conectys
global BPO solutions

HOW TO IDENTIFY TRUE EXPERTISE
2020 was a rough year for expertise. How do we know when we've found it, now?

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times

In the past year, we've definitely had a lot of expertise in the world on various important topics: vaccinations, epidemiology in general, working from home, macroeconomics, diversity, and more. The problem has become: are people actually respecting and listening to this expertise anymore?

At one level, of course they are and it's a dumb question to even ask. If your mom has cancer, you will go to an oncologist and not ask your plumber for advice there.

But at another level … hmmm. Maybe we do respect expertise a lot less.

In one pocket of the globe, as far back as 2015, Americans were distrusting science, which is troubling. There are some crazy scientists, sure — but in general the scientific method is something we've upheld and vetted for years. Foreign Affairs wrote an article in 2017 about the first world "losing faith in expertise," and The New York Times has done some book reviews about "ignorance now being a virtue."

We are not going to attempt to turn this into an academic paper by any means, because the target audience and typical end reader is a business-driven person looking for scale and help in growth opportunities. But it is worth discussing the idea of expertise for 4-5 minutes of your time, because if you don't know what expertise is, and you don't trust the right expertise, how can you scale that business properly?

Quickly: where do we stand on expertise currently?

A few notable examples, and some good dinner party banter:

- In a 2015 poll, 30% of American Republicans and 19% of Democrats supported bombing Agrabah, the fictional hometown of the Disney character Aladdin. In a similar vein, a 2014 poll found that the less people knew about where Ukraine is located on a map, the more they wanted the U.S. to intervene militarily.

- Another study done by researchers at Ohio State University found that when confronted with scientific evidence that conflicted with their pre-existing views, such as the reality of climate change or the safety of vaccines, partisans would not only reject the evidence, but become hostile and question the objectivity of science.

- In fact, in a twenty year study of political experts, Philip Tetlock found that that expert predictions were no better than flipping a coin. Further, he found that pundits who specialized in a particular field tended to perform worse than those whose knowledge was more general.

- Thomas Kuhn explained in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions that, at some point, expertise runs its course. As the world changes and evolves, flaws in existing models become more and more evident, eventually becoming untenable. That's what sets the stage for a paradigm shift. "Failure of existing rules is the prelude to a search for new ones," he wrote.

- Researchers at Northwestern University analyzed nearly 18 million scientific papers and found that the most highly cited work most often comes from a highly focused team of specialized experts working with an outsider. That combination of deep domain expertise and outside thinking is often what produces major breakthroughs.

There's a lot to unpack there, but a core question becomes: why has expertise declined in perception so much in the last decade? A few potential theories include:

1. Perhaps we're not educated enough, or don't know how to think critically through problems.

2. The rise of the platform economy means there are lots of different sites where you can find supposed experts, but the process of vetting them lies within the platform -- so maybe you just found a digital superstar or a blockchain goddess, or maybe you found a scammer, and you don't completely know.

3. Because business (and the world) is moving fast right now and can be especially disruptive, maybe the idea of expertise isn't evolving as fast as it should.

4. From the last bullet point, above: most of the big breakthroughs of human existence and crisis-solving have come from "a team of experts" + "an outside perspective." Experts tend to stay in a specific lane. (We are getting into "generalists" vs. "specialists" territory here.) The team of experts needs another perspective, be that a tech person, a "design thinker," a bitcoin expert, or whoever. If you try to solve COVID with only disease experts, well, that's 200+ years of experience (the whole team) of a specific way of thinking. You might need someone to help them break out of that. So maybe we're too deep in our functional silos.

Those are some potential theories. Now let's get to action.

How do you identify and vet expertise?

This varies by industry and organization, to some extent, but for our world, let's say you need an expert in customer experience. The approaches would typically be:

- Talk to others in your space

- Talk to former colleagues

- Talk to friends in the geography of the area you want the person to operate in

- Do some low-grade online research

- Consider a call for RFPs

- When you narrow it down to a few organizations or individuals, vet them online, including:

  - Previous work

- References

- Reviews

- Any red flags

- Examples of work specific and adjacent to the work you need done

• Go back to your trusted sources -- executives, consultants, etc. -- and run the options through them

This system is not perfect and sometimes scammers or less-than-experts will get through it. People have built massive companies based on nothing in the past 20 years (Theranos is a good example), and very-skilled institutional investors had no clue what they were putting cash into.

All humans have biases, and those biases can color our decisions and enflame our blind spots. The more people you involve in a process, while the meeting cycle can get tedious, it's good because you reduce the blind spots due to more eyes on whether a person/ organization is truly an "expert."

This works the same way at the individual level: if you want to understand who is and isn't an expert, get out of your own filter bubble and read/watch content from "the other side" of the ideological discussion. More voices is more framing, and more framing leads to truly expert-level people influencing you.

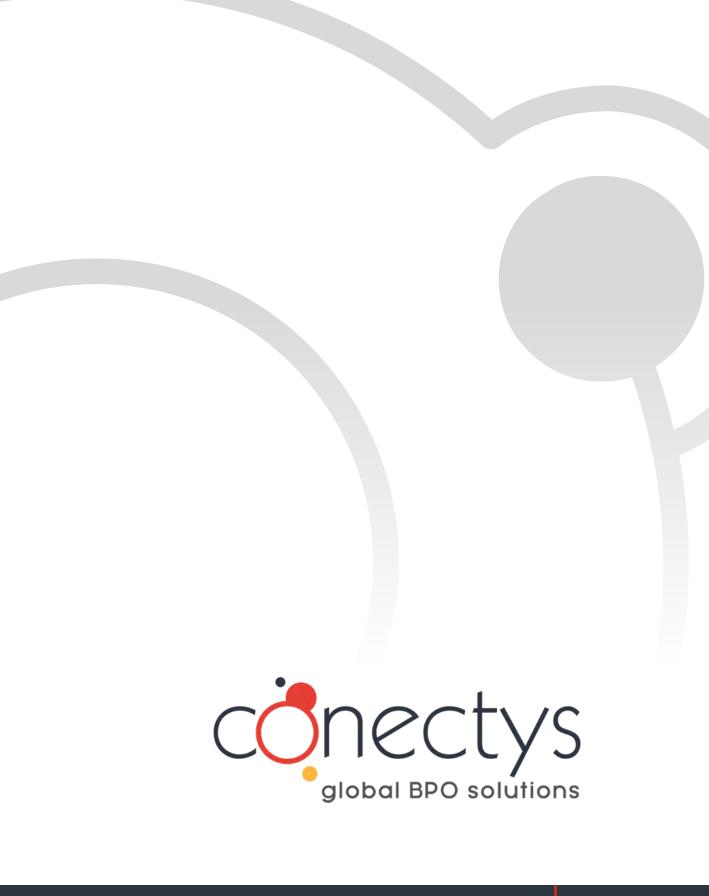## What should you look for in a customer experience or content moderation partner?

That's our world. If you're trying to evaluate real expertise in that space, look at these factors:

• **How long have they been doing it?** Tenure doesn't always correlate to success or expertise, but it's a good potential marker.

• **What do year-over-year revenues look like?** If they consistently increase, it means others are investing in their services, which denotes expertise.

• **Who else have they worked with?** Look for client logo banks on a vendor's site. If the logos are similar in business model to you, chances are you're on the right track.

• **What can they do around scale?** Ask them questions, look for case studies, and talk to others in your space about what they know.

• **How much access can you get to the executive team of the vendor?** That's where the true decision-making, and a good chunk of the expertise, will lie in a vendor/partner organization. We love our account managers here, and they have legitimate expertise, but sometimes you need to know you can reach a decision-maker quickly. This is usually a factor of size of the vendor, but can be the structure of the org too. Investigate this.

• **Can the vendor be consultative?** Some vendors/partners will be deemed "experts" because they are very good at nuts and bolts execution, but they cannot make any recommendations to you about CX, moderation, tech support, or anything else. They just know how to effectively turn the dials. That can work, but it's not actual "expertise" unless the business can be positively driven forward as a result.

- **Do they see the next few years?** Do they understand where different sectors and trends are headed, or are they overwhelmed with their current task and client list?

- **Cost and value:** You pay for expertise, because it's valuable. Does the cost structure reflect that? Someone that competes on going under-market might not be as expert as you think.

There are many types of BPO providers -- four distinct ones, in fact -- and finding the right level of expertise for your business is crucial. If you'd like to talk more about where our levels of expertise lie and how you can access them for scale and growth, we'd love to start a conversation.

conectys
global BPO solutions

Contact us at sales@conectys.com

Or learn more from our Blog.