

## Bringing Clarity to the consumer journey

### A Formulations interview with ThoughtForm's Gwyn Cready

(The written version of this interview has been gently altered to increase readability)

**Kevin Fernando:** Hello and welcome to Formulations. Formulations is brought to you by ThoughtForm. ThoughtForm is a communications design firm located in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, working hard every day to bring beautiful clarity to complex ideas.

Today we'll be talking to Gwyn Cready about consumer decisions and how to communicate clearly to help consumers through decisions. To start off, do you want to talk a little bit about yourself Gwyn?

**Gwyn Cready:** Sure, I am a writer and brand builder here at ThoughtForm, and I like helping clients take complex problems, and figure out a way to communicate them clearly.

**KF:** That's awesome. It's good to have you here.

**GC:** I'm glad to be here

**Topic one:**  
**Information and risk along  
the consumer journey**

**KF:** At ThoughtForm, we like to distinguish between high-information and low-information decisions along our consumers' journeys. What's the difference between a high-information and a low-information decision?

**GC:** Well, a lot of it depends on the amount of time you take to research a decision. However, it can also depend on how risky the decision feels to you. For example, when people buy cars, they are generally spending a ton of money, and they do a lot of research: What's available now, maybe they haven't bought a car in the last five years so they don't know all the bells and whistles that are available, and how the prices have changed in the last five years. So that's generally a high information decision, but it doesn't always have to be.

Things that you would think would be a low information decision, like buying pain reliever, could become a high-risk decision if for example, it's a parent buying it for their baby. Suddenly, it's not just buying it for yourself, where you're like "Ah I don't care what I put in myself," But if you're buying it for a baby, you're like "Hmm, is this okay for babies? I have to read the instructions very carefully. Have there been any bad reactions?" Something that's very simple can become a high-risk decision, which therefore makes you do a lot of research to gain a lot of information.

"Something that's very simple can become a high-risk decision, which therefore makes you do a lot of research to gain a lot of information."

## Bringing Clarity to the consumer journey

### A Formulations interview with ThoughtForm's Gwyn Cready

I was talking about cars just recently. They are generally a high-information gathering decision. However, just in the last few weeks, our daughter needed a car very quickly. She thought she had her car working that day, but it had broken down for absolutely the last time, so we knew the next step was going to be her leasing a car. We didn't know it was going to be that day, but that was the day she went out and leased a car. Normally, we might have taken several weeks to look at different options, but we needed a car that day so it was sort of like, black or white? It can't be more than this much per month, and it has to have all wheel drive. That's how we had boiled it down to minimize the risk in a decision like that.

**KF:** So it seems like consumers, whether they have a decision that's risky or not, or high-information or not, it really depends on the situation, given your car example.

**GC:** Yes, it's very personal.

"You need to understand your consumers needs in order to aggregate your content and respond to what they need."

**KF:** Is there a way that companies can predict whether or not a decision will be low information or high information? Should they plan communications accordingly?

**GC:** Yes I think they should definitely plan communications accordingly. You can certainly talk to your consumers or find them wherever they happen to be on the path, and by talking to them, you start to get a feel for what the range of information needs is. Whether it's high-need, low-need, and what areas the needs are in, so you can be ready with the information they need, when they need it. If you are a car manufacturer, you can set up your website in a way that makes it easy for people to find the price, find the option, find the leasing ability, the leasing options. You need to understand your consumers needs in order to aggregate your content and respond to what they need.

**Topic two:**  
**Consumer research and  
testing methods**

**KF:** What are some of your favorite research and testing methods for finding out what your consumers need?

**GC:** Alright, I definitely think it's very important to find out what consumers need. That is one of my favorite research areas. I think companies can really do well by being absolutely and currently on top of what their consumers want. Also, what consumers of their competitors products want, and what people who should be consuming their product but aren't, are thinking. I think there are three groups there that you need to stay on top of.

## Bringing Clarity to the consumer journey

### A Formulations interview with ThoughtForm's Gwyn Cready

Now, conducting that research can be very expensive. I've worked on research projects that have been in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, but they don't have to be. Everyone can do a basic level of research that isn't very costly. For example, pick a product category. I can go onto twitter right now and tell you what in general people are thinking about that category or service, and what they are thinking about the key brands that are available in that category. It won't be the deep dive you would get if you sit down with consumers, but you spend a couple hours looking through hashtags on Twitter and you will start to get what the key issues are, the key complaints, their favorite things, etc. And that's really helpful.

**"I think companies can really do well by being absolutely and currently on top of what their consumers want."**

Another thing you can do that's not very expensive at all, if you have a consumer hotline and people call in, you should be regularly going through the logs of that, to find out what people are saying. Because, you know that people are going to call if they are angry or dissatisfied, and sometimes they call if they are really happy too. I wouldn't take it as what percentage of your consumers are unhappy versus happy, but I would read the unhappy ones and find out what it is that they are unhappy about. So that's another important way.

Another is to go where consumers purchase your product or service, or where they are considering it, now that might be online, it might be in a store, and if you can watch them unobserved, that might be really important, because sometimes when they know they are being observed they behave in ways that are sort of different than if they don't know they are being watched. Obviously you don't want to be too creepy about it, but being able to observe your consumers while they are talking about the product, or while they are considering the product is also a very, very helpful thing.

#### **Topic three:** **Tips for structuring** **information for consumers**

**KF:** What tips do you have for companies to better structure information for consumers?

**GC:** Well you know I'm big on better understanding your consumer, so when you are thinking about how to present a complex idea or topic to people, you should figure out what your target audience knows about that topic first. Also, once the topic comes up, what's the consumer concerned about. If you are tailoring your message to your audience, then you need to be helpful. You need to put yourself into their shoes and think about what they are going to be worried about when the topic comes up. What's going to pop into their head. You can guess at that, but it helps to talk to them first and also talk to them again once you have written or produced the way you are going to present the idea.

## Bringing Clarity to the consumer journey

A Formulations interview with ThoughtForm's Gwyn Cready

"Being able to observe your consumers while they are talking about the product... is a very, very helpful thing."

For example, I purchased this numbing agent, and my number one question was how long after I apply it, does the numbing begin. I couldn't find that anywhere in the material. I don't know why but other than "Will this kill me?" What could be more important than that. So I think companies need to think about that.

Other things they can do is chunk the information, think about ways they can break down the topic into three or four big chunks. So you give people a way to get through it without feeling overwhelmed. Also, using visuals whenever possible. People find visuals more engaging and easier to absorb. Everyone knows how to look at a picture and figure out what it means. Pictures let you do some things much more quickly than words do. Things like bringing a focus to the more important things, or showing relationships among ideas, or showing the hierarchy of what comes first and what's more important. Whenever you can, use visual explanations in your presentation. It can be very helpful.

### **Signing off**

**KF:** Okay thank you for joining us, that's about it for today! Thank you Gwyn for providing us with all those insightful answers.

**GC:** My pleasure.

**KF:** And if you are coming to us from Youtube, don't forget to hit subscribe, and don't forget to visit ThoughtForm.com for lots of other content including blog posts, white papers, case studies, everything you could possibly need to learn about communication design. Thank you very much and we'll see you next month.