Redesigning a Brand Tracker
Helping LATAM Airlines soar to new heights

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Preface

How taking a human centred, lean approach to research generated insight that made a real difference.

We’re well aware of the challenges of converting insight to impact. The techniques adopted by LATAM Airlines & MESH enabled the unification of multiple trackers across LatAm into one consolidated vehicle, delivering game changing insight direct to the c-suit.

Introduction: Getting ready for take off

This is your captain speaking: Fasten your seatbelts, stow away your tray tables and pay attention to the safety instructions, as you join us on this thrilling journey showing how LATAM airlines translated insights into actions to soar higher than ever.

This paper will tell a story of how LATAM Airlines; a leading airline in Latin America, alongside MESH experience; a research consultancy focused on understanding experience with brands, joined forces to take a fresh approach to the way that market research is conducted in the airline industry. Now, insights are feeding directly into business strategy and making a difference to the direction of the company.

At one level, the learnings seem somewhat obvious – to take a human centred approach to research, collect and deliver in a simple, flexible way so that it can be used throughout the organisation, ensure that the right insight is there at the right time, and lastly, ensure you have the right partners to take you there. However, just because it’s obvious doesn’t mean it’s easy – and hence why these topics are still being discussed. The trick is both in the planning, and of course, execution. In this paper we will talk you through what we see as the ingredients for success, and some tips on how to implement them yourselves.

A challenge of epic proportions...

As the Latin Airline giants TAM and LAN joined forces, they faced a whole host of challenges ahead of them as they looked to restructure and gain efficiencies, whilst shaping a strategy for the new LATAM brand. They needed a partner to help them, so they brought MESH Experience on-board to support them on this epic journey.

In this paper, we outline the strategies adopted to tackle these turbulent times, and practical ways for you to employ the same techniques in your day-to-day lives, in order to get data converted into insight, and then turn this into action, enabling you to soar to success.

Our itinerary – turbulent flying conditions forecast ahead

The overarching remit from the senior board was to design and run a tracker that could be used for decision making and make a difference to the business, whilst still maintaining consistency and satisfying stakeholders with the regular metrics they needed. Simple, right? But the devil was in the detail, and the Marketing Intelligence function had the following boxes to tick:

• To have one vehicle to track the brand’s performance in a competitive context, whilst also understanding shopper behaviour in this complex, long purchase window market;
• To merge five standalone trackers, all in varied formats, across different countries, to one centralised tracker;
• To introduce new elements and move away from a traditional tracker – something different and innovative was needed to try and get an edge in this competitive market. From MESH’s point of view, they realized from the offset that it was important to integrate elements from an experience perspective, as this was their heartland;
• To get multiple stakeholders aligned and using data – both at a local market level and senior central level.
Needless to say, it was never going to be a smooth flight. Furthermore, these were the challenges that we were starting out with, but were by no means the only ones we would face. Once we had taken off, other challenges emerged mid-flight.

How did we tackle them? Well, we learnt as we went along, keeping what worked and tweaking what didn’t. We evolved our approach together. At times when evolution didn’t work, then it called for revolution, and a brave approach and drastic changes were needed.

What held us (both MESH and LATAM) together and focused on the challenges throughout was a close, trusting partnership built on strong foundations. This is an invaluable element of any client relationship.

In the next section we will walk you through our flight plan of what we feel was essential to our success.

Our flight plan – Our journey and what learnings we can take from it

1) Taking the consumer on-board

*We needed to go above and beyond what we already had, so that meant a consumer (not metric) led approach.*

We already had standard industry metrics (e.g. awareness, last flown, preference, etc.) as well as traditional statistical analysis techniques (e.g. regression etc.) from the start, but it wasn’t getting us the level of detail or insight that we needed. We realised that it was more about asking the right questions, rather than just employing more sophisticated techniques to the data we were already collecting. So we innovated our approach to data capture and analysis, making it more real-world and using consumer language, rather than trying to fit it around complex business modelling.

*Learning – don’t structure your studies leading with the metrics and terminology you are used to. Flip it on its head and lead with the consumer’s language; enter their world, don’t try to fit them in yours!*

MESH believes in understanding experiences and occasions – in this case how people really look to fly and how they evaluate brands in their heads. Yes, some people may have a general deposition towards a brand, call it preference, consideration, etc. But when it comes to thinking, evaluating and actually choosing, they have a particular destination and purpose in mind – such as a business trip from São Paulo to Rio. We believed that capturing information in this way, i.e. framing as much as possible in the occasions was vital to getting true-to-life metrics that were more accurate and actionable.

We implemented this true-to-life approach in a number of ways. Sometimes, it was as simple as reframing traditional questions, such as preference, to also ask from different perspectives. But other times we had to get creative! For example, we wanted to understand the last purchase, but knew that this could be distant for some people, thus we needed an innovative technique to capture real flight experiences with as much detail and accuracy as possible. So we designed a “boarding pass” tool to implement in our surveys. An online visualisation of a boarding pass for people to fill in all the details of their last flights – destination, class, price, etc. This proved to be a simple but powerful way to evoke deeper memories. Over time we built on the boarding pass, asking for example, which brands were being considered at that moment of purchase as well as in general at an overall level. The result was a rich occasion database of human experiences, from which we soon started to see incredibly useful trends emerging. For example, the number and types of channels used during the purchase journey changed significantly by type of flight. So with this in mind, we knew exactly where to focus our efforts in intercepting the consumer depending on what they were booking.

*Learning - Asking the same thing in the same way will rarely get you ground breaking insight*

*Learning - Have the confidence to let go of the comfort blanket of the same traditional brand health metrics; understanding your customer in the here and now is more important than comparability.*
2) Clearing the runway. **Making it simple makes all the difference**

**Making ourselves more aerodynamic – simplifying the survey vehicle**

We had it all! After beefing up the questionnaires and adding many more questions and image statements, we had covered every element of the flight experience. But it was doing us more harm than good. We simply had too much data – nearly 40 image statements from just one question! We were trying to cover everything, but this left us confused as it was difficult to navigate and focus, both from an analysis perspective (as we wanted to try to cross everything with everything to get meaning) but also from the end user of the insight, who was being fed all these metrics.

*What do they all mean? Which ones should I pay attention to? Why do similar ones behave differently? What action do I take?* These were the kinds of questions we were being faced with. It was the classic paradigm of hyper choice; the more we had the less we could get from it. So we decided to revamp. Again.

Cutting down the unnecessary questions was essential to streamline data collection and focus our insight generation on what mattered to the business. We also continually put ourselves in the executives’ shoes to keep front of mind what was essential and what was superfluous.

When we revamped for the second time, we took the opportunity to focus even more on occasions (as we had seen the value of this insight), as well as streamlining everything and cutting unnecessary questions and statements to only what was essential. Though this left us with less granular data, it was more powerful, as it gave us clarity of thought. The audience we were ultimately delivering to were senior board members – they needed top line strategy and direction. This way we were forced to focus our insight generation on only what mattered to the business.

This approach was sufficient to get us almost all of the way there, and enabled the business to make strategic decisions. To fill any small gaps that were left, we were able to supplement with bolt on research to dig further into specific questions, e.g. a “thermometer” study to measure regular perception of the merger, or smaller qualitative studies.

*Learning - Sometimes you need to go through this process a few times to get where you need to be. It is rarely a one off one step process of improvement.*

**Simplifying the reporting**

Everything we presented needed to have a purpose. The questions and metrics are just a method to collect data, they aren’t the outcome themselves; the outcome should be the business decision – and all should be geared towards that.

It’s often easy to fall into the trap to present metrics for the sake of showing scores (as that’s what is always shown or because “we have asked it so might as well show it”) without questioning what action can be taken from it. Or indeed, it’s tempting to make analysis big and complex to try and wow the audience. However, this all means long and un-insightful presentations that fail to engage senior management and illicit action.

During our journey, with so many metrics, we realised that our reporting was also over complex, so, upon simplifying the survey vehicle we realised we needed to simplify our outputs. The fog needed to clear here too! For LATAM Airlines this meant simpler and fewer metrics, presented in a simple and logical way.

So how did we go about achieving this? It’s common to switch on autopilot and fall into the subconscious traps mentioned above. But we were conscious of this, so put together the following framework to assess our performance at each key stage. You can also follow the framework below to make some automatic parts of the ‘insight process’ conscious again, and stop and reflect to get back on track and ensure what you are delivering is as streamlined as possible:

- **Checkpoint 1)** when you are outlining the scope of a project or relationship
  MESH uses a “Project Charter” document when kicking off projects, which gives both parties the chance to outline what success looks like as well as logging potential issues and risks, evaluating their likelihood and impact, and planning how to mitigate them. This process gets everyone on the same page and it’s helpful to continually refer back to throughout the project life, to see if everything is on track. This also ensures that before you go into the design process, you have front of mind both the project objectives and the stakeholders’ needs, so you can make this the focus of what you decide to put into the study.
• **Checkpoint 2)** when you are designing or refining the questionnaire
  Ask yourself these questions when deciding which questions or metrics to include – if you can’t answer affirmatively to all of them, then don’t include it!
  
  o When was the last time this metric was used? At all in the last few years?
  o Which decisions were actually taken from this metric?
  o Think: if it wasn’t there, what would the real impact be? Do I really need it?

  Ideally, aim to have a maximum of 10 key metrics. Remember, they can be crossed by each other and demographics, so the analysis possibilities soon expand!

• **Checkpoint 3)** When you are analysing the data
  Here are the key questions to ask yourself when you are extracting and polishing those nuggets of insight.
  
  o Before I start, am I clear what decisions are being made from this document? This should respond to clearly articulated business questions. If you don’t have these, then go back to the executives and pressure them to give you their burning issues. No more than three big questions ideally;
  o Am I using the right language for the audience - is this how they think and talk? It should seem as if it was written by the person making the decision, not a researcher;
  o Am I being too wedded to the data? Is there a purpose for every piece of information in the PowerPoint? Sometimes, you need to swallow your pride and be ruthless! Even if you painstakingly and lovingly made a chart - if it’s not serving a purpose, take it out or put it in the appendix. It will most probably detract from the story and the precious minutes of the exec’s time that you have;
  o Is it telling a story in a logical way? Have I bundled my insight together into key points and does it flow?
  o Ultimately, has EVERY slide got just one message and one conclusion?

Checking in with traffic control and reading the flying conditions – Understanding and shaping our findings around context

In addition to real-life context being important when asking consumers about their perceptions of the brand (e.g. the occasion model proposed above), context around how we analyse and present the data is also very important.

As researchers, the way we present information can make the difference between understanding and confusion and thus success or failure. For example, we could have a set of metrics that are presented in a brand funnel in a very traditional way, or we could isolate those same metrics and tell a story around them, presenting them to directly respond to a business question, and tie in with a concrete strategic action. The latter is much more likely to make an impact.

For LATAM, this was exactly the case. In one example, we had looked at drivers of preference in early reports, but it was lost in many other slides in a raft of other metrics, and also had so many statements that it lacked clarity. Simplifying the input factors, telling a story around the metric and building a deeper, more meaningful analysis, meant we had some new insight that could be used to take direct action. It wasn’t necessarily about complicating our analysis. Instead, it was due to evaluating the factors that mattered to the audience, then following the logical questions that arose, and summarising it into a succinct, easy to digest format. Taking this example further, these are the layers of analysis and train of thought that we followed:

• So what is important in this market at driving emotional metrics and brand closeness? And how strong are the differences between elements?
• Ok, is this order consistent across all types of metrics? NPS, preference, consideration? So, overall, which are the real key things to consider?
• So, how is our brand performing in these metrics? Are we doing well in the areas we ‘should’ be?
• How has this changed over time? What’s the trend?
• How do we compare to the competitors in our market? Who owns what area? Do the footprints differ?
• Ok, does this differ amongst markets (countries) and customer segments/occasions (e.g. business domestic vs. short haul leisure) – so where does my strategy need to adapt, and what elements are consistent?
• In conclusion, what should my strategic focus be?
The result was one “killer” slide (repeated by market) which was able to be used in the executive summary deck, and then fed into various other areas of the business. It was both the way we built context around the analysis of “drivers” and the way it was presented, that made it so relevant to the audience and fed directly into strategy.

*Learning - When the information is put into a context and a strategic line of thought is applied it makes all the difference.*

The customer is always right.

We learned we needed to tailor our offering to the different “customers” of the insight function within LATAM.

We needed to be flexible in our approach to analysis and delivery. We had to adjust the way we were able to report to different audiences at different levels. We needed the data in our dashboard month on month for quick access and to look at trends and benchmarks, but we needed to also be able to roll up data and create in-depth strategic reports. We weren’t just working to a set, templated, 100 slide quarterly report and spending our time completing that. We automated and flexed and worked with different formats to keep fleet-of-foot.

Being flexible in this way and leaving our reporting open to strategic need, rather than just key metrics, meant we could quickly look at any new business question and give a timely response that could be taken all the way to the board. Also, streamlining the way we worked with our data and delivered it to the client (e.g. moving from PowerPoint reports to an online dashboard) not only saved time and improved data accuracy, it also enabled us to focus on more strategic work and got insight to stakeholders when they needed it. Furthermore, an added benefit was that it engaged stakeholders in each market and gave people the opportunity to be curious with the data and explore hypothesis. This made them feel empowered and gave them reassurance and confidence, as they felt they had the data at their fingertips to do whatever they needed with it.

*Learning - Be flexible. Collect the right data you need for your decisions – not just to fuel existing metrics that are demanded by the business in a standard format on a regular basis.*

Maintaining a punctual service

Timing can make all the different if you want to win out

Timing isn’t just down to chance, it’s about being prepared and thinking ahead to have everything to hand when you might need it in the future. This was another vital element to our success story of being able to embed actionable insight into the business.

Upon building and revising such a rich tracker, we had plenty of data to play with and potentially use, but we didn’t have a firm idea of when or how we would use these metrics, we just knew they would put us in a better position in the future.

It was essential that we had this wealth of accurate data at our disposal, to be able to deliver the right data in the right format, quickly, when needed. This hinged on two vital factors, one was the flexibility (just discussed) and the other was that it *required us to have some faith in what we believed was important.* Capturing the most realistic and true to life data and including new, unheard of metrics, generated some opposition at the time (which we talk about more below) and we needed to fight to add them in. But we knew deep down that a time would come, once we had gained trust and stabilised delivery of traditional metrics, when this additional insight would be prove to be vital. Only with the confidence and foresight to include such metrics in advance, were we able to deliver this data with a big enough historical base when needed.

*Be confident when changing your flight path*

Nobody likes change. We know that. But it isn’t the change itself that is disliked, it’s the fear of not being prepared for change or the challenges that it brings.

Throughout this journey there has been a fair amount of change, from changing suppliers, methodologies, questions, metrics to deliverables and presentation methods. And indeed it was how we managed that change which we believe is a contributor to the success of the relationship and the acceptance of the results that have been delivered.
A golden rule is the preparation for change through open communication and transparency. Involving people at key milestones, as and when useful, and keeping them abreast of what is going on, often alleviates much of the concern. Even if the news is bad, people would rather hear about it sooner than later, and will welcome the problem much more openly if it comes joint with a solution. For example, “we need to cut these metrics, however, there are these other sources that can help us answer our questions, and in fact, the scores haven’t changed significantly over the last three years and haven’t been used in decision making, so they won’t be missed. Look at all the new metrics we can deliver…”

If you are clear in your communication, explain the benefits of a new approach and make stakeholders comfortable, then you are half way there to getting them to buy into the change.

However, it’s not always about heeding to everyone’s advice or opinion about what should be done. Be brave; not all decisions should be made by committee. Sometimes, to get things done, you need to decide first then convince later, otherwise quick decisions are never made and opportunities are lost. In LATAM’s case, the decisions of which statements to cut in the image statement question was made centrally, and the other stakeholders informed. In the end, nobody complained about the metrics that were removed as it didn’t impact their decision making and they were so focused on the new insight delivered. What is important is to have clear and well thought out justifications. If you are making changes, make sure you have worked through your reasoning. We looked at factor analysis and which statements performed similarly together, and thus which could be cut. Put the work in so you can fight your corner if and when you need to.

Lastly, with all this in mind: be ready to compromise! Choose your battles wisely, as for the sake of relationships with stakeholders, you will have to have ‘give and take’ and you will need them on-board so you can do your job. Both sides need to feel victorious. Be clear and confident and identify the essential vs. negotiable, that way they will feel that they have had some input at least and helped to shaped the outcome.

Learning - Just do it; don’t wait for the right time – it will never come.

Ensuring a smooth landing

Our ultimate measure of success was landing insight into the business.

Ultimately, all the pre-flight checks, changes on route and great delivery of service along the way all sum to the final and most important event: the landing! In this case it was landing insight into the business that was our key measure. So, reflecting on all of the above we see that we were able to make a significant impact on our business in a number of ways:

With the new format of insight, delivered in a flexible and timely way, we had an edge over previous data, and it gained us attention. The key here also was humanising the insights. As it was framed in real life metrics and language, it was truly customer centric, which broadened its appeal way beyond the Marketng Intelligence function. Furthermore, this meant it was a more accurate read of the market, and so built confidence and engagement with the insights that we had never seen before. Ultimately, what we delivered was tangible and actionable and could be converted into real decisions.

One of the main ways that this insight was used was to feed directly into our Strategy & Communication Planning for 2018. All the adjustments made to simplify our research process – both data collection and analysis – enabled us to have a clearer view of the information with the level of detail and depth we needed to consolidate only three powerful insights that suddenly were incorporated in almost all board meetings as a solid foundation for decision making. This meant that the presence of the Marketing Intelligence function was truly felt, building its reputation of real consultants for business decisions.

For example, having a considerably shorter attributes’ list enabled us to analyse the competitive positioning of all airlines split by different types of travellers; something which was previously difficult with such an exhaustive list, as it failed to deliver actionable information. This simple switch helped us to have a much more realistic interpretation of the market so it was easier to decide which battles to take and where to focus on to win in the market.

Another important win from our new insight format, was to be able to see how biased the preference metric could be if asked in an overall way. By simply asking consumers for their preferred brand considering their natural mental process – considering a specific travel occasion – we realised that the market was much more competitive than we
have ever thought. This more accurate perspective enabled us to reinforce with the executives the urgency to take some strategic decisions and helped us to speed up some projects.

In fact, the new deliverables provided insight that fed into a number of high level decisions about the strategic direction of the company, giving confidence to continue with that strategy and make relevant adjustments to optimise it. And it continues to do so today.

Last but definitely not least, all this improvement in the way we make customer centric decisions was only possible because we have the right partner – MESH – along the way. And I am not only talking about having the adequate techniques and knowledge that are absolutely necessary for putting all this in place, but specially about having the essential level of energy and willingness to adapt and evolve together with us. **So the final learning here is that having the right people working together – from both sides – with the same level of engagement and focus on customers’ satisfaction is the main ingredient for success.**

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