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BY CAROLYN KOPF
Founder & Managing Partner
C.E.K. & Partners
Atlanta, Georgia
carolyn@cekpartners.com

Rethinking Client Deliverables: What Happens after the Research Ends?



For many marketing researchers, expertise can be both a strength and a bit of a trap. The more reliably you deliver a specific type of project, the more clients may “pigeonhole” you. However, your personal core areas of expertise and specialization don’t have to limit the value you provide. If you’re a solopreneur, freelancer, or small business owner offering marketing research services, this article is for you. What may seem like the end of one engagement could actually be a potential springboard for the next one. We’ll explore how to extend your services beyond traditional research deliverables and uncover fresh ways to rethink your deliverables that might help expand your business.

Your next project might be hiding in plain sight in the findings and conclusions of your most recent research report. There could be an opportunity to further engage your client and provide additional value by recommending applications of those insights after you’ve reported on them. Doing so could strengthen your client relationships and position you to become more involved with their businesses. This shift would also elevate your role to strategic consultant. Extending services aligned with the research findings you’ve already provided could lead to incremental revenue for your business. New services should naturally extend your current offerings to avoid weakening or diluting your core area of expertise

Deliverables to Future-Proof Your Business

The following are examples and thought starters that could help inspire ways for your research deliverables to lead to new types of projects.

Brand Positioning Statements

Establishing or evolving a brand starts with a clear understanding of what customers know, feel, and believe about a brand, along with how it compares to its competitors. Research insights can help reveal what makes a brand different or better. These insights provide a solid foundation for companies seeking to establish or refresh their brand positioning. Also, these insights can be helpful for crafting a company’s brand story and supporting communications.

You already add value by translating your research findings into an understanding of how your client’s brand is perceived by their customers. Your research might also highlight unmet customer needs, clarify where the brand could outperform competitors, and identify opportunities to stand out. Sharing these insights in your report or presentation gives your client’s team a clear direction for guiding decisions and actions. However, going beyond this to apply these findings can lead to a new project, such as developing or refreshing brand positioning statements and crafting the corresponding brand story. This is where your unique perspective grounded in recent insights makes you the right resource for developing them.



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Brand Guidelines

Across various marketing areas, brand guidelines serve as a rulebook, defining a brand’s visual and verbal identity across formats such as social media, advertising, and websites. Brand guidelines aren’t just about fonts and color palettes, they’re the playbook for how a brand looks, speaks, and behaves. They cover everything from creative layouts to tone of voice and can range from a quick reference document to more in-depth guides. These documents act as a blueprint for consistency, informing decisions and ensuring alignment across every brand touchpoint. Capturing the brand’s voice and tone means clearly describing it as “professional and formal” or “friendly and casual.”

Most likely your research projects have implications for your client’s brand guidelines. For example, insights could include brand perceptions, such as its strengths, weaknesses, why it’s appealing, or its general essence or vibe. Undoubtedly, you already have these types



of insights that could be valuable for sprucing up the brand's guidelines. You could consider proposing a project focused on evolving or reworking their brand guidelines—helping to keep them current by tapping into these findings.

If your customer research reveals that younger audiences think the brand's materials and communications have an overly corporate and formal tone, this is a clear and actionable conclusion to include in your report. And you can make a strong case for updating the brand guidelines with "Dos and Don'ts" on how the brand should speak. For example, "use contractions to help make writing more conversational" and "avoid jargon or industry speak." When informed by data, brand guidelines move away from rules on a page to acting as a strategic tool that helps bring the brand to life and genuinely resonate with customers. Future research studies can test ad concepts based on the new research-informed style and tone.

Customer Persona Development

Defined customer profiles, or personas, represent a business's most relevant buyers. They're a cornerstone of any strategic marketing playbook because meaningful marketing and sales engagement starts with a deep understanding of the target audiences.

Whether your client targets consumers or businesses, research can uncover the insights

needed to shape actionable personas. These inputs include demographics, such as age, life stage, or income for consumers, and professional attributes like job role, industry, company size, and purchase authority for business-to-business (B2B) companies. Equally important are buyers' goals, pain points, decision drivers, and preferred communication styles which often make personas actionable rather than purely descriptive.

Developing personas doesn't always require a dedicated research project. In many cases, you can create or refine personas using insights from existing studies, such as satisfaction surveys, segmentation work, or qualitative interviews conducted for other purposes. When personas are the primary objective, a discussion guide or survey can be specifically created to capture the data necessary to develop robust profiles. The right approach depends on the depth of detail your client needs and the research already available. Either way, it presents an opportunity to provide a distinct set of deliverables where you lead the research and write the profiles.

For example, you might develop personas for a pet retailer around different types of pet owners. Based on your insights, a "first-time puppy owner" prioritizes buying leashes, harnesses, crates, and training services; while a "senior dog owner" tends to seek out supplements for joint mobility. These distinctions influence not only product and service recommendations but also messaging, content strategy, and marketing tactics.

Marketing Key Messages

Key messages are crisp, clear statements businesses use to communicate consistently across sales and marketing materials. They highlight the most important aspects of a company's products, services, and benefits—emphasizing how or why its offerings stand apart from the competition.

The data you've collected and analyzed for your client might just be a goldmine for shaping or freshening communications. Insights from your research can inform the writing, refinement, and prioritization of key messages for an existing product or new solution.

For example, findings from a study might identify the top features small businesses want in their point-of-sale devices—including the core aspect of accepting payments, and the ability to manage loyalty programs. After reporting these in the research findings, there might be an opportunity for a separate project developing the relevant and actionable messages. Doing so would support your client's marketing team with developing the right language and corresponding proof points that will be appealing and drive customer engagement.

Content Development

Companies communicate with customers in many ways, ranging from e-newsletters and social media posts to infographics and short videos or reels. Research can reveal the channels and formats that will be most enticing and effective, and the points in the customer journey that will be most impactful.

Insights from your research can help uncover the topics your client's target audience cares about most and the formats they prefer, whether that's an e-book or a simple infographic.

These findings would also put you in a position to propose a follow-on project—helping to write and design the content that is most enticing and effective. By applying the research insights, the materials developed will speak directly to the customers' needs and help your client create effective sales and marketing content.

Delivering Beyond Research: How Do You Make It Happen?

So, at this point you're intrigued but also thinking, "This all sounds great and potentially valuable. How can I actually provide these types of additional deliverables?" Here are a few practical tips for getting started.

1 Develop Partnerships

Consider partnering with professionals who complement your research expertise. One way to do this is by tapping into your network and identifying writers, brand strategists, or designers—often freelancers or solopreneurs. As you meet others, take note of their strengths and areas of interest. For instance, do they

excel at writing about enterprise-level digital banking innovations, or are they extremely passionate about small business retailers? Building a list of trusted potential collaborators will allow you to more easily match the right people to the right projects.

2 Establish a Referral Program

If you prefer not to deviate sharply from your core services, a referral program could be an effective approach. Your clients probably often reveal what they need next, sometimes even for follow-on work that complements your research deliverables. By referring them to another consultant or small business, you provide value without taking on the extra work yourself. When a referral turns into a contract, the consultant could pay you a referral fee as a thank-you for the introduction, a win-win.

3 Tap into Artificial Intelligence

AI tools can support your deliverables in meaningful ways. One example is with creating personas by synthesizing large datasets, clustering behavioral patterns, or even drafting initial profiles. AI-generated personas are most effective when grounded in actual customer data and polished by a human. Treat AI as a starting point—a tool to boost efficiency, not replace the insight and judgment that only you can provide.

Also, you could consider using Large Language Models (LLMs) to suggest other research projects that would logically build on your findings, along with identifying follow-up questions for future studies.



Conclusion

The insights your research uncovers can serve as a launchpad for your next project, whether that's developing personas, writing key messages, or producing marketing content. By moving beyond research deliverables, you can position yourself as a strategic resource, deepen client relationships, and open the door to new opportunities.

Collaborating with other consultants or setting up a referral program allows you to expand your business while staying focused on your research expertise. Ultimately, it's about delivering more value to your clients and ensuring your own business remains relevant and thrives.

What other ways could you expand your research findings into additional projects? 

About the Author: Carolyn Kopf



Carolyn started her career on Madison Ave in New York City and has also worked at top global agencies in Europe and APAC. Today, she is the founder and managing partner of C.E.K. & Partners, a certified woman-owned small business specializing in marketing research and content development. Based in Atlanta, the company has been serving large companies and small businesses for over 15 years.

She is passionate about delivering strategic insights that transform brands. Clients benefit from her team's ability to provide data and actionable insights. Carolyn holds an International M.B.A. from U of S.C.

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About the Feature Editor: Mark A. Wheeler



Mark Wheeler, Principal at Wheeler Research LLC, is a cognitive psychologist by training who applies his knowledge of behavioral and social science to healthcare moderating, reporting, and consulting. Mark has over 20 years of experience across a wide range of healthcare areas, with particular emphases on biologics, immunology, and oncology, especially when these medicines are in pre-launch phases. Mark has a Ph.D. in psychology from Rice University and a graduate certificate in management from Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania.

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