

SEQUENT ACCELERATOR AWARD

2025 Winner

The **Sequent Accelerator Award** celebrates technical advances in key aspects of marketing analytics – spanning the modeling processes, metrics, data acquisition, AI applications, insight dissemination, and organizational adoption.

In keeping with the spirit of the Marketing Effectiveness Accelerator (The Accelerator), this Award recognizes innovative solutions that deliver meaningful brand impact and advance the discipline of marketing analytics.

Nominee Details:

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Our innovation transforms customer research by creating “Simulated Audiences” built on 100,000+ Microsoft proprietary customer data points. These Simulated Audiences replicate real audience reactions with 90% accuracy in minutes, enabling brands to test concepts, messages, and features instantly. This delivers insights previously unattainable—revealing subtle preferences and trade-offs—so brands can iterate faster, optimize campaigns, prioritize features, and target audiences precisely. By turning customer understanding from a bottleneck into a competitive advantage, it drives measurable improvements in brand performance and market impact.

Extended abstract

Summary:

Our Simulated Audiences built using 100,000+ proprietary customer voice data simulates real audience reactions shaping the inbound and outbound messaging with precision and personalization, delivering insights with 90% accuracy, at unprecedented speed (in minutes from weeks), transforming research cycles, reducing costs by \$7M in the past 11 months, unlocking new marketing scenarios where customer voice could be applied and driving measurable improvements across Microsoft campaigns, messaging and product launches.

AI Messaging Assistant

AI Messaging Assistant (AMA) is an AI app built by Research + Insights built on *proprietary research data* that provides instant feedback on common marketing tasks across **11 Microsoft key audiences**



AMA can help answer

- Does this message clearly communicate our value?
- Is our positioning differentiated enough to stand out in a crowded space?
- Are we using the right language to move customers from interest to action?



Applications

- Create value prop
- Brainstorm product scenarios
- Create campaign concepts
- Prioritize product features or product use case scenarios
- Optimize Messaging & Positioning
- Refine blogs, in-app, email, web page, social media communications

[+ more](#)



The screenshot displays the AI Messaging Assistant interface. At the top, it says "Hyper-personalized feedback for Marketing Applications". Below this are two buttons: "Create New Messaging" and "Optimize Existing Messaging". The main section is titled "Simulated Audiences" and contains a grid of audience segments with their respective sub-audiences:

- SMB for Productivity**: Sub-Audiences: VSB, Mid-market, Upper Mid Market
- Developer**: Sub-Audiences: AI, ISV, Enterprise, Decision Maker
- Security Decision Maker**: Sub-Audiences: CISO, C-1, Risk & Privacy DM, Other C-Suite
- ITDM**
- BDM**: Sub-Audiences: Overall BDM, BDM for Sales, BDM for HR
- IW**
- Windows Replacer**: Sub-Audiences: Prosumers, Creators, Gamers
- AI Sentiment**: Sub-Audiences: AI Optimist, AI Neutral, AI Pessimist
- M365**: Sub-Audiences: Consumer Subscribers
- Policy Insiders**: Sub-Audiences: US Rep, US Dem
- Gaming**: Sub-Audiences: General Gamers, Xbox Gamers

At the bottom, there are two blue bars: "Powerful LLMs with Proprietary Data Context" and "Proprietary Primary Research: Quant, Qual, 1P Data: Revenue and Telemetry".

The Analytical Challenge

One of the biggest challenges facing modern marketers is the ability to capture authentic customer feedback at the speed, scale, and depth required to compete in today's market and convert the customer insights into actionable strategies quickly. Traditional research approaches such as surveys, panels, interviews, and focus groups have been the foundation of insights for decades. While these methods deliver value, they are slow, costly, limited and often have a shelf life of single use. A single round of concept testing might take weeks and consume tens of thousands of dollars. Focus groups, while rich in qualitative insight, only provide a snapshot of a handful of voices. Even large-scale survey data can fail to capture the nuance of human reactions or the diversity of perspectives across different audience segments.

As the pace of marketing has accelerated, this lag in insight generation has become a bottleneck. Brands today need to make decisions in days, not weeks. Campaigns, creative assets, messaging and product features evolve rapidly, and yet the research infrastructure supporting those decisions is often out of sync with the business reality. This creates a significant analytical gap: marketers are either forced to launch campaigns without adequate validation or rely on outdated insights that no longer reflect shifting consumer sentiment. The result is wasted spend, misaligned messaging, and products or campaigns that miss the mark. In prior research cycles, Microsoft teams were spending millions annually on studies that could take months to deliver actionable insights. Microsoft needed a faster, scalable, and accurate way to understand customers in near real time and grounded in customer voice

The Technique That Unlocked the Innovation

Our breakthrough came from rethinking how customer voice could be captured, modeled, and scaled. Rather than relying solely on live respondents, we asked: what if we could simulate real audiences—down to their preferences, trade-offs, and emotional responses—using the latest advancements in AI?

To achieve this, we gave proprietary customer voice data context to large language models (LLMs). This data included years of research insights, verbatim feedback, surveys, and behavioral signals, ensuring that the models were grounded in authentic customer expression. The process combined several cutting-edge techniques:

- ***Intelligent RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation)***, that interprets, evaluates, and optimizes the retrieval process dynamically
- ***Reinforcement learning from proprietary human feedback (RLHF)***, to refine responses until they captured the subtlety and tone of genuine customer reactions.
- ***Audience segmentation logic***, to ensure that the AI could replicate distinct profiles and audiences very valuable to Microsoft—each with unique perspectives.

*The result was the creation of **Simulated Audiences**: simulated audiences that can replicate customer feedback with up to 90% similarity to actual human responses. These audiences can be prompted to react to new messages, evaluate concepts, rank product features, or provide trade-off decisions—producing actionable insights in minutes rather than weeks.*

Previously Unavailable Insights

*What makes this innovation transformative is not simply the speed, but the **type of insight unlocked**. Traditional research often forces marketers to choose between depth and breadth—either rich qualitative input from a small group or broad quantitative patterns from a survey. With Simulated Audiences, Microsoft can have both.*

1. ***Granularity at Scale***: We can simulate how different audience segments respond to the same campaign, uncovering subtle differences that guide precise targeting.
2. ***Trade-Offs in Real Time***: The Simulated audiences can be asked to prioritize features, rank messages, or evaluate creative, revealing not just what audiences like but what they are willing to give up.
3. ***Iterative Testing***: Instead of waiting weeks for a study, teams can test multiple variations of a campaign or product idea in a single day, iterating until they find the version with the strongest resonance.

4. **Exploration of “What If” Scenarios:** *Because the Simulated Audiences are not constrained by fieldwork costs, Microsoft can explore an unlimited number of concepts, features, or campaign angles, generating a breadth of insight that was previously cost-prohibitive.*
5. **Unlock new scenarios:** *The Simulated Audiences also unlocked application of customer voice to new scenarios which wouldn’t be researched otherwise such as advertising script or demo script optimization ensuring the words, tone and messaging reflect what customers would find it engaging.*

Impact on Microsoft’s Brand Performance and Cost Savings

The business results have been profound. By integrating Simulated Audiences into the innovation cycle, Microsoft teams have been able to:

- **Reduce time-to-insight by over 90%**, compressing research cycles from weeks to hours.
- **Lower research costs**, saving over \$7M annually in reduced fieldwork and operational expenses.
- **Launch campaigns with confidence**, knowing that messages, visuals, and calls-to-action have been tested against realistic audience reactions.
- **Improve product-market fit**, by prioritizing features and benefits that customers value most, rather than relying on internal assumptions.
- **Sharpen targeting**, tailoring campaigns to resonate with distinct audience segments and avoiding one-size-fits-all messaging.

Transforming Customer Understanding into Competitive Advantage

What began as a response to an analytical bottleneck has become a strategic differentiator. The ability to simulate targeted audience response at scale has transformed customer understanding from a constraint into a competitive advantage. Microsoft teams are no longer limited by research cycles; instead, they operate with continuous, real-time intelligence that informs every decision from product development to media strategy.

In a landscape where speed, relevance, and customer-centricity define success, this innovation empowers Microsoft to move faster, spend smarter, and connect more authentically with audiences. It doesn’t replace human insight, but it supercharges it—allowing marketers to validate, iterate, and refine ideas with unprecedented accuracy and efficiency.

By bridging the gap between the speed of business and the speed of research, Microsoft’s Simulated audience innovation has enabled teams to outperform competitors, build stronger connections with customers, save millions in operational costs, and achieve measurable improvements in market performance.