

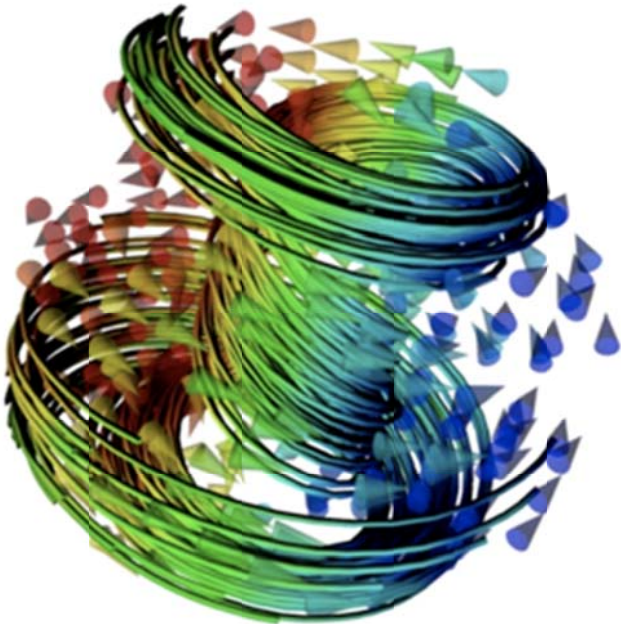


# Style or Substance? Crafting your Research Delivery Strategy

by [Nancy Pekala](#)

How would you define your market research delivery style? More brawn than beauty? Or more style than substance?

There are two camps when it comes to delivering market research insights. The first camp can be defined as Team Substance. If you're on this team, you're all about the content and delivering it to your client or organization in simple, black and white terms so you can get to the heart of the objectives of the research and add value to it. No fancy graphics for you. No flying transitions between slides. No video. No sound effects. Just an old fashioned PowerPoint that allows you to zero in on the insights that will add value for your client. You're about reporting the data in terms that will add value to the organization.



The second camp is Team Style. If you're on this team, you recognize that data is critical, but you see no harm in adding some razzle dazzle to the presentation to make your client or organization take notice. It's all about getting their attention. You believe in not just reporting the insights, but in selling them as well. Bring on the 3-D transitions. Wow 'em with video and animation. Pile on the intricate multi-colored graphics. It's all about making the presentation memorable.

Neither camp is right or wrong but clearly more attention is being paid today to the methods in which research results are being delivered. Take the recent example of NBC Universal which is forming a separate unit called Curve Films. Don't bother looking for any of these films in your local multiplex. You won't find them there. The defined target audience is not your typical popcorn-munching, Saturday night movie goer, but rather Madison Avenue.

Spearheaded by NBCUniversal's integrated media group, Curve Films aims to find more interesting ways to deliver research to advertising and media agencies and marketers. So, rather than release a report on Generation Y, Curve plans to distribute a film called "Y Now." The film aims to demonstrate how Millennials behave, what they believe and how they differ from those ages in previous decades. Nine Millennials are profiled in the documentary-style film, each representing a different life stage or lifestyle.

The 22-minute film, which is divided into five key segments, was emailed last week to 1,000 employees at agencies around the country. The overarching goal is to make research more entertaining, according to John Shea, executive vice president and CMO of the NBC Universal's integrated media group.

Melissa Lavigne-Delville, vice president for trends and strategic insights at the integrated media group, explained in a recent New York Times [interview](#), "Having been in research for so many years, I know that research gets boiled down to just stats and facts, but at the end of the day, it's a reflection of consumers' lives. We intend to breathe life back into what is at its core interesting material."

But not everyone buys into the infotainment version of delivering research results. Commenting in the [Marketing Research Group](#) of AMAConnect, the AMA's online community, Terry Grapentine noted he has one client that dictates research presentations be delivered with black and white slides only, no graphics.

"The fact that the client would do that (require only black and white slides with no graphics) reflects more on that client's thinking skills than anything else," Grapentine stated. "Those thinking skills permeated the organization and affected the kind of research that was done, and the results that came afterward. Many firms "act" on research, but get no results."

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Also commenting in the AMAConnect [Marketing Research Group](#), Martha Guidry, author, consultant, researcher and speaker at [The Rite Concept](#) suggested that the type of research report delivered is driven by the client's needs. "I've certainly done a few more 'infotainment' presentations, but this was primarily driven by the lack of client participation in the research itself," she explained. "In general, I've found that clients want actionable recommendations FAST. This flies in the face of highly interactive content to communicate findings."

Guidry added, "For me, the opposite has occurred. I have reverted back to my P&G days of a very tightly written, concise and actionable document. Clients don't want somewhat relevant diagrams or clips. These take a lot of time to create and review." She noted that "I provide my clients research reports that are faster, more actionable and cheaper! Generally, my findings and recommendations will be received in 36 hours or less. It is clearly a win for everyone."

According to Lynn Dube, Senior Vice President at [Bellomy Research, Inc.](#), "We find more and more that our clients are seeking results in formats that are not only visually appealing and engaging, but sometimes even bite-sized for easy digestion and distribution to non-research audiences. This has led us to develop and widely implement a 'newsletter' or 'dashboard' reporting format, which we use as either a standalone deliverable or include as part of a more standard PowerPoint report. This format is easy-to-understand, interesting and engaging in that it is usually written in headline form, often illustrates key findings with colorful charts and graphs/word clouds/heat-maps/etc., and sometimes pits business/research objectives directly alongside the specific insight generated from the research. "

Dube added, "In this way, each objective addressed is clearly communicated, as well as is the learning against each objective and what the business implications are, as well. Depending on the scope of the study and the number of objectives, we sometimes use combinations of each of these elements to produce intense, brief, highly impactful, engaging executive summaries that are end-user-ready and need little to no technical explanation."

"This 'at a glance' strategy of reporting learnings and business insights saves end-users time traditionally spent reading, processing, absorbing, and understanding (often very dry) research results," Dube said. "This bottom-line-oriented, visually-engaging report style delivers results that are more easily grasped,

processed, and passed along to others and, because of that, they are much more effective in driving strategic action than the more traditional, data intensive, PowerPoint report format alone.”

John Sessions, CEO of Bellomy Research noted that his organization uses video in results presentations which has proven effective. “The process can be time intensive, but we’ve created an efficient means to manage it,” he said. “In the end, the insights and implications we are able to communicate are well worth the effort.”

Leona Foster, Senior Vice President at [Market Strategies International](#), also [commented](#) on the common lament that today’s market research reports are written for market researchers rather than top executives. On the [freshmr.com](#) blog, Foster acknowledged that “the type of report my clients want has been described as ‘McKinsey-esque,’ with ‘memorable sound bites’ and a ‘30-second elevator speech’ of the research findings. The storytelling factor seems to have become a table stake.”

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She added, “But not everyone agrees on what a ‘consultative’ report (aka “McKinsey-esque”) includes in terms of content and format. For some, it’s a compelling headline that summarizes the key findings of the page in, at most, two lines. For others, it’s a chart that is stripped of ‘market research stuff’ such as base sizes, significance testing, means and standard deviations, question wording and caveats about small sample sizes. It appears that some reports are now being written as ‘infotainment’.”

Foster, a 30-year veteran of the marketing research industry agreed that the days of the 130-page deck are over. “We have a responsibility and an opportunity to teach analysts how to focus on the big picture as viewed through the eyes of a senior executive,” she noted. “Analysts with some business training may be better suited to think along these lines. For analysts without a business degree or MBA, successful market research companies will need to add this type of training to their internal curriculum. “

For today’s researchers, Foster suggests a four-step action plan to create valuable presentations:

1. Spend more time thinking about what the data mean to the business, not what the data say.
2. Focus on more compelling graphics.
3. Write engaging headlines. When a 30-minute presentation needs to be distilled to 10 minutes for senior executives, researchers would do well to develop a quick walk-through using well-written headlines to provide them everything they need to know at a glance
4. Allow enough time to really think about what the data imply.

Kathryn Korostoff, founder and president of [Research Rockstar](#) and Group Ambassador of the AMA’s [Marketing Research Group](#), suggests in her most recent e-book, *Principles of Remarkable Research*, researchers should craft a comprehensive deliverables strategy for every research assignment. “With emphasis on retention building among the audience, you can avoid the common error of over-relying on slide decks as the sole deliverable,” she said. Korostoff also noted that key components of the strategy include a mix of deliverable options including:

- **Conventional Presentation Options**

These options include typical on-site presentations, web conferences and one-on-one briefings.

- **Interactive Presentation Options.**

Workshops, where participants engage in data analysis exercises or strategic implications

brainstorming, can be a valuable component in the mix. While such workshops take more time to plan, and more effort to facilitate, they add to the retention and adoption of research results.

- **Written Report Options**

The researcher's toolkit might still include the basic options of slide decks, white papers, executive summaries and top-line reports.

- **Data Deliverables Options**

These options include tables (showing all data as cross-tabs) and online reporting tools.

- **Multimedia Options**

These include internal blogs or podcasts (to share key research findings), qualitative research video highlights and video "reports" (where key results may be set to a narration or music track). Korostoff suggests that more researchers are experimenting with audio and video as part of the deliverables process--not necessarily to replace a conventional deliverable, but to enhance or augment it.

"Find ways to repeat key pieces of information in different ways and times," Korostoff advised. "In many cases, a key audience member will only 'get it' after the third or fourth exposure. Some people 'click' with charts, others with stories or anecdotes, others with video. Repetition using multiple approaches at multiple occasions is critical."

"Research involves delivering results," Korostoff said. "Remarkable research involves making sure our audience actually uses them. If we expect people to retain and apply the results, we have to create a more comprehensive delivery strategy."

[Nancy Pekala](#) is the AMA's Senior Director of Online Content and Editor of Marketing Researchers. Continue the conversation about market research delivery approaches in the Marketing Research Group of [AMACConnect](#), the AMA's online community exclusively for marketing professionals. Follow us on Twitter @[marketing\\_power](#).