The Independent Agency Toolkit

HOW TO GO BEYOND DATA-DRIVEN

Contents

Introduction

2019 is full of challenges and opportunities for independent agencies. **Project-based contracts** are increasing in popularity, giving indies the chance to win more business, while brands continue to shift core skills and expertise in-house.

In this competitive landscape, independent agencies need to stand out from the crowd and prove their value to brands.

To do this, it means developing a much deeper understanding of the consumers they're targeting.

What do we know about today's consumer?

50% research brand or products via search engines, and 41% via social networks

Digital consumers have on average **3.2 devices**

73% second-screen using their mobile phone while also watching TV

44% are now blocking ads online

55% visited a brand's website last month, and 24% watched a video made by a brand

67% say their mobile is their most important device for accessing the internet

They have an average of **8 social media** accounts, up from 3 in 2012

Free delivery is the most popular online purchase driver, at 59%

What does this tell us?

Today's consumers are harder to reach than ever.

They've taken control of their own **purchase journey** and are actively using search engines, social networks and other sources to find and research brands and products.

Stretching their time and presence across a number of devices, social platforms and websites also means they're more difficult to pin down efficiently.

To engage them, you must know not only where they spend their time, but why.

Independent agencies have a central role to play in helping brands understand who these people are and how they can be reached.

Indies have the skills, expertize and flexibility to go far beyond traditional marketing, nicely slotting into the spaces where brands are lacking.

But who are the indies of tomorrow?

01

The indie
of tomorrow

> **"Our job as indie agencies is to bring the spirit of independent thought to the machine of capitalism. Putting ideas first. Putting culture first. Putting people first."**
>
> **Alex Bennett-Grant**, Co-Founder & Managing Director at We Are Pi

Independent agencies are changing, and for good reason.

With more brands **moving audience research in-house**, looking to take back control of their budget and output, many agencies are positioning themselves differently.

Branching out to become more specialized, they're honing in on their unique expertize and creative talent, because this is where agencies can't be beaten.

But at the heart of this is **deep consumer insight** that brands know and trust. This is what ensures creative work is on point and sure to have real impact.

Investing in transformative insight that goes far beyond demographics is where the indie of tomorrow can get a competitive advantage.

"The future for indies lies in marrying data with ideas," says Kevin Mulrane, VP of Sales development at GlobalWebIndex. "But it's not enough to have the right data to hand - you have to know how to use it to glean actionable and creative outcomes."

Big challenges

To a certain extent, independent agencies face the same anxieties as any other agency today; new technology, fast-paced industry changes, competition for talent, and much more. But some challenges are uniquely theirs.

Competing against agency networks.

Competition from large agencies is nothing new to indies, but there are more opportunities than ever to stand out and land significant contracts.

The ongoing shift towards project-based contracts is giving indies the chance to catch a brand's eye when looking to finalize their next project.

Flexibility and the ability to make changes in line with fast-moving consumer trends is where indies have an advantage over bigger players.

Richard Exon, Founder of Joint London, **says**, "15 years ago, your independent agencies were private versions of the publicly owned or holding company owned agencies. Today, all our businesses are different in type, specialism and expertise.

Huge diversification means we can compete with holding companies for different clients on different briefs."

Having less resource than key competitors.

Since indie agencies often have less resource available to them than their bigger counterparts, it's crucial to allocateit where it counts.

Today, you can't know whether a creative idea will work unless you've based it on accurate research that has come directly from the consumers themselves.

Knowing how consumers will respond to a campaign before launch is a sure way to streamline spend and improve ROI.

Gaining client trust without a big reputation or rich history.

A long-standing challenge for independent agencies has been competing with the sometimes **decades-long history** and relationships big agency networks can have.

But the attitude towards indies may be changing.

Andrew Roberts, Founder of agency Gravity Thinking, **says**, "There is a growing confidence in indie agencies from a senior level, those who, rather than seeing smaller agencies as a risk, see them as the opposite of that. They see the potential to a business, the benefit of more agility and access to senior expertise."

Big opportunities: a roundup from the experts

Despite the familiar obstacles of smaller budgets and fewer resources, indies have a lot of advantages over networked agencies.

01. Flexibility

For agencies, being able to adapt to the consumers they're targeting at any given time is even more crucial, as consumer, market and industry trends continue to move faster.

"The best thing about working in an independent agency is there's no red tape", says Matt Klein, VP at Elite Marketing Group. "If I want changes made, I have one boss, I put my ideas in front of him and we decide how to move forward, versus a long process and having to stay in your lane."

02. Creativity

Often the best creativity comes from unlikely places. For Dominic Poynter, Group Communications Strategy Director at Droga5, this has nothing to do with how much resource you have at your disposal.

"Independent agencies are usually smaller and have fewer resources", he says. "This can be a big advantage as it gives you more clarity of thought and encourages you to be more resourceful in how you think about developing insights and communicating as a team.

Most of us will agree some of the best campaigns we've worked on are the ones with the smallest budgets which echoes this thought; the less you have, the more creative you get."

03. Relationship-building

For independent agencies that are that bit smaller and more nimble, a key advantage for clients is the ability to work more face-to-face with the

same people, offering that one-to-one approach they can't always find.

"Business becomes more personal at an independent level", says Helene Dick, Strategy Director at Barton F. Graf. "It becomes about the relationship with that client and that business. You get a different type of relationship, because you can make choices you otherwise wouldn't be able to."

04. Passion

For most independent agencies, it's not about the biggest clients, it's about all clients. Their success isn't just driven by need or a sense of duty, there's a personal desire that plays an innate role in how they grow.

"With independent agencies, there's the hunger factor, the passion", says Matt. "We fight, claw and scratch for every piece of business we get. We value our clients to another level because we know we need to develop and grow that relationship and keep that business."

05. The personal touch

Data and research is where most great ideas are born, but it doesn't always start there. Often, data is used to prove or disprove our creative hunches, which can come from anywhere.

For most independent agencies, spending time with and listening to the clients is an essential step – not only for building that all-important relationship, but as a source of inspiration.

Someone will say something to you at some point which is fantastically interesting", says Dominic. "Our job is often to listen for that, take it and marry it with something else like a data point or an insight. I think that's where the personal touch plays a big role in building that relationship with clients."

Big data

Having access to the best data source sets you apart. Knowing how to use it makes you even more valuable.

GlobalWebIndex conducts a global survey that's fully opted-in and leverages a panel of 22 million consumers (the largest in the world), to give brands a true representation of their target audience.

Relying on a single source of data like this for your research, rather than juggling a number of data sets, makes it easier to join the dots and paint a harmonized picture of the audience you're looking to target.

Here are just some of the things you can create using deep survey data to support and generate ideas.

✔ Detailed consumer journey maps:

Consumer journey maps provide a detailed overview of the customer experience and the **path to purchase**. With granular data, you can create highly usable maps that will resonate with clients and strengthen campaigns.

✔ Personalized campaigns:

Today's consumers expect personalization – and so do your clients. Use insight that translates a consumer's behaviors, interests, attitudes and perceptions to tailor your campaigns to the right people, and make your **programmatic advertising** work as hard as it can.

✔ Tailored consumer insights:

Re-contact your target consumers using a single source of extensive survey data to cut to the chase and uncover insights tailored to your brief and objectives.

02

The changing role of insight

"Amazing things will happen when you listen to the consumer."

Jonathan Midenhall, CMO of Airbnb

Consumer insight has always been central to effective brand positioning and marketing strategy. Today, it's taking on a whole new role.

Traditionally a lengthy process involving several arms of external research, uncovering an actionable insight took both time and resource.

Now, every forward-thinking brand knows consumer-centricity is key – something only achieved by putting insight in the driving seat.

Because in the digital world, insight is everything.

Market research is moving in-house in a bid to 'take back control' of their budget and output, many brands are re-evaluating their approach, cutting their spend and refocusing their investment in-house.

Here's why.

Consumers have changed.

They expect more **personalization**, more authenticity, and more relevance from brands, meaning these brands need to know them on a much deeper level to meet expectations.

More than ever, insight is everything.

Brands are taking large scale audience research in-house to get straight to the insights that make a visible difference, because complex technology is making it possible and easier to reach a new audience, or optimize their existing reach.

Technology is paving the way for a new brand.

Disruptive technology is empowering brands, giving them more control, more knowledge and more visibility than ever. Solutions like GlobalWebIndex are making 'instant insight' a reality – enabling marketers to streamline their processes, align their strategies, and improve their effectiveness.

Strategic thinking is making a comeback.

Leading brands have realized the overarching need for strategic thinking versus tactical immediacy. They're taking robust, reliable and up-to-date consumer data in-house that enables them to infuse consumer-centricity in their strategy from end to end; telling them who to target, where to invest, what to measure and how to optimize.

Despite what appearances might imply, this isn't bad news for agencies.

While this shift in the balance of power is giving brands more control, agencies remain essential to brands. They infuse expertize, experience, industry knowledge and creative talent.

But the way they work together is changing, and their relationships are becoming even closer.

They assign workloads between them in a more strategic way that offers brands the transparency and control they demand, while enabling agencies to work to their strengths.

Essentially, brands must learn from the agencies they invest in, leveraging the tools at their disposal to put this into practice. That's why, as an agency looking to compete, you need deep insight you can trust to have impact.

Dominic Birch,

Strategic Agency Partner Manager at GlobalWebIndex

Whether it's a small idea or a big one, in today's ever-changing digital landscapes, strategies and campaigns need to be built on a foundation of originality, creativity and relevance. This is why insight and creativity are intrinsically linked.

After all, the most iconic examples of creativity in marketing are born from impactful insight.

I've worked with hundreds of independent agencies throughout my career, but have never seen agencies pick up anything as well as the GlobalWebIndex platform and data.

One indie agency that springs to mind works with a number of start-up organizations, helping them create outside-the-box ideas and ensuring these businesses stand out from the crowd, ahead of their competitors and notice significant growth.

GlobalWebIndex helps to fill the gap between innovation and performance.

The same agency had a fantastic idea and proposition for its client. We could then use our wealth of data straight from the consumers themselves to help the agency prove their creative hunch, and target the correct media channels with tailored content using the sort of messaging that's going to resonate with its audience.

We live in the audience age and the better you understand your audience, the better your delivery will be, and the more your message will stick.

Data vs. information vs. insight

Data, information and insight are often wrongly interpreted as being the same. In reality, an insight is the end result of pertinent analysis of the relevant data that's been harvested.

So how do you get from data to insight?

01 State a clear goal
Determine what you want your insight to achieve.

02 Prioritize your data
Which data sets will yield the results you need? With this knowledge, you won't get bogged down with irrelevant data.

03 Make it real
Add context to your data to see its true value and meaning. Data may seem useless until it's made human.

04 Map a day in the life
Use your data to create a map of a typical day for your consumer, shedding light on what they do.

05 Finished insight
With a relevant and truthful insight at hand, you're ready to put it into action.

"

Having opted-in, reliable data from the consumers themselves is vital to any agency looking to gain client trust and get buy-in for their ideas. By using deep insight harnessed from a trustworthy source, you can prove just how well you know your audience.

Tom Smith, Founder and CEO of GlobalWebIndex

"

03

The data-driven expert

"Marketing without data is like driving with your eyes closed."

Dan Zarrella, Social Media Scientist at Hubspot

The big idea behind using robust and reliable data to guide your decisions is to position your agency as data-driven experts.

But it's not enough to say you're data-driven - you need to prove it.

This means taking data far beyond what agencies are used to, translating the reasons and motivations behind consumers' actions and turning into compelling stories for clients to use.

The question of trust

When it comes to agency work, client trust is everything.

With the right level of trust, a client will have confidence in your recommendations, your decisions and your work, and keep coming back for more. This is the way to stronger and longer-lasting client relationships.

And off the back of the introduction of the GDPR and widespread discussion around data privacy in 2018, trust is set to be the topic of the year in 2019.

This is especially true for agencies.

According to ID Comms' **Global Media Transparency Survey**, "trust between advertisers and agencies has declined in the past 12 months, with just 10% of advertisers rating levels of trust with their agencies as 'high' or 'very high'."

So how can agencies increase trust levels among their clients, and use data and research responsibly and transparently?

The key lies in using research that shows your work is based on insight that comes directly from the consumers you're targeting.

Here's an example.

One U.S.-based independent agency was pitching for a new potential client, entering a competitive race for their next few years of creative work.

Looking to target millennials who primarily purchase products online, the agency knew it had to delve deep into this wide-reaching audience to have an impact.

The team, searching for insight that would spark creative ideas and teach them everything to know about the target consumers, posed these questions:

01 What **devices** do they use?

02 How do they **discover** brands?

03 What **social platforms** are important to them?

04 How do they **spend their time** on social platforms?

05 What do they want **brands to do** for them?

06 How do they conduct **product research** before purchasing?

Profiling millenial online buyers

Turning to GlobalWebIndex for answers, the team found insight that would guide their pitch and strategy to a win.

Device Ownership

96%   74%   38%

Social Platforms

71%   54%   66%
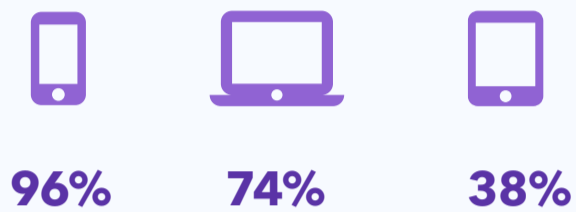
Social Media Motivations

46%
Stay up-to-date on news and events

44%
Fill up spare time

44%
Find funny or entertaining content

Brand Discovery

39%   35%   33%
Search engines   TV ads   Reviews from friends

Product Research

48%   43%   38%
Search engines   Social platforms   Consumer reviews

Brand Needs

27%
Improve my knowledge and skills

27%
Provide innovative new products

24%
Produce eco-friendly products

This paints a portrait of a consumer who:

✔ Is mobile-first.

✔ Actively discovers brands and researches products by using search engines.

✔ Wants a strong relationship with brands they can learn from.

✔ Enjoys video content.

✔ Uses social media for a combination of news and entertainment.

Knowing the full story, focusing on the details and the motivations behind the actions, the team could present the client with a campaign strategy guaranteed to have an impact.

By showing the client that every pitch and idea is backed by universal truths, they proved they could be trusted to present strategies that are finely tuned to the right consumers, and that their data is fully opted-in by the consumers themselves.

The power of difference

One crucial component of independent agencies that sets them apart from their older and larger competitors is their point of difference. This is what can make them truly stand out from the crowd.

Being more flexible, more creative and having the bravery to try new and unexpected things offer clear advantages.
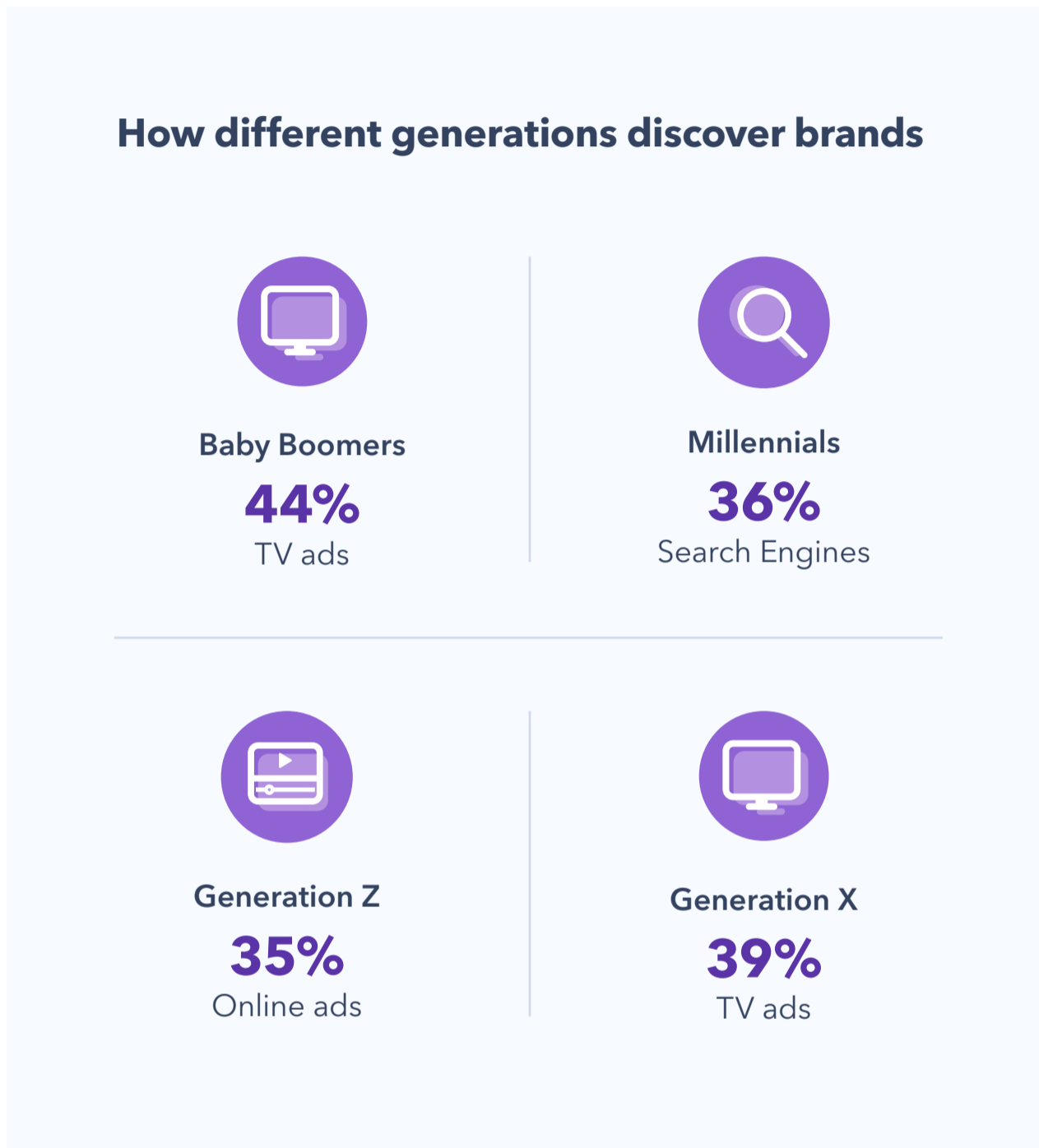
But crucially, indies have the opportunity to be truly and radically data-driven.

For example, you may run a brand awareness campaign via a number of marketing channels. But unless you know that not only are the right consumers present on these channels, they're also open to discovering brands or products on them, you don't know whether the campaign will work.

You need to know the motivations behind your target consumers' actions, or you're simply guessing.

Without knowing their reasons for doing something, your efforts won't have the impact you want, for one simple reason: people have different ways of doing different things.

Let's look at generational differences in brand discovery.

How different generations discover brands

Baby Boomers
44%
TV ads

Millennials
36%
Search Engines

Generation Z
35%
Online ads

Generation X
39%
TV ads

With this information at hand, it's clear that any campaign strategy targeting one or more of these generational divisions will need to be optimized in the right way.

This way, agencies prove they're fully data-driven, they're flexible (as opposed to their decades-old competitors), and they truly know their target consumers.

04

Pitch perfect

> **"The key is, no matter what story you tell, make your buyer the hero."**
>
> Chris Brogan, CEO of Owner Media Group

The key to winning new business and delivering a successful pitch is to know the consumer far better than the client.

But it's not enough to rely solely on experience or assumption.

To truly prove to clients that you understand their audience, you need to lean on trustworthy data and present it in a way your client can immediately understand.

Finding the answers

So what actually makes a pitch stand out? Having knowledge and insight that backs up your idea and solves a problem for your client.

When your pitches are based on solid fact, there's no room for guesswork, assumptions or second-guessing, and your clients can feel secure and confident that your ideas are 100% consumer-centric.

With brands now being less likely to stay with the same agency long-term, and leaning more towards project-based contracts, it's the perfect time for indies to catch their eye.

And what better way to do it than by proving you're the experts?

Use granular insight to show prospective clients you don't only have big ideas - you have solid strategies that are built on universal truths you can really trust.

The importance of insight in pitching

✔ It helps you **stand out from the crowd.**

✔ It makes everything from campaign and strategy to media planning **easy as pie.**

✔ It squeezes the most out of your **time and budget.**

✔ It gives you the data you need to **back up your creative talent.**

✔ It enables you to compete with the **world's top agencies.**

The challenge

Getting to the revealing insight.

For every agency, the ability to profile a client's target audiences effectively is essential in acquiring valuable insights. But for David Preece and Nick Siantonas, both Senior Strategists at Brilliant Noise, consumer profiling plays a much more important role across their business.

"This data plays an integral part in our customer planning work", says David.

We chose GlobalWebIndex as it provides the attitudinal and behavioral data we need to backup our ideas.

"We can then combine it with live social data, conversational data and website analytics."

The action

Backing creative ideas with behavioral data.

This capability gives the agency the quantitative proof behind their work and allows them to make the case for strategic and creative solutions for prospective clients.

"We've used this data in several pitches – one recently, for example, where GlobalWebIndex acted as the proof point and core of the pitch," says Nick.

The result

Winning new business with data-driven solutions.

Using consumer data that went beyond what they were used to,
Brilliant Noise:

✔ Won new business with unique insight they couldn't find elsewhere.

✔ Saved time and resource with ready access to robust research.

✔ Improved targeting with revealing consumer data.

Having instant access to unique insight that made them stand out from
the crowd meant they could improve their confidence and show off
their individuality.

I would definitely recommend GlobalWebIndex to other professionals, it's really powerful and easy to use.

Download the full case study **here.**

Winning new business

As we've established, it's not good enough to just show up with good ideas. You need to prove how those ideas will make a difference to their brand. Here's how to do it.

Ensure your data source is credible.

Make sure your data's coming from a credible source that will help you develop your expertise, not hinder it.

Find the insights your clients don't have.

Come prepared with deep insight into their target audiences, and showcase not only your ability and your eagerness to know their consumers inside and out.

Understand more than just behaviors.

Your data source of choice must offer insight into not only behaviors and demographics, but motivations and perceptions.

Visualize the journey.

The best way to win a pitch is to provide insight into everything from a day in the target consumers' lives to their path to purchase.

Be a data storyteller.

For your client to really believe in what you're saying, it takes creating a story that will resonate, just as you might do with any campaign.

Show them the return.

Putting granular consumer data behind your ideas proves to the client you have a solid, reliable foundation to work from, rather than turning to educated assumption.

PPC and Biddable experts Katté & Co are enjoying a meteoric rise in the agency world, having just been highlighted as one of The Drum's Top 100 Independent Agencies.

The team knows the true value of consumer data and the impact it can have. Here's what Jack Giddens, Head of Biddable at Katté & Co, has to say.

Q: **How do you use consumer insight from GlobalWebIndex to prepare pitches?**

Getting an understanding of how consumers behave gives us real insight into how to frame a pitch. Being able to get in front of a prospective client with real data on their consumers is invaluable.

We use GlobalWebIndex to show prospective clients that we have a deep understanding of their target market, and that we have the data to prove it.

Q: **How has this strengthened your pitching?**

Being an agency that prides itself on data, this information helps us highlight that and put more weight behind the pitch.

Q: **Any words of wisdom for other indie agencies?**

We'd highly recommend investing in a granular consumer data source, like GlobalWebIndex, and taking the time to get to know your audience.

The more information you have on who you're targeting, the more detailed your targeting can be and, effectively,the better your ROAS will be.

Conclusion

The competition in the agency world is stiffer than ever, but it's possible to stand out.

While most agencies have access to and use a data source, the data itself has evolved far past its ancestors.

Now, you can get complete insight from the consumers themselves, based on their behaviors, perceptions and attitudes, enabling you to know not only what they're doing, but why.

This way, you can generate unique ideas that are guaranteed to resonate and engage, proving to clients that you don't simply rely on past experience or educated guesses.

When you use a top-tier data source, and use it right, you can go far beyond being data-driven and prove yourselves as the true consumer experts.

Curiosity about life, in all its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people.

Leo Burnett, Founder of Leo Burnett Worldwide

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