InFront
by InnerView

A guide to
Frontline Insights

A playbook for turning the voice of **your frontline representatives** into a key part of your **go-to-market strategy.**

INTRO DUC TION

86% of consumers say a salesperson had at least some impact on their purchase decision

Executive Summary

Frontline employees play a major role in influencing the customers they serve. This includes what purchases the customer makes and their overall satisfaction with a particular company. We recently collaborated with consumer financing provider, Synchrony, on some [consumer research](#) and found that 86% of consumers who interacted with a salesperson said that salesperson had at least some impact on their purchase decision.

This is the foundational assumption for this guide. In a world placing so much emphasis on digital interactions and tools, human connections still are a powerful factor. Figure A shows where we believe companies can maximize the value they deliver. The sweet spot is aligning their brand promise with the needs and expectations of their two most important audiences – their customers and their employees.

In this paper, we will share a roadmap for organizations to better understand the perspective of the frontline audience and the role they play in driving successful customer outcomes. **Frontline teams are full of valuable intelligence that can help organizations improve decision making and enhance the customer experience. We call this intelligence frontline insights.**

Optimal Value Delivery

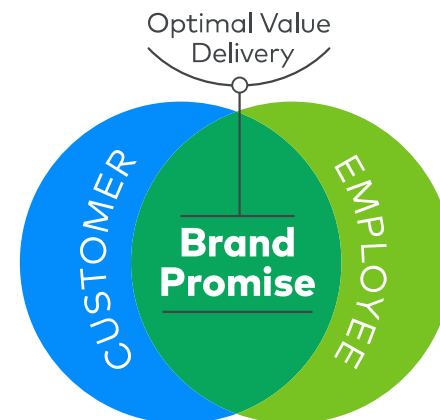CUSTOMER | **Brand Promise** | EMPLOYEE

Fig. A

Defining Frontline Insights

Frontline insights are intelligence gained by tapping into the perspective of customer-facing representatives. Companies invest heavily to understand the perspective of the buyer, through things like market research and customer satisfaction surveys. However, most leaders lack clarity into how their products, services and messages are being received internally. It is a common blind spot.

As Figure B shows, frontline insights fill the gap in marketing intelligence. Marketing leaders collect data on customer perceptions before an interaction, and track customer satisfaction after the interaction. However, frontline insights can help demystify what will happen during a customer interaction by bringing in the voice of the other participant – the frontline employee.

Frontline insights are about value. They are a way for go-to-market leaders to assess how a value proposition is perceived and how effectively their representatives will deliver it when serving customers. They are not an employee satisfaction survey. While gathering frontline input can have a positive impact on employee engagement and satisfaction, the primary goal is to ensure better outcomes for customers.
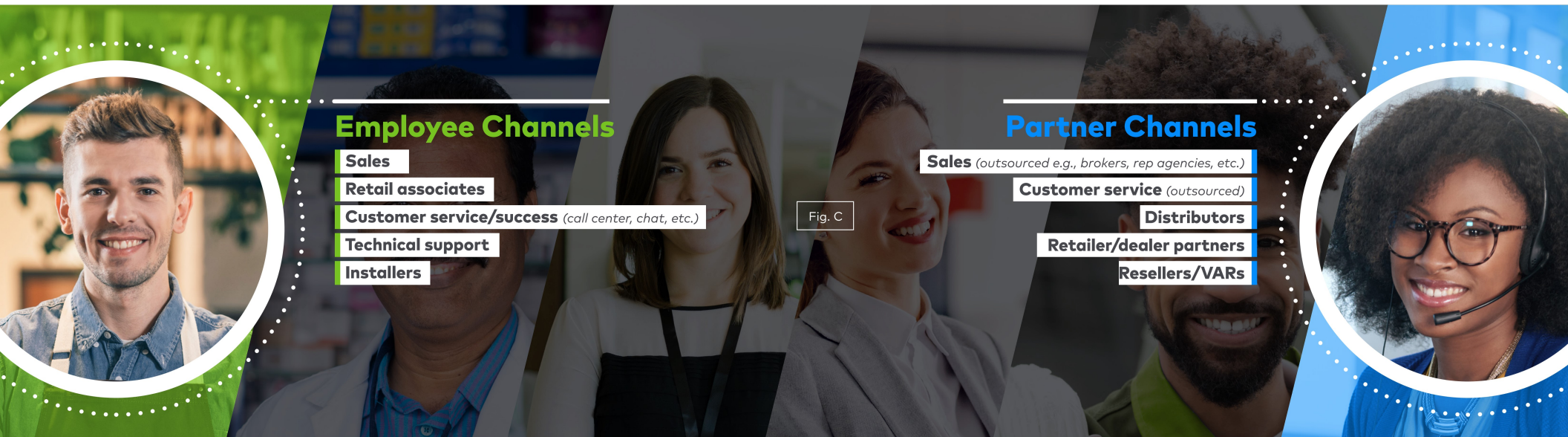

BEFORE — Market research

1

Fig. B

AFTER — Customer satisfaction

3

DURING — Frontline insights

2

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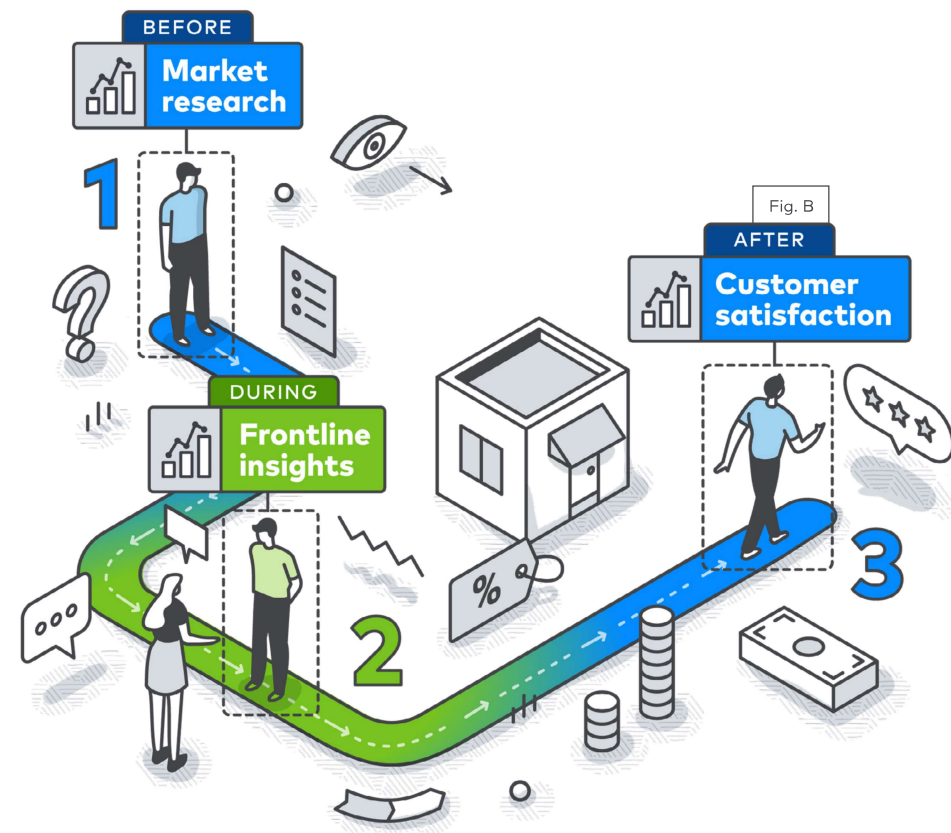
frontline insights *are*

✔ A feedback loop for go-to-market leaders ✔ Intelligence on customer needs & behaviors ✔ Internal "market research"

frontline insights *are not*

✖ Employee/job satisfaction surveys ✖ Employee engagement surveys

3

Employee Channels

Sales
Retail associates
Customer service/success (call center, chat, etc.)
Technical support
Installers

Fig. C

Partner Channels

Sales (outsourced e.g., brokers, rep agencies, etc.)
Customer service (outsourced)
Distributors
Retailer/dealer partners
Resellers/VARs

Identifying frontline audiences

The term "frontline" will be a little different for every company. We refer to frontline as any representative who interacts with a customer at any point. Organizations might look at "customers" slightly differently as well based on how they go to market (B2C, B2B2C or B2B), but we treat any person who can directly impact the buying decision or customer satisfaction as being frontline.

Your frontlines are your messengers. They are the face of your brand. Before collecting any insights, identify all the audiences from which you want feedback. This could include salespeople or service/support functions. Any role that can directly impact the customer experience can provide valuable perspective.

Figure C above provides examples of typical frontline channels,

organized by employee and third party, or "partner" channels. No matter who signs their paycheck, if they directly influence a customer's attitude toward your brand – they are frontline.

A frontline insights strategy is about creating a two-way dialogue with these critical channels. What they know, see and perceive can impact success on many levels.

Why make it a focus:

Frontline insights are a tool to drive a better customer experience. Understanding the perspective of this often-overlooked group of customer influencers can shed light on gaps in customer experience.

Consider how frontline insights can be most immediately applied:
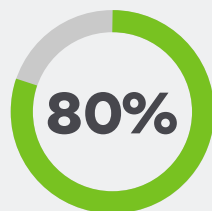
80% of marketers say their success depends upon the effectiveness of frontline teams.

Fig. D

- Increase performance
- Sales/sales conversion
- Product/service attach rates
- Average selling price
- Customer satisfaction
- Customer loyalty

Better decisions

No one knows customers better than your frontline teams. They see, hear and observe things your customer either does not share or doesn't know how to express in focus groups or surveys. By tapping into the frontline perspective, leaders can have a more complete understanding of customer needs and behaviors. This can lead to more informed strategies around pricing, packaging, promotions, and messaging. This is not to suggest that all go-to-market strategies should be crowdsourced from frontline teams, but it does complement the data already being considered.

Better execution

The most immediate impact of frontline insights can be seen through improved execution. When gathered effectively, the insights uncover gaps in team message alignment, frontline confidence and support processes. The data helps pinpoint those gaps so frontline support can be tailored and strategic.

Frontline insights can improve both how the value proposition is crafted and the success with which it gets delivered to the customer. The bottom-line impact is easily measured (see figure D).
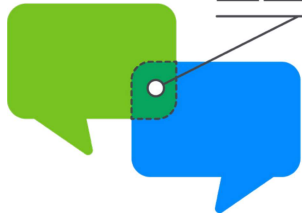
5

WHAT WE'VE UNCOVERED

Our analysis of the nearly 20,000 frontline responses — gathered from dozens of studies with major brands across a variety of industries, including banking, manufacturing, telecommunications, electronics, and more — has uncovered some notable trends.

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MISALIGNMENT
22%

Think about what would happen if you told a story and got almost a fourth of it wrong. The average gap between leadership's vision and frontline perception is greater than 22%, signaling a detrimental misalignment in how leadership and frontlines see the value of their offering. Having this type of insight into your own company allows you to pinpoint where the message is breaking down and put the proper plans in place to shift frontline perceptions.

UNFAVORABLE PRICING VIEW
75%
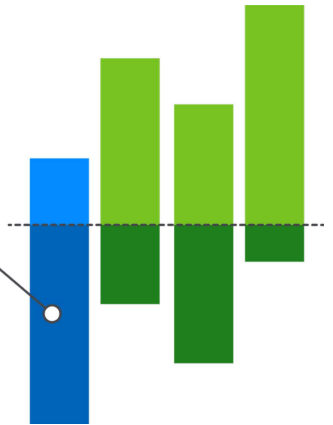
Pricing is a mental roadblock, but frontline insights provide a roadmap for building value into price. It is no surprise that in 75% of our studies, frontline teams had an unfavorable view of their company's pricing — salespeople will always wish for lower pricing. However, in each study, another side of the data reveals where frontline teams believe their company's value exceeds competitors. Through expert analysis this multifaceted data illuminates areas of perceived strength, which we use to help market-ers reinforce the value of their offering.

Comparing the perspective of both leaders and frontline teams can help identify ways that a company can improve confidence and consistency of its customer experience. In 64% of our studies, the frontline teams viewed company/product average performance higher than leaders. This signals two things. *Leaders are skeptics of their offering* – whether because it's perceived as a "work in progress" and they underrate its value, or they lack confidence that their teams will deliver on the value proposition. Insights from this data uncover areas of breakdown in meeting customer expectations. *Frontline teams are more optimistic.* On the surface this may be a good thing, but further analysis can uncover areas where frontline reps are over-confident, which could cause them to make inaccurate claims to customers.

64%
FAVORABLE
PERCEIVED
PERFORMANCE

1 Define what you're measuring

Frontline insights are a tool to improve go-to-market success, whether it involves a product or service offering, promotional campaign or brand position. Start your frontline insights process with a clear understanding of what value proposition you want to assess and what your goals are once you have the data.

At InnerView, we take each key initiative and apply a structure that is similar to customer market research. We identify all the key decision criteria a customer might consider when choosing whether to do business with a company. We then have the representatives evaluate those factors, focusing on which value points are resonating, and which ones are falling short. By getting to that level of detail, you can uncover actionable insights on how to help your frontlines have better, more confident interactions with customers.

2 Select and segment your audiences

Define all the frontline audiences who will play a key role in the success of your next initiative. This will ensure that the data collected is relevant and the actions that result from the insights can drive results. For example, not every salesperson will sell every product. Not every customer service representative supports all business lines. Focus on the roles that will be the "messengers" relaying your story to customers. Not only will this help you gather insights from different viewpoints, but it will also help you tailor your support strategy to the specific needs of these channels.

Beyond just identifying job role, there is an opportunity to further segment the data to uncover useful insights. Just as with market research, demographic data can help understand your frontline population in a very detailed way. Figure E offers some additional demographic data points to collect to allow for thorough analysis.

Fig. E

Demographics to collect
Job Role
Tenure
Geography/Region
Title/Level

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3 Take a structured approach

Frontline insights are a largely untapped source of intelligence. That is because most organizations don't take a scalable approach to listening to or analyzing the voice of their frontlines (if they are listening at all). See figure F from a recent survey of a community of product marketing professionals. You can see that only 23% of the professionals are using structured research to listen to their frontlines.

Frontline insights will only deliver ongoing value if there is a scalable framework that can mine, process and deliver actionable information on a regular basis. Ad-hoc conversations are not scalable, and the information collected is not structured, organized or tracked. Informal listening can do more harm than good if leadership is acting upon the opinions of only a few voices.

Therefore, we recommend a repeatable process where research is built using a consistent structure and distributed to an appropriate sample of respondents across frontline audiences every time. This will ensure the data collected has integrity and can be used confidently to make decisions and drive actions.

Do

✓ **Have a consistent structure and methodology**

✓ **Target a representative sample of respondents**

✓ **Ask for frontline input on a regular basis**

Don't

✗ **Create surveys from scratch each time**

✗ **Use ad-hoc conversations as representation of the frontline perspective**

Fig. F

How are you getting product positioning input from your sales team and channel partners?

Ad-hoc conversations	64%
Structured research	23%
Informal surveys	8%
I'm not asking for their input	6%

Poll by Richard King, VP of Marketing. 318 participants from a 2022 survey of a community of product marketing professionals.

4 Acknowledge the findings

If organizations are going to commit to listening to the frontline perspective, they need to demonstrate to their teams that the feedback is being used and is driving action.

This can be done in a few ways:

> Display results
Show your frontlines teams the data you compiled from their feedback. Share with them the highlights and key takeaways.

> Outline next steps
If there are clear conclusions from the data and plans are in motion, tell them. Frontline teams often feel disconnected from the marketing team, so they'll be happy to know there was value in what they shared.

> Rapid response
In many cases, companies have the chance to take some immediate steps in response to results. For example, if there are common misconceptions about a product or offering, a quick one sheet highlighting some key facts can clear up issues.

Sharing what you learned and how you plan to use the information will build trust with your frontlines. On the other hand, if they feel like their input is not valued, they might be hesitant to share the next time.

5 Continue monitoring

The key ingredient in turning frontline insights into an organizational strength is repetition. Gathering point-in-time feedback might be useful, but the effort becomes more actionable when the data is tracked and analyzed over time.

This helps leaders in a variety of ways. First, it helps determine if the actions you took following the previous collection had any impact. The first set of data establishes a baseline, and the subsequent collections show movement. Marketers already do this with their customer research to ensure their efforts are working. Why not do it internally as well?

Next, it establishes a go-to-market scorecard of sorts that can help drive success for future initiatives. We have done research that shows that 72% of marketing leaders are introducing new initiatives – products/services, brand campaigns, offers and promotions – to their frontlines on at least a quarterly basis. That means the frontline insights collected from previous launches – successful or unsuccessful – can be a point of comparison for your next big launch.

These ongoing insights are what ultimately can predict customer satisfaction and revenue performance.

How often to measure? Every 3-6 months for a specific topic.

Ask yourself a question. What poses the biggest threat to your next go-to-market effort being successful? Is it a poor strategy? The wrong price? Poor messaging? In our experience, new initiatives struggle due to poor internal alignment.

Marketing leaders set the strategy, but they need their frontline teams to execute. Frontline insights inform strategies that create a stronger connection between these two functions.

As shared previously, 80% of marketers believe frontline representatives are key to the success of their strategies. Building a dialogue with the frontlines improves the flow of information in both directions. First, marketers collect insights from the trenches that can inform better strategy. Second, marketers can pinpoint where the frontlines

are struggling with the current offering and provide targeted support. The approach leads to a better experience for the frontline teams, which ultimately leads to a better experience for customers.

To be useful, frontline insights need to be collected and analyzed with some rigor. An occasional frontline focus group or periodic opinion survey will not produce actionable insights. Marketers must approach the data with the same sensitivity they would customer research. The research should have clear objectives, the studies structured consistently, and audiences segmented appropriately. Most importantly, the results should be reviewed and acted upon as quickly as possible. The data is only valuable if frontline teams see the insights impacting decisions.

Summary

" *I'm glad you've offered this chance to share our input because real change starts at the bottom, and I truly hope the powers-that-be will listen.*

Thank you! "

— Frontline salesperson
home improvement

About InFront

InFront gives companies a fresh glimpse into their customer interactions through the eyes of their frontline representatives. It is a platform that collects and analyzes the frontline perspective on what customers need and how well their company meets those needs, turning it into valuable intelligence for marketing leaders. Using proprietary data science, InFront delivers insights to improve company alignment and accelerate go-to-market success.

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