

How Research Can Serve Both Product Development and Marketing

**By Ellen Bialo and Jay Sivin-Kachala, Ed.D.
Interactive Educational Systems Design, Inc.**

Conducting foundational research as part of your design process ensures that your education product is best in class, resonates with academic experts and professional organizations, and is positioned to take advantage of all market opportunities.

This research can also be used to prepare a must-have component of your marketing communication strategy.

A Research Foundations White Paper (RFWP) has become an essential tool in marketing education products successfully to school district decision-makers. The purpose of this type of paper is to show that the instructional methods and approaches incorporated into the product are research-based—as part of the marketing department’s efforts to convince customers to purchase.

Unfortunately, many companies develop the RFWP *after* an instructional product is fully developed, when it is too late for the latest research to be factored into the product. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that the instructional product is best in class and “in sync” with the recommendations from leading experts and institutions regarding curriculum, pedagogy, and technology design.

A better approach is to complete foundational research as part of the product design process and then to repurpose this research toward a published RFWP as part of the company’s marketing efforts.

Drawing on the Project's Academic Experts and Extending Beyond Their Knowledge Base

Have your academic experts provide a record of the research they are drawing on.

Instructional products typically rely on one or more academic experts for the underlying curriculum and instructional design. The ideas of these experts are informed by the research and expert opinion to which they have been exposed. It is in the company's interest to push their academic experts to provide a record of the research and expert opinion they are drawing on, including summaries of findings and their implications for product design.

Going Beyond What Your Experts Know

Conduct a literature review to ensure that your product reflects the latest research and thinking of experts.

To extend beyond the knowledge base of their academic experts, education publishers should conduct a literature review to ensure that the instructional product reflects the latest research findings and thinking of other well-regarded experts across a range of approaches.

It is to the advantage of developers to understand the variety of methods and approaches shared by potential influencers, such as state and district policymakers and educators, during the product development phase—both in order to focus more narrowly on promising market segments, and in order to consider changes to the product itself that might broaden its appeal. This kind of research can also serve as a check on the assumptions of the company's program developers and content experts.

Additionally, early market and competitor analysis may reveal that the product needs to address specific pedagogical issues (e.g., project-based learning, differentiated instruction, formative assessment) to ensure market success. If this is the case, review of the academic literature on these issues is mission-critical.

Who Can Do the Research?

Larger companies may have in-house research staff. However, many midsize and small companies will need to hire independent education-focused researchers. Most valuable to education companies are researchers who can interpret research with an eye toward product design.

Understanding Policy Trends

Keep up-to-date on guidance from education organizations and government agencies.

Education companies should also be up-to-date on the opinions and guidance published by leading education organizations and government agencies. For example:

- The Common Core State Standards Initiative for reading/literacy and math products, as well as important non-Common Core states
- The Next Generation Science Standards, as well as key non-NGSS states

- The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards
- The RTI Action Network, a program of the National Center for Learning Disabilities
- Key subject-specific professional organizations (e.g., International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Science Teachers Association)
- Recommendations of the What Works Clearinghouse
- Policy documents published by national and state departments of education on a variety of topics

A Joint Effort

Because this research effort will serve both product development and marketing purposes, both departments should be involved in developing key questions that will drive the research. Budgeting for this research initiative can come from both departments.

Important Questions to Ask Independent Researchers

- Do you have a process for quickly identifying the most important, credible, and up-to-date research and expert opinion?
- Are you experienced at summarizing research and explaining implications for product design?
- Can you compare a preliminary product design to key research/expert opinion and identify where these align and don't align?
- Do you have experience repurposing the research into a RFWP when product is ready for launch?

To explore how IESD can help you conduct foundational research for your education product, call 212-769-1715.

ABOUT IESD

Serving the PreK-12 and higher education publishing and technology market, Interactive Educational Systems Design (IESD) specializes in research to support product development and marketing, and in effective communication with educational decision makers. Services include literature reviews and white papers, case studies, focus groups (face-to-face and online featuring our EDRoom online research facility), surveys, in-depth interviews, usability testing, competitive market analysis, customer analysis, and efficacy studies. For more information, contact Ellen Bialo at info@iesdinc.com or call 212-769-1715.