




# THE TOP 50 MOST INNOVATIVE CLIENT COMPANIES

For the first time, we decided to extend our inquiry around innovation to include client-side organizations. Since market research is driven by client demand, we felt just focusing on the supply-side of the business was an incomplete picture of the drivers of change, so extending our investigation to the demand-side would fill in some gaps. Our gamble paid off in droves, as you'll see.

Following the exact same question structure for the Top 50 Supplier rankings, we asked respondents to tell us which (and why) client-side organizations were considered innovative. The result was 1,816 total responses which were coded down to 544 unique companies. Below is our inaugural ranking based on number of total mentions.

P&G is considered the most innovative client organization by a wide margin to the remainder of the list. For many years, they have assumed an active and leading role in shaping new methods and approaches and this visible activity has clearly been recognized by the industry as a whole.

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We also performed a slightly different analysis based solely on the follow up question to the verbatim exercise: "Please rank your top 5?" Although we do not consider this to be the definitive ranking (that is the previous table) since it does not capture all brand mentions, we think this secondary analysis is interesting. Since we previously published the Top 15 using this analysis on the GreenBook Blog, we are including that version here for the sake of completeness.

1. Procter & Gamble
2. Coca Cola
3. Google
4. Unilever
5. General Mills
6. Lowes
7. Apple
8. 3M
9. Microsoft
10. PepsiCo
11. Mondelez
12. ESPN
13. Intel
14. L'Oreal
15. RedBull

Using this framework the ranking changes for anything below the Top 5, but the leaders remain the same, proving that any way we look at the data, these Top 5 companies are considered the leaders in driving innovation.

Rank	Company	Mentions
1	Procter & Gamble	142
2	Coca-Cola	122
3	Unilever	63
4	Google	53
5	General Mills	41
6	Apple	21
7	Microsoft	18
8	Mondelēz International, Inc.	17
9	Johnson & Johnson	16
10	PepsiCo	15
11	Nestlé	14
12	Kimberly-Clark Corporation	13
13	Lowe's	12
14	Red Bull	11
15	Samsung	11
16	Anheuser-Busch InBev	10
17	Intel	9
18	Heineken	9
19	Facebook	9
20	Danone	8
21	Warner Bros. Entertainment Group	8
22	American Express	8
23	Campbell Soup Company	7
24	Disney	7
25	Netflix	7
26	3M	7
27	Kraft Foods	7
28	AstraZeneca	6

Rank	Company	Mentions
29	Discovery	6
30	ESPN	6
31	Amazon.com	6
32	AT&T	6
33	Mars, Inc.	6
34	Toyota	6
35	L'Oréal Group	6
36	Reckitt Benckiser	5
37	Eli Lilly and Company	5
38	Target Brands, Inc.	5
39	Bank of America Corporation	5
40	Kao	5
41	Sanofi	5
42	Diageo	5
43	Nike, Inc.	5
44	Philips	5
45	Colgate Palmolive	4
46	Capital One	4
47	IBM	4
48	IKEA	4
49	SABMiller	4
50	NBCUniversal	4
51	HERSHEY'S	4
52	Clorox	4
53	MasterCard	4
54	Kellogg Company	4
55	BMW	4

## WHO'S ON THE LIST, AND WHO IS MISSING?

There are two interesting things about most lists, who is on the list and who is not, and this is very true of this list. We'll use the filter of the top 20 mentions as a frame of reference

### On the List

Business sectors that show themselves to be innovative by being in the Top 20 include:

- **CPG** – P&G, Unilever, J&J, General Mills, Mondelez, and L'Oreal – with Kimberly Clark and Nestle just outside the top 10.
- **Non-alcoholic Beverage** – Coke, Pepsi, and Red Bull
- **Tech** – Samsung, Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Intel. Note that Google is the only company in the top 20 for both supplier and buyer categories.
- **Alcoholic Beverage** – Ab Inbev and Heineken
- **Retail** – Only one retailer: Lowe's. Note that Lowe's performance was particularly strong given its North American focus and the global nature of the responses – quite possibly a result of Lowe's track record at speaking at and being involved in international MR events.

### Missing?

Major buyers of research who did not make the top 20 include:

- Media
- Auto
- Finance
- Pharma
- Consumer durables

Does this mean those sectors are not innovating as it relates to research? Of course not. But it does indicate that they are not talking as much about it or are not as engaged in the industry as a whole. Arguably, this lack of recognition for their efforts to innovate could impact them by limiting the number of innovative new suppliers who reach out to them, thus impacting their own ability to effectively implement an innovative insights program.





# DRIVING FEATURES OF INNOVATION

After respondents ranked the companies, they were then asked to explain why they perceive the first company to be most innovative. Again using advanced text analysis technology, we conducted an exploratory analysis on the responses to this question to uncover the features of these companies that caused them to be perceived as innovative. Our analysis revealed that the uniting features that these clients share are:

- Using novel technologies, methodologies and techniques
- Delivering impressive products, services, or deliverables
- Being cutting-edge and taking calculated risks

## Novel Technologies, Methodologies, and Techniques

The most prevalent feature of innovative clients in this analysis is their resolve to use the latest technologies, the most experimental research designs, and the most creative techniques in their business. Respondents said that innovative companies are those who are driven to move away from traditional approaches and try new things in order to push the envelope. They stay abreast of technology and science because they know that these domains are always changing, and they believe that the only way to stay at the head of the crowd is to constantly adapt and embrace these new tools and methodologies. For instance:

*[This company is] using innovative suppliers and methodologies. They are not only using neuro and non-conscious techniques, but in some cases training their internal employees on these techniques.* – In reference to Procter & Gamble

*Are developing new techniques, but mostly are creating products that we didn't know we even needed or wanted. They are successfully combining product innovation with new ways of living.* – In reference to Google

*[They] understand the need, dos and don'ts behind MR, while constantly pushing for new ways of doing things better and smarter. They realized that it's best to use best-in-class providers for each step of the research chain, rather than stick with one or two big suppliers.* – In reference to Coca Cola

*They have significant "R&D" funds set out to try (and ok to fail) new techniques and new technologies. Actively looking to push the envelope. proactive rather than reactive.* – In reference to Intel

## Impressive products, services, and deliverables

Many companies who made the list were recognized for their excellent products, high standard of customer service, or the high quality of their deliverables. Products, services, and deliverables were thought to be of high quality when they met a specific customer need, provide unique or novel insights, or synthesize data from multiple sources in a streamlined and efficient way.

*The development of no 7 lipsticks that are recommended based on skin tone seemed to respond to a real consumer need that resonates with customers, which suggests highly insights driven innovative product development.* – In reference to Boots No 7.

*Heard an anecdote that they seek alternatives from standard concept testing, such as launching a product on home shopping networks and rating the concept/messaging according to the ebbs and peaks of people calling in to buy the product.* – In reference to Kimberly Clark

*(1) laser focus on their consumers' needs / wants (2) continual innovation (both product / service / experience-based) (3) leadership in their given category.* – In reference to Starbucks

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## Cutting-edge risk takers

Companies perceived as being cutting-edge, pushing the envelope, and taking big risks were highly likely to make the top 50 list. Respondents value companies who have made risky decisions to disrupt the marketplace and ultimately usher forth a new and better way of doing things.

*The VR lab is very impressive, and the new initiatives they are rolling out are quite forward-thinking.* – In reference to Lowes

*Always pushing the envelope, not satisfied with “just doing the normal thing”.* – In reference to MTV

*They are constantly thinking of new ways and approaches, setting the stage and inspiring others to try the same thing. They are willing to take risks and try something new for the benefit of improving the marketplace.* – In reference to Charles Schwab

## Key Features of the Top 5 Most Innovative Clients

In this section, we shine a spotlight on the top 5 clients and unveil the reasons why these clients were considered to be the most innovative of all the client-side companies in the GRIT Top 50 Clients.

### Procter and Gamble

P&G was perceived as being innovative because of its effective and useful methodologies, their cutting-edge research, and their future-thinking mindset. Specifically, P&G was acknowledged for focusing on human emotion and its correlates to behavior (which is a notoriously difficult discipline in MR), learning new methodologies for analyzing qualitative data instead of relying heavily on quantitative data, and for hosting webinars and conferences in order to share their methodologies and insights with others.

### Coca-Cola

Coke was recognized for its commitment to staying at the forefront of technology, techniques, and methodology. Respondents applauded Coke for its innovative ways of understanding consumers at a deeply emotional level and the ability to engage with them at that level. They also admired Coke for its willingness to take big risks that pay off in the long run. For instance, it was highly risky to release

the “America the Beautiful” spot at the Super Bowl, but despite the detractors, the spot was still a big success. Respondents were impressed that Coke made a risky move in order to do something that they believed in – which was engaging personally with Americans on a very cultural level.

### Unilever

Unilever was recognized for its smart, fast, and effective methodologies, use of novel technologies and techniques, and cutting-edge work. Unilever was applauded for being the first to make significant discoveries, and for then sharing their discoveries with others in a collaborative way. Respondents mentioned that Unilever also has a unique and special ability to challenge their business partners. That is, Unilever is forward-thinking and holds high expectations, which causes them to have high expectations for those that work with them.

### Google

Google was lauded at being one of the most cutting-edge companies in the country. Respondents reported that Google is so ahead of the game that they are able to give answers to problems before anyone even realizes there is a problem. “First to market” was an expression that was commonly used in reference to Google. This indicates that respondents view Google as an industry leader that ushers forth new ideas that are often rapidly adopted by other companies.

### General Mills

General Mills received the unique distinction as being a company that not only utilizes new technologies and techniques, but that also helps to establish the benchmarks that need to be in place for other companies to use those techniques and technologies successfully. They were also applauded for being bold and risky in their approach, which most respondents reported as being an important facet of innovation.

These companies are sound examples of how client-side organizations are driving the conversation (and implementation) of innovation in market research.

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