

Milieu Insight wants to make market research pain-free; raises seed funding

Will Chin | 29 November 2018

Admit it: traditional market research methods are painful for everybody. For researchers, low response rates and quality of results are constant struggles. For research buyers, designing the right survey takes time, not to mention the cost involved. For surveyees, nobody likes to receive phone calls from unknown numbers.

This is where [Milieu Insight](#) comes in. The two-year-old Singapore-based consumer data and analytics startup hopes to simplify how brands acquire and use consumer data.



At the recent Basecamp Singapore 2018 event by Salesforce, *Tech in Asia* caught up with Gerald Ang and Stephen Tracy – CEO and COO at Milieu, respectively – to find out how the company intends to shake up the US\$45-billion industry... one data point at a time.

The pain of market research is real

Before Milieu Insight, Ang spent about two years at market research firm YouGov and more than four years at Growth from Knowledge (GfK). Ang also spent eight out of the last 10 years in Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand. “Sometimes, I label myself as not just a Singaporean, but also a Southeast Asian,” he confesses with a laugh. His decade-long experience, however, highlighted several pain points about the market research industry.

For example, the amount of administrative work needed to launch a 15-question survey is tedious, to say the least. The cost is also prohibitive, thus preventing social enterprises and startups to engage in consumer research. “Then there’s speed. Clients are moving much faster in terms of their marketing planning,” Ang explains.

“Previously, maybe they do four-to-five major campaigns a year. Now they are doing 20 a month, so they either have to begrudgingly wait for three weeks before the results come in, or they have to base their decisions on instincts.”

Keep it simple, easy, and fun

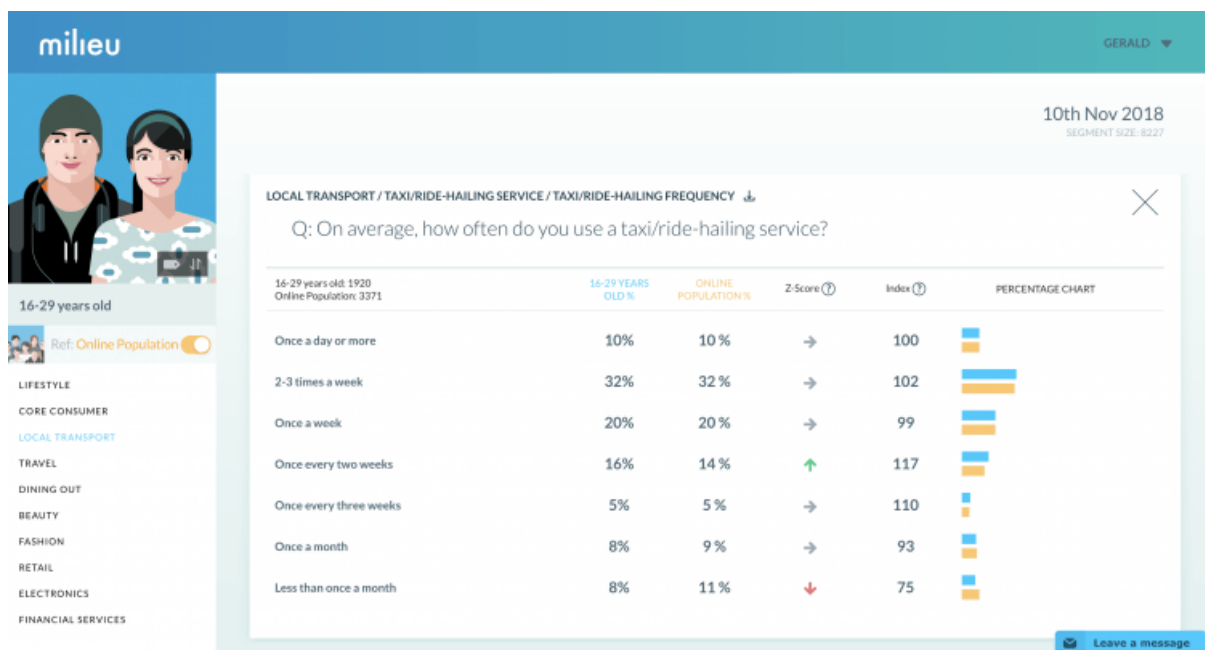
At the core of Milieu Insight’s product offering is Canvas, which allows businesses to access and build statistically robust and timely consumer profiles for more effective campaign planning and audience targeting.

One of the biggest differentiators, however, is that the company collects data exclusively through its mobile app, Milieu Surveys. “Mobile is the way to go,” Tracy asserts.

He adds, “There’s quality control [to] make sure that your data is good. It prevents professional panelists and bots to create information we cannot use.”

They track users through their device IDs, making sure they’re not cheating the system by creating multiple accounts or taking one survey twice.

Besides, considering the penetration of mobile devices in Southeast Asia, building a market research platform outside of the mobile ecosystem no longer makes sense. “Most people do surveys in between places when they are commuting. No one wants to [turn on] a desktop just to do surveys,” Tracy says.



On Milieu Surveys, users can answer short multiple choice questions on the go. The more questions they answer, the more points they get. These points can then be used to redeem rewards, from vouchers to money wired straight to their bank

accounts – even donations to charitable causes. Since the app’s launch in Singapore and Thailand, Milieu Surveys has garnered more than 150,000 registered users.

The startup aims to create a pleasant experience on the buyer’s side, too. Instead of columns of data on seemingly endless Excel sheets, research buyers are presented with a simple and elegant dashboard. “Our model is subscription-based,” Tracy elaborates. “Instead of a one-off project, where you spend two weeks designing a survey, you subscribe to our platform and get access to all the possible data of consumers.”

Crash and burn – and rise again

Two years on, Milieu Insight has already hit several milestones. For one, the startup secured US\$730,000 in seed funding from a number of private investors, including former Rippledot Capital director Ravi Ravulaparathi.

Also, Salesforce recently collaborated with Milieu Insight to find out how keen Singaporean workers are to adopt new skills at work. More than 1,200 interviews were conducted within a week – that’s excluding the 7,244 profiles of working professionals already on Milieu Insight’s database. In short, things are going great.

However, that hasn’t always been the case. Milieu Insight has its own set of challenges and horror stories. For example, two weeks after Milieu Surveys was launched on the Google Play store earlier this year, the app crashed. This prompted enraged users to leave angry reviews.

Instead of seeing the incident as a death knell, however, Ang saw it as a chance to make improvements. “I had to officially write an email [to] our users to apologize for it and tell them that we will do better,” he recalls. “From that, we learned to

build a technical deployment structure that allows us to do testing before rolling out the app.”

Since then, Milieu Surveys has rebounded from an average two-star rating to 4.3 on Google Play and the App Store. “This is what I always tell my team,” Ang says as he scrolled through the positive comments on the app store.

“We can make mistakes, but we never make the same mistakes twice.”