URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/conducting-valuable-research

Alexandra Zatarain, co-founder and VP of brand and marketing at Eight Sleep, shares how her company starts with qualitative research, having deep conversations with individuals to learn about their problems. Once they have enough information about a target audience to construct a profile, she says, they start gathering more quantitative data.

Transcript

- Is there a type of research 00:00:04,560 that is the best to help inform which target audience to go after? Is it surveys? Is it observation studies? It sounds like it might be psychographic investigations.. Is it all equally good without one being saliently the best? I guess that's question number one.. And then question number two is, can we dive into then, how do you identify what is this? What's the salient filter to determine who is the target audience? - Yeah.. 00:00:30,990 So, on your first question, I'm a huge fan of doing calls with people or meet face to face.. So, really like you're having a conversation individually, not focus groups with people at the beginning who you believe could be within your consumer segment, right? And then, from those calls, all you're doing is you need to go into it with a lot of curiosity.. So in our case, what we did is when we started the company, we, Matt and I, moved to San Francisco, where our other co-founder Max was based.. And we had this apartment in Soma, and we would basically invite people.. That was our office.. And we would invite people, anyone that we knew, to just come in and talk about their sleep.. We just wanted to learn what were the problems that people had in their sleep? What were they struggling with? And we would just listen..

And it's like therapy, right? You're just like asking all these questions and all these whys.. And you're trying to get to the why.. Why do you do what you do today? Why do you use these products? What have you bought in your sleep? What mattress do you have? What lamp do you have in your nightstand? Anything and everything.. So, you're trying to build this profile in your mind because you don't want to make decisions about your business just based on who you are and your view of the world, right? And from those conversations, there were a lot of interesting themes that started coming up.. Temperature started surfacing as a big thing.. Couples fighting around temperature started surfacing as a huge thing.. So we're like, oh, this is interesting.. So, we may have already had an idea of what we wanted to build in the product.. But by listening to people talk about their problems, we started to shape the narrative for how we could pitch this product to the consumers.. And we started to understand that there were certain types of people, maybe in certain ages or with certain lifestyles, or with certain incomes, that were more interested in our product, or were willing to pay for our product..

And so what happens is I always describe it as like, it's not perfect science.. There's a bit of that art and that intuition where you start triangulating all of this information.. So you got to speak to a good number of people, especially initially, right? 20, 50, a hundred, like just spend time in those potential communities, start seeing where the signals take you.. And maybe as you find that some communities may be more prone to buy your products, spend more time with them, start really

focusing on them and going deeper and deeper and deeper, and then spend the time constructing what this profile of these individuals is.. And from there, what I like to do is then I take it into something a bit more quantitative.. And so initially for a startup, especially in the consumer space, and you start building things like, well, why don't we put a little bit of money in ads and run some ads and then go to landing pages and see what happens? And do people give us their email? And is there some interest, or at the time, way back, you know, you launch on crowdfunding and you see what happens? So you start trying to get signals at scale, because obviously those one-to-one conversations are only going to take you so far...