

# 9 Ways to Champion the ROI of Your Research

When quality research takes time, resources, and money, how can teams demonstrate their company is getting a return on its investment?

In this Q&A, experts break down nine ways to ensure your company understands the value of your team's work—and gives you the tools to make a real impact.

This article has been excerpted from a webinar interview. [You can watch the entire session here.](#)

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# Tips for demonstrating the value of your research

## 1. Get in the heads of your stakeholders

**Dr. Nikki:** I'm asking [partners and mentors], *"What's important to you? What could you do if you understood this more? If we were able to get you some feedback from customers on how they felt about that, would that information be helpful?"*

When I reposition it through these relationships and conversations, I then have been able to use that and position myself and the team to say, *"You need us and you need something like this because you said you had these questions. You said you needed this deeper understanding and Product is saying they're not sure how customers are going to receive and interact with this to make sure they're building the right system."*

Research is important because we can figure that out for you in a way that gives you not only just the answer to the question, but also the context around it. Having that business language helps me position myself and the team.

## 2. Understand the language and metrics your stakeholders use

**Greg:** The language we use is very important. I'm sure all of us have been involved in a conversation with one of our partners where they've been trying to talk about research and just have clearly demonstrated that they don't understand what we do, or they don't understand best practices, or they don't understand the outcomes that we are trying to achieve through our research.

Let's think about it in the reverse context. You have your business partners, data analytics partners, or tech partners, and you're going to them and talking about their work and their priorities.

If you're not using language that is familiar to them—that is, if you are showing yourself to be naïve within their area of expertise, it's a lot harder to form those relations and to trust the recommendations that you're providing.

If I'm able to go to my partner and talk about the percentage of engagement that we might grow as a result of this work, if I'm able to talk about contribution margins across our organization that may be affected by a different distribution of how we do research, all of a sudden their ears perk up and they say, *“Okay, you understand what I'm thinking about. I'm willing to listen to you now. You've shown yourself to have spent a little bit of time understanding what I do.”*

Go to finance meetings and listen to how they talk about earnings and expenses. Get familiar with how these business metrics are calculated. It's one thing to say, *“We want to affect our return on investment or NPS or year-over-year expenses. Do you know how those are calculated? Do you know the things that go into those?”* Have a better understanding of what will be helpful.

### 3. Form strong partnerships across departments

**Greg:** One of the reasons that we're able to be successful is because we have integrated with what we call our “quad partners”. The quad is Design (representing designers, content strategists, and researchers), Product, Tech/Dev, and Data and Analytics

We make decisions together. We think about what types of items we want to research together, what we want to learn together, and what our strategic priorities are together. We're all working toward a common goal.

### 4. Partner with leadership to identify priorities

**Greg:** Part of our job as a research team is to help our partners decide where they should spend their resources, priorities, and time.

If one of the things we're able to do is say, *"Here are a bunch of things that are probably not as valuable to the customer experience, probably not as impactful to our usability metrics, and probably won't drive revenue or decrease expenses in the way that you're hoping."* Then we can say, *"Let's not use our time, money, and resources there. Let's use it on other things that will provide more value."*

Being able to steer our partners to more valuable projects is an impact and return on investment for our work.

## 5. Focus on customer impact

**Dr. Nikki:** Let's say you're not close enough to where you know the ROI and you don't know some of these numbers and you can't talk in terms of finance and how it's gonna maybe drive impact on the bottom line.

What you can do is always bring it back to, *"What are the implications to the customer experience if we were to do this? This is what we think the experience will be and this is what we think the impact will be based on that discovery and generative research that we had done before."*

Even if you're not close enough to, or have enough of the business acumen, you can always drive help. Your stakeholders understand the implications by helping them understand what the customer experience is going to be.

## 6. Work on your own personal development

**Greg:** If you are trying to go up the corporate ladder, you will hit a plateau at some point unless you start learning about finances, business goals, and business values. You cannot progress higher. You will hit a wall and you will not be allowed to progress if you do not show the requisite skill or ability to learn some of these things.

You'll get to a point where it's too essential—that your job is far enough removed from the actual research and your job is now more about resourcing, prioritization, and strategic vision for the organization.

You need to be able to understand these things to be in those rooms with those folks having those conversations and advocating for yourself and your team.

## 7. Ensure that insights are actionable

**Greg:** Our research is only valuable if it's actionable, which is when we talk about the ROI or the impact of user experience or user experience research.

One of the primary ways we provide value is by making sure that our work is actionable and our partners can do something and we can do something with our research. The phrase that I like to use is, *"We don't produce book reports."* We don't simply talk to customers and then write down a list of things that the customer said.

We are effective when we're able to identify those insights and turn them into recommendations that are actionable, tangible, and tactical. We talk a lot on our team about what we're not going to do as well—this idea of research acting as a risk mitigation team.

## 8. Make sure your insights and results tell a story

**Dr. Nikki:** We can tell the story that we did 50 research studies. I promise you, no one cares.

What you need to do is say, *"We lead creative insights that drove action resulting in a 15 percent lift and conversion."* Or you can say, *"Helped de-risk a product launch based on feedback from key customer segments."* There are no numbers involved in that, but it tells a better story.

## 9. Champion both direct and indirect results

Greg: I like to think about impact as having direct results and indirect results. Typically when people think about the ROI of our work, they're thinking about business results like, how much money did we make? How many expenses did we save? Those are direct business results.

But there are also customer and user impacts. These are usability scores. These are engagement metrics. These are the metrics that we look at to understand whether a customer experience is more or less successful.

There are also equally important indirect results that we, as either individual researchers or research managers, should be following and tracking just as importantly:

- Are you making a process impact?
- Is your work changing the way that your organization is working?
- Is it changing the way that your partners think about the process of decision-making?
- Are you building empathy?
- Are your partners learning more about your customers?

That is a return on your investment. You might not be able to tie it to, “*We generated X amount more revenue.*” But over the long term, you are building an organization that understands your customers better and as a result, can more naturally make informed contextual decisions about what they should and should not do.

## Wrapping it up

The strongest foundation for demonstrating the value of your research begins with understanding the outcomes your stakeholders are looking for—and forming meaningful partnerships across the organization.

Creating actionable insights that also tell a story will also pave the path for demonstrating all that your team has achieved. While none of this work happens overnight, it's a goal you can build towards in collaboration with your team and in tandem with your own professional development.

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