

Zak Kirchner (he/him/his)

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Relevant Experience

Vikasa Insights

Founder & Principal Researcher, September 2024 – Current

- 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

- Established UX research and market insights program for the most engaging consumer AI app by time spent with the second largest user base. Brought back on part-time contract after being impacted by layoffs to extend runway.
- Designed the first EQ benchmark for AI's that combined neuro signals and survey responses captured during live user testing. Insights from this work heavily influenced the \$2.5B valuation and Google acquihire.
- Built a UX research community and conducted usability testing to optimize app signups, discovery, retention, 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

Head of Global Consumer Brand Research, December 2019 – April 2024

- Led consumer brand research and collaborated closely with product research, business development, strategy ops, and comms to develop our global user growth strategy.
- 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 trends.pinterest.com.
- Promoted to leading the global brand strategy research team and overhauled the global brand equity programs for the consumer and creator audiences, evolved our cross-channel campaign measurement approaches, and managed all audience insights, creative testing, and effectiveness measurement for our biggest media investments.
- Transformed marketing strategy to drive audience comprehension, leading to significantly higher performing campaigns and contributing to the 30% YoY growth in searches by Gen Z on the platform.

Edelman Intelligence

Vice President of Strategic Insights, October 2017 – November 2019

- Led a team of 15 researchers helping brands such as Salesforce, Facebook, HP, and Charles Schwab to build brand reputation measurement programs and thought leadership content marketing.
- Managed user research to inform artificial intelligence and augmented reality product roadmaps.
- Project lead for HP's All American Family research that won Silver in Data Innovation and Gold in the Tech and Telecom categories at the 2019 ARF David Ogilvy Awards.

Other Experience (see LinkedIn for more details)

- FANDOM: Established UX research and market insights function working closely with the COO and CMO.
- digthevibe: Co-founded a ratings-based app where users could share feedback to earn donations for charity.
- Altimeter Group: Thought leadership on business transformation, social media, and content marketing.
- Interpret LLC: Product optimization, marketing strategy, and monetization research for entertainment clients.
- eLoyalty: Created NLP algorithms to analyze customer distress and personality in contact center software.

Education, Expertise & Personality

Northwestern University, 2003-2007: B.S. in Organizational Communication, Minors in Psychology & Film Studies

Methodology Expertise: survey development, qual moderation, segmentation, usability testing, brand measurement.

Platform Expertise: UserTesting, Morning Consult, comScore, Nielsen, Google Analytics, Quantcast, Qualtrics, Qualaroo, Suzy, Ace Metrix, GWI, Talkwalker, Memo, Brand24, basic SQL and PHP.

Personality: Enneagram - 3w2; Myers Briggs - ENFP-A; StrengthsFinder - Positivity, Relator, Ideation, Achiever, Woo