



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

ENTERPRISE HARDWARE DESIGN: EXECUTING A MULTI-REGIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY BY LEVERAGING LOCAL RESEARCH PARTNERS

When you have a product that will be deployed on an international scale it is important to do regional testing to confirm that local insights generalize across markets. Human Interfaces executed an enterprise hardware design research project in four major metropolitan areas in the US and abroad: Los Angeles, Chicago, London, and Munich. By leveraging our relationship with a trusted research firm in Germany we were able to quickly translate our materials and research protocol

into the local language, have it executed by native speakers with a live translation streamed for observers back in the states, and results compiled and reported (alongside other regional data) within the span of a few weeks.

One of the largest enterprise hardware manufacturers in the world was working on the design and development of their next generation of servers. They have a history of success in this space with a sizeable market share and needed confirmation that their updated product would not only be perceived positively, but would retain the aspects that users valued while improving on any short-comings. In particular, they wanted to learn how their current enterprise IT products were perceived relative to the competition and they sought feedback on the industrial design direction of the next generation. They asked Human Interfaces to execute a series of focus groups with both end-users and IT business decision makers, first in the US and later in London and Munich to validate and extend research insights. In each of these locales we recruited local IT professionals and decision makers to participate in one of 4 focus groups, culminating in a total of 112 participants across all markets.

The research began in the US. Results were mostly consistent domestically between the two markets. The client's brands were perceived as one of the top amongst the competition. The industrial design was considered in-line and as heading in a positive direction. Only minor revisions to the design language were warranted and the client had a better feel for feature prioritization.

When the research was extended to Europe, Human Interfaces discovered that one of the competitors was considered a more premium brand over the client, differing from US opinions. This clarified who our client's biggest competitor was in this market, not just based on market share, but in overall quality perceptions. Also, although many of the design themes from the US were consistent (certain design elements were well-liked and a few were disliked), a significant and surprising difference in perceptions was uncovered in EMEA. One key feature of the product had been designed with multiple options – four physical prototypes were shown in-session to facilitate assessment and discussion. In the US, none of the four prototypes was particularly well liked or disliked. However, these prototype variations were found to be very polarizing in EMEA. This informed the design direction away from *“any of these options would be acceptable”* to *“avoid this particular design because it is poorly received in EMEA”*.

Our client came away from the research with a much more nuanced understanding of their place in the competitive enterprise hardware space and a clarified direction for their design language

- Discovered that perceptions of which enterprise hardware brands is most premium is region-specific
- Discovered that a neutral design element (in the US) had a strong negative association in another market (EMEA) which thereby informed industrial design direction