

# The Hendrix Moment

**O**ne would think that any innovative marketer worth his or her salt would love nothing more than to find new and exciting ways for people to connect with each other and create the sheer joy that only those connections can provide.

And yet, most of what passes for “innovation” in marketing today doesn’t even begin to tap into that emotional reservoir. Instead, we have a deluge of meaningless line extensions of flavors, sizes, colors and packaging that flood the marketplace with their irrelevance.

Why is this happening and what can be done about it? Clearly, as a recent *Reveries.com* survey demonstrates (see page 12), the problem is not that the marketing industry is suffering from a shortage of innovative people.

Almost 90 percent of the senior-level marketers surveyed said they considered themselves to be innovative. But only 70 percent think their companies are innovative and just 40 percent think the marketing industry is innovative.

That’s quite something — an industry that is populated by almost nothing but innovative people produces very little that’s innovative. When the survey asked, “What would help you and your company be more innovative,” the response was a cascade of complaints about a lack of leadership, vision, time, money and an overabundance of stupid clients.

But a closer look at the overall results reveals something else. First, marketers persist in using focus groups as their insight tool-of-choice. This is perplexing, because about everyone now acknowledges that focus groups are deeply flawed as a method to get at the insights that drive innovation.

One problem with focus groups is that they can only tell you what people *think*, not what they *do*. Focus groups only measure past motivations of

behavior. What is needed for innovation are insights that are future-directed.

Second, I detected a certain level of disregard toward the very people innovations are intended to help. While 47 percent said consumers were “very important” to their innovation process, 46 percent, nearly half of the respondents, said consumers were either only “somewhat important” or “not important.”

That pattern continued when respondents were asked about how they involve consumers in the innovation process: Only nine-percent said they involved consumers in creating ideas. Only six-percent rated consumers “excellent” as a source of innovation.

While I completely understand the limitations of consumers in the innovation process — they usually can’t articulate, much less define, innovative solutions — we need to do a much better job of *hearing* what they have to say.

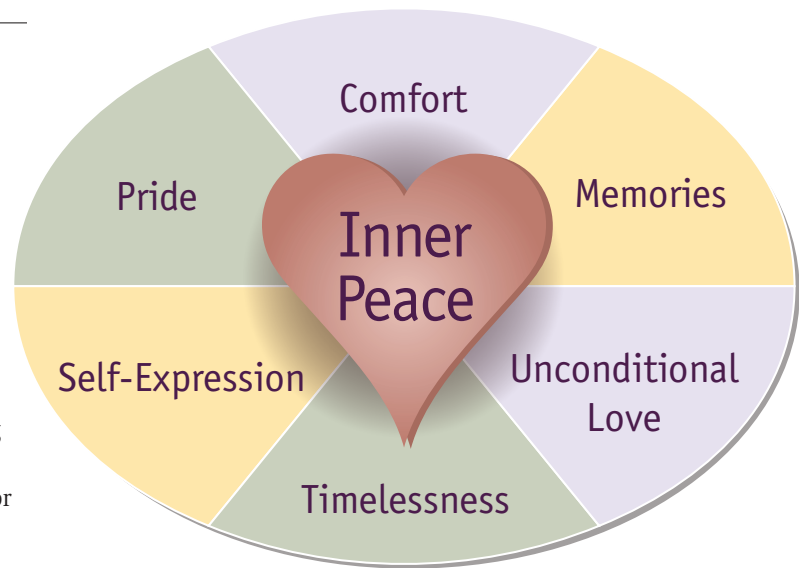
Do you remember the film, *White Men Can’t Jump*? There’s a great scene in it where the Wesley Snipes character asks the Woody Harrelson character whether he *hears* Jimi Hendrix.

Woody is flummoxed by the question because Hendrix is blasting on the car radio at the time. So, Wesley says: “Look man, just because you’re *listening* to him doesn’t mean you’re *hearing* him.”

All too often, that’s kind of how I feel when marketers say that they are listening to their consumers. Yes, they are *listening* to them, but they aren’t *hearing* them.

The tools you use to listen to consumers — focus groups, ethnography, social-network sites — are not nearly as important as the “tool” between your ears that determines whether you truly *hear* them. Even more important is taking what you hear and transforming that into something that makes a real difference in their lives.

**It’s not enough  
just to *listen* to  
your consumers.  
You have to  
*hear* them.**



The difference between what I was listening to and what I was hearing was particularly striking while we were conducting research recently for an iconic food brand. I'm sorry I can't tell you who—or even what category it is in—because the project is still in progress.

The stars of our research were boomer women. Among other research, we conducted what we call *Girlfriend Groups* and *GenConnect Groups*. Both were casual, in-home get-togethers—among boomer girlfriends in the first instance, and among family generations of grandma, boomer daughter, and her daughters in the second instance.

We were listening to *memories and traditions*. Here's what we heard: "I still use recipes that were handwritten by my grandmother. Just seeing those recipe cards brings me back to her and to the smells in her kitchen."

We were listening to *self-expression*. Here's what we heard: "Cooking for friends is like conducting a band... special friends, special food. Like I'm at the piano. It's the ultimate."

We were listening to *timelessness*. Here's what we heard: "When your friends and family are all together it's perfect. Everything is in balance."

We were listening to *comfort*. Here's what we heard: "It's the adult with the little baby penguin. The grandmother, the mother, the child... it's like coddling."

And we were listening to *pride*. Here's what we heard: "When someone asks me for a recipe or asks me to make something especially for them, I feel honored."

So, we listened and we heard all those things. The real question was, what did it all mean to them, really? What did it say about what the brand meant—or could mean—to them?

Many marketers would have identified any one of these areas as a rich territory for their brand. But that wouldn't have been sufficiently differentiating. It wouldn't have had the emotional intensity required, and wouldn't have provided much opportunity for innovation. We would have been selling the brand—and more important, its consumers—short.

So we dug deeper. There wasn't any particular method or five-step process that we used to get from there to here. We relied on nothing more than our

respect for, and empathy with, women consumers; it was all about our willingness to listen and our ability to hear.

What we heard was *inner peace*.

That's what it all added up to for us—comfort, memories, unconditional love, timelessness, self-expression and pride. It all added up to *inner peace*. We had arrived at a place that truly connected with our audience, what we like to call a *deep, soul connection*. As boomers are reaching mid-life, their priorities and values are shifting in profound ways. This brand could own the emotional space associated with food and her craving for inner peace.

Inner peace is that feeling we have when everything is right in the world, and with ourselves. It encompasses mind, body and spirit; it's about balance and equilibrium, between heart and head. It's about self-acceptance of who we are and what we've accomplished in life (or not), about acceptance of and by our families and friends.

Where we go with that is the next challenge, but it's one we are excited about. It provides an opportunity to be a lifestyle brand that helps replenish, nourish, inspire and connect these women. Imagine one integrated platform brought to life through all touch points—one that shares stories, inspires ideas, stirs creative expression, nourishes relationships and becomes the portal to a world of inner peace. It suggests so many different possibilities—and possibilities are the very heart and soul of innovation. ■



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