

a branded world

PODCAST

with
Luiza Campos



003 | HOW RESEARCH HELPS CRAFT
WINNING BRAND STRATEGIES WITH
MATHEW STONE, CO-FOUNDER OF
STONE-OLAFSON

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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A BRANDED WORLD PODCAST - 003 | HOW RESEARCH HELPS CRAFT WINNING BRAND STRATEGIES WITH MATHEW STONE, CO-FOUNDER OF STONE - OLAFSON

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Luiza Campos: You're listening to A Branded World podcast, episode number three.

Announcer: Welcome to A Branded World podcast where we explore great brands and give you tips, tools, hacks, and guides to create brands that captivate clients and drive growth and revenue. Now your host Luiza Campos.

Luiza Campos: Hello, everyone. We have a great episode for you. Today, I'm interviewing Mathew Stone, co-founder of Stone and Olafson. This is a really interesting interview. We talk about a topic that a lot of small businesses and nonprofits are not paying enough attention, or not using this tool. At least, not as much as they could be using. This is research. Now Mathew has a great experience. He started his career as a brand manager himself. He really understands what it takes to build a strong and magnetic brand. He also understands the important role that research plays in doing that. He goes into a lot of detail in terms of what are the steps that you need to take to use research. Even if you don't have a big budget. This is something that anyone can do, regardless of the size of your organization. Regardless, of the budgets that you have.

One of the things that I really love about Mathew and his team at Stone and Olafson, is that they are not only great experts in conducting research, in getting that information, but they go a step beyond, which is something that, in my experience, it's really hard to find. They actually have the ability to put the information that they gather from the research, put it into context with what we know about the brand, with what we know about the organization, or your business, and actually translate that information into actions that you can take to build a stronger brand. This is key because research is just the first step, finding that information is just the first thing you can do to build a stronger brand, to build a stronger bond between you and your audience. Listen to this episode, you will get a lot of things out of it. At the end, make sure to go to ABrandedWorldPodcast.com and check the show notes. We'll have a lot of information there as well as a downloadable PDF

with some of the key takeaways that Matthew talks about in this episode.

Here you go, here we are with Matthew Stone from Stone and Olafson. Enjoy.

Hi Matthew, how are you?

Mathew Stone: I am great, and yourself Luiza?

Luiza Campos: I'm great, thank you so much for being here with us today. I am very excited to interview you, and have our listeners hear your story, and what you have to say about research.

Mathew Stone: Perfect, well thanks for having me, looking forward to our chat.

Luiza Campos: Awesome, I thought we could start by having you tell a little bit about yourself and how you got started in the world of research.

Mathew Stone: Well, I came up research in the business world from a little bit different perspective. When I give talks often people assume that I went to business school but I didn't. I came to business world honestly through a liberal arts education so I ended up in Calgary working in market research through a variety of different paths. Our approach, how I ended up here, is really all about working with different organizations and realizing that people weren't getting the answers they're needing by looking at things in the normal way. What I mean by that is business solutions, and things, all work just fine, but sometimes organizations need a creative and fresh approach. I ended up here by combining some research and basic data understanding and understanding what people say, and attaching creative thinking and creative approach to it. Ultimately, come by it a little bit differently than most that you might see.

Luiza Campos: That's really interesting. Can you tell us a little bit more about attaching this research with creative thinking? Because I think we get to really the main importance of research, which is not just having the data itself, but what makes you really good, what makes Matthew really good at what he does, is you actually interpret that data. You're really able to make sense of it and tell the client how to then use that into brand strategies, right?

Mathew Stone: Absolutely. I think one of the misconceptions about using research is that people depend on it as seeing data as fact. You're right, data is fact, but too often researchers who will come at it, and say, "Here

are the facts and this is what the facts are showing," but if you talk to most researchers they'll stop there. Because few are willing to go so far as to say, "This is what you should do." We like to take a different approach because we've been in your shoes.

We've been in the shoes of a client at our team, and in my experience, I've actually had to sit in a marketing chair and lead a brand redevelopment, so I understand what the challenges are. Quite often when it comes to research, people just say, "The data is what the data is," but the problem is, is that people don't always say what they really mean in research.

It's important to go beyond the numbers and put it into context. Context is absolutely critical when you're doing your research because nothing ever occurs in a vacuum. We ask the questions in a vacuum, and we do the research in a vacuum, because we have to, but the real meaning of it doesn't exist there. It's really important to add context to everything that we're talking about. That context really depends on understanding what's going on around us in the market, but also understanding exactly where brands are really at in terms of how they intersect with their market, how they intersect with their audiences, and what are some of the internal challenges they have. Organizations that use research really well tend to put it all there and understand, "Okay, this is what it means," but then look at all the other pieces that might be influencing it.

Things like new product development might be impacting a brand, or a recent issue will be impacting a brand, and bringing those things to context. It requires taking a creative approach to it because you can't just say, "This is the numbers and that's what it is." You have to think about it a little bit differently. A little bit of background and history helps with that because I can look at things in a little bit different way.

Luiza Campos: That's really important, I think, you can't just take the data, the findings from the research, and you also have to think about, as you were mentioning, everything else that is going on with the brand. You really have to work very closely with the client, and the client has to be in really good touch with what she's going on with the brand.

Mathew Stone: Yeah, absolutely. Good thing to think about, a good example of that is after the last hockey lockout, everybody loves hockey so it's an easy one to relate to. All of the polls, the public opinion polls, that were out there during the lockout said one after the other that

fans were angry about hockey, and disappointed, and weren't going to go back, and they weren't going to spend anymore money because they were tired of supporting millionaires and billionaires and their fight. Fine, that's what the facts said, but put in the context, they forget that fans have attachment to hockey, and sports, and their hockey stars. What happened after the lockout was ended?

People came back in droves. Every arena was sold out, merchandise sales were all through the roof. Without context people would have assumed, wow, NHL and each hockey club has a lot of work to do. The fact is, is that that's a brand, sports brand, that was superseding the sports, and transcending cultural lines, and population lines, and so as a result there was no negative impact. People were disappointed, yeah absolutely, but business performance was unaffected.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, their attachment to the brand was much stronger than that incident that happened.

Mathew Stone: Absolutely, there's an emotional piece there, right? There's benefits attached to that, to participating and observing it.

Luiza Campos: Can you tell us a little bit, Matthew, in terms of the importance, the way you would see, or you would recommend a brand use it, between a new organization, a brand-new business, or a startup, and a more established business, perhaps one that an organization has been around for a long time. Is there a difference in the use of research, or how would you recommend this to different organizations go about it?

Mathew Stone: Well at the end of the day, a great question, at the end of the day research is one tool in a toolbox. Depending on where you are, the biggest difference between organizations and their ability to use research, really comes down to resources. The fact is, is that they all still should be looking at facts wherever they can get them, in order to inform their business. For a new startup, that's particularly obvious is, is that they need to understand what the market's appetite is for their product, or their service, that they're offering. For larger organizations, it's understanding how that product is being received, or the services being received. For established it's how do they stay fresh. Research plays a role in getting that information out throughout.

Ultimately, there are some consistencies across all of them that each one of those types of organizations should be using research to understand. Beyond the obvious, it's really important for organizations to say, "Okay, great. How much do people know about my product and service they're offering? What do they really see as the benefits in getting out of it." It's a difference between a feature discussion and a benefit discussion.

To use the running shoe analogy, Nike would say, "They could focus on features and do research on that," and say, "Our running shoes are the lightest, they have the best laces, they have the best treads," but that's only one side of the story. If they focus on the benefit so it makes the athlete feel stronger, makes the athlete feel lighter, makes the athlete feel better, makes them feel like they can perform, they're more confident, those are differences.

Every organization, regardless of where they are at, should be focusing on trying to understand not just what the features are, and how people perceive them, and whether or not they're open to them, but also whether or not they understand the true benefits that their consumer base is trying to get out of it. From a brand perspective, it's exactly the same thing. Brands only work when they're looking for alignment between what they stand for, the experiences and benefits they offer, their reputation, and how they market themselves. Every organization should be looking at it that way because it's comprehensive, it's wholesome, it doesn't leave anything out of the picture.

Luiza Campos: This is exactly what I always tell my clients. You're having a good product with features and benefits that your audience perceives as being useful, is one thing, and I would even argue that those are table stakes. Those are the minimum that you need to have, a good product or service, but beyond that you really need to understand what is the true difference that you're making to your audience, that your product or service will bring to them, and that emotional attachment they may have with your brand, right?

Mathew Stone: Absolutely, that emotional side is hard to quantify but it's not impossible, right? The research can really help understand that because it's just a matter of understanding what people get out of it. From there, figuring out what the emotional attachment is. That's why you see so many tourism campaigns that use to focus on, "Here's our place, and here's what we can do, and here's what you have to do, and here's how you can save, and here's how you get there," versus the new tourism marketing which focuses all on

the emotional outputs of travel. There's a big difference. You see marketing moving more, and more, and more, away from that. Even computers, phones, any manner of product now focuses on that emotional side. Those brands that are more sophisticated in how they promote themselves really delve into that, and make the connection between that emotional output, and the features that they're offering, and then their actual brand. It's really, really critical.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, because emotion drives action.

Mathew Stone: Yes, absolutely. In most cases, yeah.

Luiza Campos: What are some the big mistakes that you see people do usually in research? Is not looking for that emotional side or what else do you see?

Mathew Stone: Well that's part of it. I think the first thing we quite often see, particularly with entrepreneurs starting up because they don't have the resources, time, or money, to invest in research. They make the assumption that they already know, or they hear feedback from one or two sources. It's so frequent that we talk to somebody and somebody that needs help, looking for guidance, and they say, "I heard from ..." it's usually one or two people who give them some kind of insight, or opinion, and they use that as fact.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, I showed it to my friend and he really liked it, right?

Mathew Stone: That's right.

Luiza Campos: Yeah.

Mathew Stone: My wife is an expert in marketing and therefore, this, or that. The problem with that is, is that obviously is just a sample of one, it's just an opinion, it's not fact. That's the first thing. People will take one or two opinions as true fact. I think the second thing is they assume that they have to spend money on doing customized market research. There is so much information available to entrepreneurs, startups particularly, that are starting out, to say, "Hey, I can get real information that will help me make my own business decision, and make good business decisions."

Luiza Campos: Tell us more about that because most of our listeners will likely be small businesses, startups, or nonprofits. How can someone, or

what would you recommend for someone, who doesn't have a big budget? Still take advantage or use research in their toolbox?

Mathew Stone: The first thing I would suggest anybody, whether they're big, new, or small, startup, or been around for 100 years, is first to sit down before you go looking for information, is to figure out exactly what you're trying to understand. It's so common that people will go into quote, unquote, research activities, without a plan, or an understanding of what they're really trying to decide. The challenge with that is, is that it will lead to misleading answers, or the wrong answers, or facts that aren't actually supporting what their business challenge is.

By understanding exactly what they're trying to figure out, whether it's how big is my market, what's the appetite for my product, how do people see my brand, what do I need in order to make people want my product, all those questions. Exactly pinpointing the specific business challenges is absolutely critical. From there a bunch of secondary questions become obvious. Make sure you have a plan, step one.

The second thing is, is to look for available information. There is a ton of information out there right now that can help any number of businesses. Number one, Census Canada, they recently brought back the long form census. 2016 was the first year in a few years that we've had the long form census. By spending some time at the Stats Canada website, you can get a whole lot of valuable information in terms of what the market might look like, what people are spending on, everything from discretionary spending, to lifestyles, household composition, any number of that kind of census data is absolutely critical. If you delve deep enough, you can find out to the point of understanding within your geographic market, where certain types of people live. Which may help you pinpoint your market.

The third thing is, is to look at it and say, "Wow, there are secondary research sources out there." Your local chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, business associations, have all likely invested in research. Much of it is freely available as a member. Go talk to those organizations that you're a member of and explain to them what you're looking for. The chances are, they're going to probably have something that's either directly, or indirectly, helping you with your information.

Finally, last thing, is to be prepared to ask your potential customers, or your current customers, particularly if you're startup, some simple questions. Don't do your own research and try and make it a long complex thing. Just keep it really simple. Things like, "Are we meeting your needs? If so how, if not, why not? How did you hear about us?" Simple, right? "Would you recommend us?" That kind of stuff. Simple things that help us understand, help you understand your own business.

Luiza Campos: How would you recommend them going about that, asking the client directly through just direct one on ones? Or some survey, Survey Monkey type of thing, or what would you recommend?

Mathew Stone: Well I think one, is to always engage your customers. At the end of the day, recognize that research is just one way of engaging customers with your brand. It's no different than good customer service. The difference is, is that you're giving people the opportunity to be anonymous in giving their feedback. Whenever you ask a customer, they're going to be hesitant to tell you what you really want to hear. Mostly because if it's not good news, which is sometimes the most important to hear, they don't want to hurt your feelings. People will tell something in a survey, or say something to another researcher, that they wouldn't say to a business owner. The first thing is to look at some simple tools. You can put ... If you have a retail outlet, you can implement simple drop card, paper survey tools, but the trick is to keep it really, really simple.

The other thing is, is there's, with the digital age, there's all manner of tools that are available. Many of them are freely available or part of a marketing package, so they give people the opportunity to either send them an email, or a text, right after having the experience. These are great tools because you can ask one or two questions, and get instant feedback that you can use to either adjust, or direct, or continue doing your business. Things like Survey Monkey are never a bad thing, just don't over use them. A lot of these tools are available, they're free, they're easy. Just go online and look for those simple digital tools. Survey Monkey would be at the top, and then there's a bunch of text POS tools that people can use, point of sales tools that people can use as well.

The trick is to get independent verification. Don't ask your customer, because they're not necessarily going face to face,

because they're not necessarily going to tell you what you want to hear.

Luiza Campos: Using a third party, and keeping it confidential, so the clients feel comfortable being honest with their answer.

Mathew Stone: Absolutely. I think part of that, Luiza, it's confidentiality is key but also when you're sending them a survey it's not good practice just to send them a survey and say, "We want your thoughts." It's important to tell them what you're doing and why. It's simple message of saying, "We want to make sure we're doing our best, please tell us what we're doing ... what we could do better." Or, "Please take a few minutes to finish one or two questions about our service and what it means to you."

Luiza Campos: That just seems a really great practice to have as an ongoing practice, right? How often do you recommend that this type of surveys, and touching base with the clients, take place?

Mathew Stone: Well if it's a simple touch base with your clients, that's something you can keep going, keep doing on an ongoing basis. Because, particularly, for businesses that are in a retail or service sector, it's really, really simple and easy to do. You should do it ongoing and look at the results on a fairly regular basis. The thing is, is that you want to make sure you have enough results to look at to make it meaningful. If you get one or two a day, sure, pull your data every three or four months and then look at it, so you have at least a certain number of people that can answer, give you some sense that what you're looking at is real and not just another opinion that you're getting from somebody that you're talking to.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, because, and this is another question that I have for you, I see sometimes that some organizations do specific research, particularly if they're launching a new product or service, or if they're having a challenge, right? If they lose some market share, or something like that. Is there something that you recommend companies do more on an ongoing basis, just to make sure that they are in touch with their brand, that they know that the efforts that they're putting behind, and the promotions that they're doing, or all of their efforts in promoting the brand, is in sync with what the customers want?

Mathew Stone: That's a tough one. Yeah, there are some things that people should be doing all the time. Whether or not your services are meeting the needs, and their awareness and perceptions of your brand, can be

helpful. I think probably one of the most important things to do, and we talked about this a little bit earlier, was just to make sure that you're asking the types of questions on a regular basis that align with where you want your brand to go. By that I mean is you need to have fundamental understanding of what's driving your brand so that you're asking about the right things. It's never going to be the same thing for everybody. I'd like to be able to say, "Here's the three questions you can ask all the time," but it just doesn't work that way. Each brand will be slightly different and they need to be pushing on those specific things.

I just need to probably clarify on that, what I mean by making sure you're asking the right questions is to say, "Hey, do I know exactly what benefits my customers are getting from our brand? Are they getting the right emotional connection?" Once you understand that, that's the question that you need to be asking on a regular basis so that you can keep a finger on the pulse, customer base. You can also then ask those other questions that go along with it.

As an example, if you are delivering a retail product that is made to make people more healthy, and it's a fitness product, then you want to be able to understand that, okay, our brand is actually not just going to make people healthy, that's a feature, but people are going to feel better about themselves, and they're going to be feeling better about where their family is at, as an example. That means they're going to have to be satisfied that they're getting the health nutrition benefits that they want, they're getting the physical aspects of their product right, whatever it is, the specific pieces that drive those emotional benefits is what you need to ask about. Because from there you can drive the other emotional benefits. It's going to be different for every company.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, for sure. Before I forget, you mentioned some digital tools that are free, or very inexpensive, that small businesses and nonprofits can use. Maybe if you can refer to what some of those are and I'll also add them to the show notes.

Mathew Stone: Well Survey Monkey is definitely one that everybody knows about. That's an easy one. Then from there, there's a host of text to tools. I'll have to, Luiza, I'll have to get you a list of things. I don't have off the top of my head but I know that people use. Just so you can have that.

Luiza Campos: Perfect, yeah. We'll add that into the show notes, that would be great.

Mathew Stone: Sure.

Luiza Campos: That would be great. Do you have an example that you can share with us, Matthew, of an organization, however big or small, that you can think of that is a really great example of how they use research?

Mathew Stone: Yeah, absolutely. I'd like to brag and say that we have a lot of clients across Canada and North America that are really good at using research. Some are better than others. I think there's a local example in Calgary that people might be surprised to see that ... research so much. One would be the Calgary Stampede. They are an organization that is truly in touch with the community all the time. They're doing ongoing guest research, they're doing ongoing stakeholder research, reputation work, they're trying to understand what drives their brand, what messages propel that brand forward, how people experience their products and services throughout, and how that necessarily works together.

They're an industry leader. What makes them even strong is they take the time to apply it throughout their business. If you walk through Calgary Stampede Park, you'll see tons of examples of where guest feedback has actually changed the experiences being offered. They're an awesome one.

It's not just because they do a lot, or invest a lot, but it's because they spend a lot of time understanding what does this mean for my business, what's the context that can help me, and then adding a bunch of other business information that will help them move forward with a decision. They would be, what I consider, an industry leader. It's not coincidence that they're one of the few fairs across North America that sees attendance actually increasing, or staying flat, over time, because the industry trend is actually strong decline. A good comparator is the CapEx in Edmonton whereas that organization has had some really challenging few years.

There's other examples as well. When I look at retailers, Princess Auto is a great example of one that spends a lot of time understanding exactly who their different retail lines of business are, and what specific products they need to be offering, in order to meet their customers' needs. Again, they spend a lot of time figuring out who their people are, what they're doing, not just what they want to buy, but what exactly are they using the tools for? What exactly are you using that equipment for? From there they

can go and pick products that are actually going to help them move their business forward. Those are two big examples.

There are lots of smaller examples as well. I can think of a variety of arts organizations that take the time to say, "Who is my customer? What is my market? What are they doing? What do they want us to provide? Not just from an entertainment perspective, but what kind of emotional outcomes do people want when they experience art, or smaller attractions like that?" The key for all of them though, the common trend for them, regardless of whether they're spending huge amounts of dollars, or very, very little amounts of dollars, is they're putting everything into context. They don't just look at one piece of data, they at it within the scope of all the information that they have available.

Luiza Campos: Well and what I got from the examples you provided as well is that actually research is step one. Then it's putting into context, understanding what the findings, and the insights mean, but then actually taking action, right? If you just get your research and your data, but you don't act upon them, then you might as well not do it, right?

Mathew Stone: We absolutely. There's a lot of creative exercises. I mean, when you talk to businesses that have been around for a long time, and work with advertising agencies, and you talk to new businesses who are just developing new lines of business, they tend to bring a planning approach to their product, or marketing campaigns, that is a little bit backwards than how we might approach it. Many start at the other. From a marketing perspective, and you've seen this before too, where an agency will say, "Hey, let us write your creative brief," or, "Let us help you with your briefing so that we can get the message right." The challenge with that is, is that you're starting at the wrong end. Why not start with facts and get the customer to write the brief for you?

That's how we approach it when we deal with a lot of our clients, and more common, and common practice is, is where our team is the one who comes in and says, "Okay great. Here's what the brief should look like." We'll actually write the product development brief, or the marketing brief, as the voice as the customer. Here's what it needs to achieve. Here's the business challenges it needs to solve. Here's what your customer looks like. Here's what they need hear. Here are your requirements. That helps some agencies move forward. Not everybody likes that because it's a little bit out of the norm but what ends up being is a much more solid, robust

campaign that frees up the agency to come up with creative solutions to those simple business challenges.

Luiza Campos: And a much more accurate reflection of what your customer is really looking for.

Mathew Stone: Absolutely, it helps the client at the end of the day as well, because there's something clearly accountable. Where the consultant that's helping them with the challenge is going to have to meet certain, very specific, clear needs. All because this is what the customer told us.

Luiza Campos: Yeah, exactly. It's so important to be in touch with that.

Mathew Stone: Yeah, absolutely. If the customer, and through that alignment with your brand, is able to show you, then your research in doing that is able to show you what alignment looks like for your brand. It is absolutely critical. Too often we see brands, and you've seen this from a mile away as well for many organizations, where they do some things really, really well, but because they're only looking at one or two pieces of information, they're not actually creating the ideal conditions for their brand to thrive. We always look at it, and chatted about this before, but we've always look at the brand as like a well-balanced wheel, right?

It's really composed of having a clarity about what you stand for, having clarity about the features and the benefits that you offer, having clarity about the kind of reputation you want, and having clarity about what messages you're putting in the market, and making sure that all of those are working together and aligned. That they're all saying the same thing. It's not good if you have a brand that says, "Hey we are the best running shoe in the market that will make you feel a million times lighter, and you will feel much more confident about what you can do with that running shoe," but your product doesn't necessarily deliver that. Because it might be much heavier and the tread is not as good. There's not alignment. As long as you have that alignment, that's where brands reach their potential.

Luiza Campos: Yes, in getting all of the alignment in all of those pieces. It's really important, from the get go, to start it right, right? I don't know, but potentially a lot of new businesses, or small organizations, they don't have a big budget, so they may not think that this is as important, that doing the research, or getting that alignment is as essential to launch their business. What would you recommend, I

guess that's my question, what would you recommend someone who is starting out, and we've talked a little bit about this already, if they don't have a big budget. How would you recommend that they go about this, setting it right from the get go? Because otherwise you much more likely to fail, even if you have a good product and service. We've seen this lots of times, right? What would you recommend?

Mathew Stone: Well you remind me of the David Ogilvy quote, something along the lines of people who ignore research, or dangerous generals who ignore codes from the enemies' signals.

Luiza Campos: That's right.

Mathew Stone: It's shocking to me how many organizations will say, "I don't need to do research, I already know," or, "I don't have time to invest," or, "What am I going to learn from that?" It's absolutely shocking and I can give you examples of various industries that are facing major public relations and brand challenges, simply because they didn't take the time to understand what the market really thought of them. The best example is probably the energy sector in Alberta, for years, was out there saying, "Hey, we already know," or, "I'm not worried about the general public consumer. I take the oil and gas out of the ground."

Luiza Campos: That's sad.

Mathew Stone: Until they have to move a pipeline forward and get public approval for it, they don't really understand. It's a missed opportunity. What I would advise everybody to do is to stop for a second, and say, "Hey, what am I doing and why am I doing it?" Then from there saying, "What do I know and what do I don't know? What do I know for real? How do I know that?" Asking some simple questions will unearth clear gaps in information that they're going to have. At the end of the day, research is really just about asking the right questions, listening, and then doing it again, over, and over, and over again. In the simplest terms, for an organization starting out, make sure that you have as much information as possible available to you. Whether it's secondary source, or census data, or anything available about your market, any of that information is invaluable. Because it may be taking you a bit of time to collect it, but it's way less expensive, and it mitigates a whole lot of risk having it, and then instead of not having it, and trying something, and spending lots of money, and time, and energy, and having it fail, just because you may have missed one or two things.

The most common excuse is, "I don't have the money for it." At the end of the day, I'd like to remind people that can they afford to fail without it?

Luiza Campos: Exactly. It's much more expensive to fail. That's it. A lot of times when you are starting up, you're focused on, and you're so immersed, in your product, and you believe in it so much, in your product and service, that you just have this strong belief that you will succeed. You need to validate that to ensure that you're not going to fail and it's not going to be this huge costly project, or endeavor. The same applies for nonprofits, I feel a lot of times, because ... I mean nonprofits are based in causes that people are so passionate about that it's hard for them to not believe that others would feel the same way, right?

Mathew Stone: Absolutely.

Luiza Campos: Do you have any advice for nonprofits?

Mathew Stone: Similar to any startup business is just to don't undervalue what information is available for you. Too often they'll say, "We have a scarcity of resources, that our budgets are so small that we can't really invest in doing something." When we do invest, they tend to spend in the wrong thing. A great example is a not for profit organization that talks to only people who attend their events, or people who only give to their causes. They don't talk to everybody else. That leads to really misleading information because they're just talking to ... they're hearing what they want to hear. It's like asking your best friend if they like what you're wearing, right?

At the end of the day it's not very helpful. If they're not going to necessarily tell you, because they're going to like it, because they think like you.

My advice for not for profits is whenever you possibly can, spend the time talking to the people that you don't do business with that are relevant to you. Find out what the market really thinks whenever possible. It doesn't have to be a huge amount of money, you can go do research with a professional organization that does on the bus surveys, ask one or two questions, and much less expensive than doing a custom survey. Do it with people who you don't interact with on a daily basis. The worst thing that not for profits can hear is more from the people they serve right now,

because they're already aligned, and it doesn't necessarily help them.

The other thing is, is to find simple ways to collect information from the people that you serve, and then look for more people like them in the market. So, quite often profiling research is often overlooked because it's not what we would see as formal market research. If any organization that's a not for profit, likely one of their biggest assets that they have are the lists of people who support them. They're often not tapping into those lists of people to understand how frequently are they engaging with the not for profit, what do they look like, what's their gender, their age, their household composition, if at all possible. Why do they support this organization? Some simple things. Having that basic information really, really helps. Because when you go and do research with the people that you don't work with, you can start to connect the dots, right, and find more people like them. Those would be the two places that I would start with, for sure.

Then just make sure. Plan, plan, plan at the very beginning. When you're doing your research, before you go do your research, again, go back to figuring out exactly why are we doing this and what problem are we really trying to solve.

Luiza Campos: Great advice Matthew, as always. Any final words? Anything you want to add?

Mathew Stone: You know what? I think at the end of the day if there's one thing that I wished all organizations, big, small, startup, growth, long-term, not, is to place a higher priority on just simply understanding what people are trying say. It doesn't need a research expert to help you figure that out if organizations spent a little bit more time figuring out exactly what do people mean.

People don't always tell, even in research, don't always say what they really mean. The context is absolutely critical. That's what probably separates a lot of research organizations from those that just deliver data and insights, verses those that actually help people solve the business problem. I get really antsy when I hear organizations that start trying to sell me data and insights, insights are no different than just a hunch, right? Putting it into context is based on experience, and just saying, "Hey, why are your people thinking things? Why are my people be saying it?" That helps provide a lot of color, and importance ...

Luiza Campos: Yeah, you were talking about how interpreting the data, and really how ... Not how customers, but when you do research people don't always say what they think. Do you have an example of that? I keep thinking of the New Coke example, right? Which of course they did a lot of research on that and came up with that new taste, but it wasn't really what the audience wanted.

Mathew Stone: Yeah, absolutely. Picking up on that idea of people not always doing ... When people often say things in research, but that isn't really what they're going to do. The NHL post lockout was a great one. New Coke one is a storied example. Even recent voting elections in Alberta, people were commenting on the polls getting it absolutely wrong. A lot of that comes down to not having the context to put into the data, and to look at what people are trying to tell you. With New Coke as an example, people said, at the time, "I love Coke. I would love to see a new version of Coke," but that didn't tell Coke, "Replace the old Coke with the new one," but they were telling them, "I like what you have. Can you give me more?" That caused a branding catastrophe.

Same thing with the NHL, people were upset that hockey was being taken away from them. The polling didn't ask about that. As a result, people misinterpreted the numbers, say, "Oh my god there's going to be a crisis in hockey," when in fact people came back to it in droves. In the elections, another great example, people were saying, "Oh I want change but I'm comfortable with where I'm at," as an example, but they didn't ... The polls never predicted change because the polls were only looking at all people. They didn't talk to the people who necessarily were going to vote, or have voted in the past. When you look at the data for those people who had voted in the past, and look at the actual election results, the election was easy to call. It was right there in front of us but people didn't delve into it enough.

Which kind of leads to the last point, thing that I would add too, is that be wary of people who are going to help you that are going to say, "We have tons of insights to offer." The question that one of my business partners often asks, he says, "Well, if you're in a battle or a war do you want insights or do you want intelligence?" I'll take intelligence every time because they're facts. Insights are just hunches on what the data is looking at. You take the intelligence and you mix it with the context of what's going on to come up with a business decision, and avoid whenever possible some insights. Why do we think that is? Well why is the customer saying it? Ask the customers directly and let them tell us.

Luiza Campos: Yes, that is great. I think that's exactly it. Research is incredibly important because you don't know. You may think you know but you don't know until you find out. Once you do find out, you need to have that context that you talked about, you need to have that combination of intelligence and context, in order to actually a good solid business decision, and brand strategy, and build your brand based on that. I think you would agree with me that research is a really important foundation piece in building a strong brand.

Mathew Stone: I would absolutely agree. I would put it on the same level as the creative approaches that you attach to your brand when you are designing. I would put on the same level as developing your product. Because information is going to provide you with all of the intelligence about where you need to go with your brand. Whether or not your aligned. Whether or not your service or benefit is meeting a need. All of those things are right there. I think, Luiza, one of the things, and we see this often, you see it all the time I'm sure, is that quite often people will avoid doing research because they're really quite unsure of what they're going to hear.

Luiza Campos: Or afraid.

Mathew Stone: Or afraid of what they're going to hear. They shouldn't be afraid of it. There's no such thing, I quite often tell people, particularly when we're delivering outcomes that they may not like, but there's no such thing as good news, there's no such thing as bad news, there's just news.

Luiza Campos: Exactly.

Mathew Stone: It is absolutely critical, if they can just figure out it's better to know, "Wow, there's a gap. I'm missing an opportunity," if they're not doing something that their brand could do. It's better to know that, and address it, and deal with it, and move forward with it, because you might find that actually your business success held forward with quote, unquote, bad news.

Luiza Campos: Exactly. Just on the last episode I interviewed Adam Legge, which of course you know him.

Mathew Stone: I do.

Luiza Campos: The CEO of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. Here you talk about this, now this reminds me of that organization who for so long probably either didn't do research, or didn't get the right

intelligence, or the context, and didn't apply it. This is an organization that is a very well-established organization in the community but had completely lost touch with their audience, and became irrelevant, and of course their brand, and all of their attendance, and all of their other measures suffered because of that.

Mathew Stone: Yeah, the Chamber is a great example. You asked earlier about organizations that really leverage ... is one of those that actually delivers on that as well. They have a wealth of information that they're just beginning to tap into. For the last few years they spent a lot of time just figuring out why are people members, what are they looking for, what are their motivations, and then quantifying that by going back and doing other research that says, "You know what? We know that we're missing the boat on a couple of things," and they quantified where that was. They pinpointed the opportunities, and they used research to develop programs, and branding, around that. Adam and his team have transformed that organization from when that was that old boys club in a stuffy old building to an innovative and progressive organization that is while not perfect, definitely moving in the right direction, and addressing the needs of business. Particularly in really challenging times. Yeah, they're a great example of people who are doing ongoing research. It isn't massive amounts of money. They're spending it wisely.

Luiza Campos: Yeah because at the end of the day it's not about your product, it's not about your service, and it's not even about your cause, it's about the audience and how you communicate to them, and give them what they're looking for.

Mathew Stone: Absolutely. I mean, research is not research, it's just another customer engagement tool, right?

Luiza Campos: Exactly.

Mathew Stone: No different than, like I said earlier, talking to your customers, doing marketing, doing online chats, whatever it is, it's all research. You're just gathering intelligence ...

Luiza Campos: Matthew this is great, thank you so much.

Mathew Stone: You're welcome.

Luiza Campos: How can people find out more about you and Stone Olafson, of course, your company?

Mathew Stone: I'd be happy for them to visit our website, www.Stone-Olafson.com, and it's S-T-O-N-E-O-L-A-F-S-O-N.com there's lots of information about who we are, and what we can do to help, and how they can get ahold of us.

Luiza Campos: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Mathew Stone: Perfect, thanks Luiza. This is fun, appreciate it. Good questions.

Luiza Campos: Great, thank you. It was great to talk to you.

Mathew Stone: Great, have a good day.

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