Contact

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(LinkedIn)

Top Skills

Market Research

Strategy

Analytics

Honors-Awards

2019 ARF David Ogilvy Awards -
Silver for Data Innovation and Gold
for Tech & Telecommunications
Categories

Zak Kirchner

Founder & Principal Researcher at Vikasa Insights - Former
Character.AI, Pinterest, Edelman, FANDOM Research Leader
New York City Metropolitan Area

Summary

I live for those "Ah-Ha!" moments where a critical insight is
discovered and everything starts to make sense. Seeing the light
bulb come on and empowering a leader to make a bold decision
with confidence is my favorite part of my career. With over 17 years
of global consulting and strategic research experience supporting
a variety of teams in the social media, technology, entertainment,
and finance industries, one of my biggest strengths is collaborating
across business groups within an organization. I believe it is
critical for research to create alignment across teams and inspire
confidence in a shared vision. I've been fortunate to lead user
research, brand measurement, thought leadership, and product
strategy research on both the brand and agency side.

Fun Fact: I started college off as a theater major and I think it's the
best market research training I've received in analyzing language
and motivations, developing deep empathy, and understanding how
intention translates into action within different sets of circumstances.
While my career path might have evolved from my high school
dreams of directing plays on Broadway, my goal is still to bring that
same level of creativity, empathy, and story-telling to my work.

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Experience

Vikasa Insights
Founder & Principal Researcher
September 2024 - Present (6 months)
New York City Metropolitan Area

Founded an independent research consultancy, delivering UX, brand, and
market research insights to clients.

Hired on part-time UX research contract with Character.AI after layoffs to run
usability testing for the new Story mode creation feature and develop a survey
to assess interest in new features for the 2025 product roadmap.

Character.AI
Head of User Research & Market Insights
April 2024 - September 2024 (6 months)
New York, New York, United States

Established the UX research and market insights program for the most engaging consumer AI app by time spent with the second largest user base behind ChatGPT.

Designed the first EQ (Emotional Intelligence) benchmark for AI's that combined subconscious neuro signals and conscious survey responses captured during live user testing interactions with different large language models.

Built a UX research community and conducted user testing to optimize app signups, discovery, retention, monetization, and the launch of two-way voice calls. WAU was declining when I joined and steadily improved to grow 20% MoM.

Developed an audience growth roadmap and user personas, identifying key jobs to be done, resonant messaging, and conducting a comprehensive product-market fit analysis to refine our product roadmap and design strategy.

Pinterest
4 years 5 months

Head of Global Consumer Brand Research
November 2021 - April 2024 (2 years 6 months)
New York City Metropolitan Area

Led consumer brand research and collaborated closely with product research, business development, strategy ops, and comms to develop our global user growth strategy. Transformed marketing strategy to drive audience comprehension, leading to significantly more effective campaigns and a notable increase in Gen Z engagement in the U.S. and U.K.

Head of Global Brand Strategy Research
September 2020 - November 2021 (1 year 3 months)
San Francisco Bay Area

Promoted to leading the global brand strategy research team and overhauled the global brand equity programs for the consumer and creators audiences, evolved our cross-channel campaign measurement approaches, and managed

all audience insights, creative testing, and channel strategy for our biggest media investments.

Sales Insights Lead for Entertainment, Restaurant & Auto Verticals
December 2019 - September 2020 (10 months)
San Francisco Bay Area

Started on the sales team supporting insights for the entertainment, restaurant, and auto verticals. Created a new targetable user profiling report that drove over $25M in revenue the first year and became the backbone for trends.pinterest.com.

Edelman Intelligence
Vice President of Strategic Insights
October 2017 - November 2019 (2 years 2 months)
San Francisco Bay Area

Worked with brands such as Salesforce, Facebook, HP, and Charles Schwab to create best-in-class brand reputation measurement frameworks and research-based thought leadership programs to build trust and authority in the market.

Led user research projects to inform the product roadmap for innovative tech solutions in artificial intelligence agents and augmented reality.

FANDOM
Research Director
April 2014 - October 2017 (3 years 7 months)
San Francisco Bay Area

Established the UX research and market insights practice, working closely with teams across the organization to help them understand our users, improve the product experience, optimize content strategy, identify opportunities for our advertising partners, and empower the executive team to make strategic, data-driven decisions.

data.ai (by Sensor Tower)
Senior Research Analyst
July 2013 - December 2013 (6 months)

Analyzed global trends driving the mobile app marketplaces to produce research based content marketing reports.

dig the vibe
Co-Founder

May 2012 - July 2013 (1 year 3 months)
San Francisco, CA

Co-founded digthevibe, a ratings-based social network where users could take surveys to raise money for charity.

Created the business model, designed the app's user experience, and conducted usability testing while managing a team of freelance developers and graphic designers.

Altimeter Group
Researcher
March 2011 - May 2012 (1 year 3 months)
San Mateo, CA

Worked closely with industry analysts Brian Solis, Charlene Li, and Jeremiah Owyang to conduct thought leadership research on the impact of disruptive technology and deliver custom consulting projects for clients such as Samsung, HP, Toyota, Wells Fargo, Blue Shield, Mastercard and Estee Lauder.

Interpret LLC
3 years

Senior Research Analyst
March 2010 - February 2011 (1 year)
Santa Monica, CA

Business strategy and research consulting with a special focus on social media and the impact of digital technology on the entertainment industry. Specialized in developing new custom research methodologies for accurately measuring new media behavior and attitudes.

Responsible for leading custom digital media, advertising, product development and monetization research for top web and entertainment companies including Warner Bros, Fox Home Entertainment, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, Microsoft, Yahoo!, Hulu, Universal Music Group, Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA), Samsung, Redbox, Electronic Arts (EA) and Activision.

Research Analyst
March 2009 - February 2010 (1 year)

Managed Interpret's New Media Measure syndicated research portal and quarterly reporting, including the development of industry reports that focused

on the early emergence of social networks like Facebook and Twitter as marketing channels.

Developed a new methodology for studying media piracy with significantly increased accuracy and adapted the last occasion coincidental techniques for measuring engagement with online media.

Associate Research Analyst
March 2008 - February 2009 (1 year)

Established foundational research skills supporting a number of quantitative and qualitative projects including large-scale attitude & usage studies (A&Us), consumer segmentation, discrete choice, intent-to-purchase and package testing, trailer/TV spot testing, and in-game ad effectiveness.

eLoyalty
Associate Consultant
July 2007 - February 2008 (8 months)
Chicago, IL

Developed personality profiling PHP algorithms based on the Process Communication Model to recognize customer distress, identify personality style, and analyze business events during contact center customer service phone calls.

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Education

Northwestern University
BS, Organizational Communications, Psychology, Film Studies

St. Xavier High School