In many sectors, the product is increasingly homogenous. Killer insights have been gleaned and targeted; innovations are incremental and seldom breakthrough. In this context, avoiding the race to the bottom means finding competitive advantage elsewhere, in either the user experience or UX.

With profitable growth and positive customer metrics correlated, it is unsurprising that so many executive teams’ incentives include a customer component of some sort. The wide adoption of Net Promoter Score (NPS) among Fortune 500 and FTSE 100 scorecards is indicative of this. Related professions – Design Research, Service Design and Usability – are booming.

Our Edinburgh-based panel facilitator, Gary Sheen collected the great and the good for a panel in a very Scottish setting to discuss the hypothesis; there are opportunities for MI/CI and UX to collaborate and apply their respective lenses and achieve better customer outcomes. Outlined below are the lessons learned from the debate in the room.

Lessons for practitioners
Mixing Customer Experience & Market Intelligence for Competitive Advantage

Andrew Beurschgens, EE
COLLABORATE AND DEFINE A COMMON GOAL

What is clear from Adam and Andrew's presentations is the need to collaborate and work with colleagues from other departments who are responsible for either measuring customer experience or service design. The deliverable from the collaboration is the result of having established a common goal; what are we trying to achieve? Andrew focused on sharing experiences from EE's context; the common goal was to answer the often answered question 'why' do we have the NPS scores we have and others have the scores they have? It needed to go beyond the top line of network/service but the drivers within network; as in building coverage, data speed, voice quality, coverage on roads, trains, or motorways for example. Andrew shared how this has been achieved and how it could be scaled for a real time read.

Adam's common goal through his programme, involving 200-350 people to evaluate Skype's competitor apps, was to provide a formal evaluation in a structured way. This ensured that the programme is repeatable and scalable. The ultimate goal of Adam's programme is to increase Skype's knowledge to compete more effectively.

Neil, the service design consultant, stated that the research approach needed to define the customer's goal, what is he or she trying to do — their 'mission' or 'intent'. This can be achieved by asking the '5 Why's' to get to the bottom of what the customer is trying to achieve/do to get the clear insight. Why is the customer trying to do what they are trying to do? Why, again and again? Can the real motivation behind their actions be understood?

The Panelists

Facilitator, Gary Sheen, is a client-side intelligence practitioner with 12 years’ experience spanning several sectors including retail, financial services and technology. Gary joined Microsoft at the beginning of 2013 to establish a global CI capability for the acquired Skype division. Gary superbly facilitated views from his esteemed panel as well as responded to questions in the room.

Panelist, Neil Collman | Design Principal | Nile Experience & Service Design has worked in digital experience design, strategy, and user research for more than 14 years. He honed his skills on large scale digital engagements at IBM for brands such as Shell, Vauxhall, and Boots. Neil is a founding member of the UK’s Service Design Network and an alumnus of the British Interactive Media Awards judging panel. While at IBM, Neil also won awards for product innovation and intranet design. Neil presented ‘Designing the Killer Experience’.

Panelist, Adam Smolinski | Senior Design Research Manager | Microsoft has 18 years in experience in the UX field, switching between Interaction Design and Design Research roles. Adam presently works on the Skype team, managing a small team of design researchers who focus on Skype for Business, PC, Mac, and mobile. Within Skype, Adam has created a hugely impactful programme for evaluating competitor experiences. The programme sees teams in Marketing, Engineering, Product & Finance getting hands on with competitors’ apps and sharing their observations centrally. Adam shared background to this programme, how it was implemented and scaled, and lessons learned.

Panelist, Andrew Beurschgens | Head Market Intelligence | EE is the current chair of the SCIP UK Chapter and has Mi/CI experience from over 20 years in telecoms and agency side. Andrew has been awarded the Catalyst Award by SCIP for his volunteer contributions to the market intelligence discipline. Andrew presented ‘Market Intelligence: Lessons from the Trenches’ with respect to getting ahead in customer experience.
WALK IN THE SHOES OF THE CUSTOMER

Neil stated that companies should stop focusing on features but focus on the end-to-end experience. These experiences can be classified into three categories: 'Must Haves', 'Satisfiers', and 'Delighters'.

Neil often sets his clients homework at the beginning of a project: apply for an insurance policy, or a mortgage. This, he finds, encourages a much more detailed and energetic discussion versus reviewing screenshots.

Adam’s program allowed acquisition and in-life experiences to be evaluated through a collaborative approach, each of the 200+ participants walking in the shoes of the customer and sharing their feedback, both qualitative and quantitative. This approach takes some organizing, but has an advantage over a smaller program, which is that it provides a wider sample.

For Adam, the use of slideware with screenshot flows, while valuable for sharing and tracking, can fall short, often serving to reinforce preconceived notions. Only by getting hands on with other apps can colleagues truly appreciate differentiators and their impact on the users’ experience. To this end Andrew goes to extensive effort to reduce the barriers to participating in the programme. A key tenant being small group demos hosted by Adam where all parties use the competing app to communicate. Regardless of feedback, all stated that the experiences needed to be documented, in a compare and contrast fashion.

From the room we heard an excellent tip: When researching experiences, rather than simply observing the customers directly, spend time with those who observe the experience most often. It’s often these people who have the widest frame of reference for understanding customer pain-points and potential solutions. So for example, a Teller could provide a richer feedback on customers’ banking experiences than a single customer could.

FRAMEWORKS TO THE FORE

Neil introduced the user experience map typically co-designed with customers and the ‘Kono Model’ used by Product Managers to categorize features. Kono acknowledges that different features play different roles in an overall product experience. ‘Threshold’ attributes are expected, or ‘must haves’, they cannot delight, but do dissatisfy if these are broken or absent e.g. a leaky milk bottle top. ‘Performance’ varies according to how well, or not, a provider satisfies these. Excitement attributes are those that the user doesn’t expect, but which can cause delight — the handwritten note and macaron in the hotel room, given as an excellent example of a delighter.

Andrew shared two tools for evaluating experiences: a radar chart framework and a simple benchmark approach. The latter allows the cells with competitors' observations relative to your business to be coloured in — green where you have an advantage, red where you are disadvantaged, and grey is neutral, where both parties offer this experience. Andrew also shared a possible output using social media, where online conversations can be listened in on to explore the experiences from the drivers and the competitor set. There are a few warnings associated with social media. It only represents a sub set of the customer base, the more digitally engaged. The conversations may not be voluminous enough to be able to derive a quantitative picture, it just does not represent the type of conversation had online. Ensure that terms are captured appropriately. One of EE’s legacy brands, Orange, can bring up a whole range of different contexts outside of the mobile operator brand in the UK market.
The SCIP UK Chapter hosts a series of networking events throughout the year. These events bring together practitioners from all corners of the discipline: service providers, consultants and academics to address topics as identified from the events’ feedback forms.

The series aims to increase the understanding and awareness of desired themes among SCIP members and non-members as well as take the discipline to different business practices through co-hosting opportunities with other professional organisations and membership bodies. It is about creating an environment to discover, enhance, exchange, and problem solve. To understand the previous networking events’ discussion themes, go to the SCIP UK chapter page for a complete running order as well as the link for the SCIP Competitive Intelligence Magazine article, helping to form SCIP’s Body of Knowledge.

The SCIP UK Chapter is grateful to all speakers and panelists typified by their passion, whom there would be neither a networking event nor the creation of a rich exchange of ideas and learning. The opportunity to speak at these networking events is open to anyone, United Kingdom-based or just passing through, subject to meeting the growing list of event topics. Engagement with us is around five themes centred on case studies: innovative integration of CI within the professional growth in CI, analysis in action, information overload, and communicating with impact. The real benefit is the rich exchange of ideas that can be applied the next day back at the office.

We encourage others to come forward to introduce the group to new perspectives, experiences and learning. What links all the prospective speakers and panelists, irrespective of their background or role within the market/competitive intelligence profession, is a passion for the discipline. Along with all the volunteer speakers to date and those that have yet to take advantage of the opportunity, they are all unique examples of characters continuing to fix the discipline more firmly on the map! What is the next step? Register your interest and details with Michelle Winters mwinters@scip.org to explore speaking opportunities and/or to be proactively kept abreast of forthcoming events in the UK.

Gary Sheen is a client side Intelligence Practitioner with 12 years’ experience spanning several sectors, including retail, financial services and technology. Gary joined Microsoft at the beginning of 2013 to establish a global CI capability for the acquired Skype division.

Andrew Beurschgens is current chair of the UK SCIP Chapter, rebranded from the UK Competitive Intelligence Forum, and is the Head of Market Intelligence at the UK mobile network operator, EE, the JV between Orange and T-Mobile.