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IMAGE SOURCE: Image generated by ChatGPT

Sales Figures Don't Tell the Whole Story: Why Soft Data Explains Hard Data

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Sales numbers are often treated as the ultimate measure of market performance. When they rise, strategies feel validated. When they fall, companies react — adjusting pricing, launching promotions, or reshuffling portfolios. But sales figures, no matter how detailed, only reveal what happened. They rarely explain why.

That “why” often sits outside the spreadsheet, in the experiences, perceptions, and expectations of the people who use the machines. This is where **soft data** — insights gathered directly from professionals through **surveys** — becomes indispensable.

Hard data shows the outcome. Soft data tells the story behind it.

Consider a case from the agricultural machinery sector. A brand performed strongly in some European markets but struggled in others, despite offering the same machines and dealer support. Sales data couldn't explain the difference.

A survey revealed the missing context:

- In Benelux, 50% of respondents said they were “very satisfied” with the dealer network.
- In the DACH region, that figure dropped to just 20%.

The machines hadn't changed — the surrounding experience had. Soft data uncovered a variable that hard data couldn't detect.

Perception drives behavior — even when performance is strong

In several LECTURA projects, companies believed their declining sales must be linked to technical concerns or pricing. Yet survey feedback uncovered entirely different drivers:

- Limited visibility in local markets
- Confusion about product positioning
- Perceived gaps in aftersales support
- Low brand recognition among new buyers

None of these factors show up in a sales report, but all of them influence purchasing decisions.

The value of asking the right questions

Soft data becomes most powerful when it is targeted and anonymous. Asking questions such as:

- *“How would you rate this brand's reliability?”*
- *“How visible is this brand in your country?”*
- *“Which competitors do you consider closest alternatives?”*
- *“Why didn't you choose this product?”*

...gives companies access to motivations that internal assumptions may miss.

In one recent **LECTURA survey**, respondents revealed that the leading reason for not choosing a particular manufacturer wasn't price or features — it was *low awareness*. A simple insight, but one that redirected the company's strategy far more effectively than adjusting machine specifications would have.

Soft data becomes stronger with real representation

For insights to matter, they must come from a representative audience. LECTURA's reach — **1.1 million monthly professionals**, across **14 languages** and **200+ equipment categories** — ensures that soft data reflects real market sentiment, not a narrow sample.

This matters especially for global brands, where perception can shift dramatically between regions. Connecting local sentiment with performance data helps companies understand not only what is happening, but why it differs from market to market.

The takeaway

Hard data is essential for tracking performance. But without soft data, it offers only half the picture.

To understand sales fluctuations, market position, or customer loyalty, organizations must listen directly to the professionals shaping the demand.

With the right questions — and the right audience — surveys turn numbers into meaning, and meaning into better decisions.

✉ **Would you like to know more?**

Visit the [survey website](#) or Send us an email at survey@lectura.de

Source: LECTURA GmbH