we are?”**

*by Kevin Sandlin  
a 2-3 minute read*

The first two steps of the Vista Brand Roadmap let the collective team come to grips with “who they are” and “who they want to be”. These first two steps are decidedly inward-focused. Step 3 takes a sharp turn towards the marketplace, and asks the following question of key external audiences: “who are we perceived to be?”

*Here’s why it’s critical. It’s easy for leadership to get lost inside their own “tornado” where their perspective of everything outside the tornado is often blurred. Step 3 “Who are we perceived to be?” gives the unvarnished truth which allows Team Vista to provide unbiased insight and analysis - the truth of the matter. Other powerful byproducts are forward-looking views of changing trends and impending disruption.*

*And ultimately, the evidence-based findings are an advanced curation of key knowledge to help the brand make smarter decisions.*

Very often, the external answers are very revealing to leadership. Sometimes they are surprising, because leadership doesn’t always hear their audience’s raw, unfiltered opinion of their brand. To get the best and clearest answer to the question, we gather two types of information - qualitative (anecdotal) and quantitative (numerical ratings). Both types of information give “shape” to how the brand is perceived by people that sustain them. These angles are not often regularly seen by brand leadership.

### **Qualitative Data**

To gather qualitative data, we set out to gain an in depth understanding of human behavior as it relates to and reflects the brand: customers, investors, partners... whoever is outside the front door and with whom we have or are interested in having a relationship. We want to know what they think, why do they do what they do, buy what they buy, and engage in the things they do with the brand. Totally understanding their interaction with the brand.

We accomplish this total understanding numerous ways - through conversations, virtual focus groups, and stories from the audience. We look at earned media, digital conversations, chatter and conversations among followers of the brand as well as anonymous conversations. Even in very unorthodox ways. For instance, Steve Beshara was featured on “60 Minutes” with Dr. Rapaille, a French psychologist who employed unusual methods to unearth how customers are imprinted by certain behaviors that drive their buying behavior. (See 60 Minutes video here: <https://vimeo.com/vistagrowth/review/116600821/34eae603f4>)

During Step 3, we gather, sort, evaluate those conversations, including metrics like the brand's top 20 posts on Facebook, as measured by highest engagement, views, sharing, etc. We're trying to capture "word of *mouse*", which can be incredibly amplified by the power of social media, and then give it context and deliver it to brand leadership.

In discovering the brand's "digital footprint", we can go back as far as 2, 3, or even four years, which may seem like an eternity in today's digital world; however, we must all remember that our social media engagements are more like a digital tattoo. The internet never forgets.

### **Quantitative Data**

The quantitative data, as you can guess, is largely mathematical. To gather this data, we uncover, gather, and synthesize unbiased information from key audiences and constituents. This process most often takes the form of surveys. People score and rate things and respond to questions about the brand, such as how they value products, how they perceive the brand's reputation, etc.

We provide a plethora of ranking tools. Most of the time, the answers are not black or white, yes or no, high or low. Instead, we provide a big field of gray to get a numerical hunch of where the audience stands on a given question. For example, the question, "*Would you recommend brand x to others? Rank from 0-10.*" might get a blended combined score of 8.9, which would be highly favorable. Similarly, a score of 3.1 means we know that the wisdom of the crowd scores us very poorly on our perceived value in that particular area. It's important, in this step, to use the numerical data to help put a very fine point on findings, rather than just a general statement like "the brand is not very good at X or Y."

Each brand's surveys and questions are totally custom; however, over time, certain patterns have emerged. For example, we always use a limited number of well-asked questions on surveys to limit dropoffs. We seek participation and audiences don't want to spend too long taking a survey. More specifically, if a user sees the momentum bar on the screen steadily advancing, they tend to stick with it. Also, we create a cadence within the surveys: read, rate, proceed. Read, rate, proceed. We discovered that asking the audience to "Explain" created much lower participation rates. Explanations are better-captured during anecdotal storytelling.

### **Capture. Synthesize. Playback.**

In our role in leading the charge, we act as the messenger, despite favorable or unfavorable findings. But the honest findings are critical to modifying products and reputation, helping make better decisions. A brand's audiences are more willing and more open to share with Vista as a third party than with company executives, to whom they give polite, less truthful answers. It's dangerous to craft business and brand plans based on misinformation and half truths. Positive, desired change comes once the unvarnished voice of the customer is delivered.

What we seek is the reality of market perception. Sometimes these results sting. We are very careful to set the stage for this step, rather than surprising anyone. “The results may not be what you imagined.” Two key reasons we go to such lengths in this step are:

1. Brand leadership must be aware and conscious of what everyone outside the organization is thinking and doing. Informed leadership is an imperative.
2. When we interpret external opinions, that’s one huge step forward towards improving, enhancing the brand and preparing for a new era of growth.

Step 3 of the Vista Brand Roadmap is almost always eye-opening in the most constructive ways. The research conducted provides unbiased insight and analysis, forward-looking views of changing trends and impending disruption, and the advanced curation of key topics to help a brand make smarter and more informed decisions. It’s the step that really gets the brand’s attention as they now understand not only where they think they are, but where the mirror of the market says they are.

60 Minutes video:

<https://vimeo.com/vistagrowth/review/116600821/34eae603f4>