



## **Episode 47: "How BI Unlocks Extra Tools in the Marketing, Strategy, & Design Toolkits"**

*with Melinda Deines, Director of Marketing & Communications at SLD*

*By completing UBC's Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights, Melinda Deines has been to apply BI to her work in brand strategy, marketing, and design. She shares how the intention-action gap was an aha moment in her BI journey and how she uses BI to tackle everything from reducing sludge to smoothing organizational transformation to helping companies achieve their sustainability goals.*

### *Transcript:*

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KIRSTIN APPELT, HOST: Welcome to this edition of Calling DIBS. I'm your host, Kirstin Appelt, Research Director with UBC Decision Insights for Business and Society, or DIBS for short. Today, we're calling DIBS on Melinda Deines.

Melinda is Director of Marketing and Communications at SLD. She's also a recent graduate of our Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights, for which she bravely navigated the time difference between BC and Ontario. And Melinda really has a gift for clear communication, and I'm excited to talk about that with her today. So welcome to the podcast, Melinda.

MELINDA DEINES, GUEST: Thank you. Thanks so much for having me.

APPELT: Why don't we start by just hearing a little about you and your current role?

DEINES: Sure. So SLD is a strategic design agency. We work generally with retail and CPG brands and we provide all kinds of different solutions from store design to consumer insights to package design, web design.

And in my role, I lead the Marketing and Communications team and our Strategy department is kind of connected with the Communications department. And so that's delivering our own marketing communications, but also working on strategy and communications for our clients. So that could involve developing a brand strategy for a new brand, coming up with their brand positioning. It could develop consumer research to help them solve a particular problem. So we're a kind of small team, but mighty. I hope that gives you a good idea of what we do.

APPELT: Yeah, that's great. And it sounds like just such an interesting, fertile, creative area to be working in. So one of the constants that we find in these conversations is that most of us have circuitous routes to get to BI. Very few of us are day one, BI is what I'm going to do. So how did you come to the field of BI? What was your BI journey like?

DEINES: So I think I had a common experience that a lot of marketers have, which is coming up against the limitations of consumer research. So, you know, conducting a lot of consumer research and say developing a new brand or launching a new product and feeling confident that, "Oh, you know, consumers are going to really like this. They say they really want it. We've tested the product, they like the way that it tastes. You

know, they say this is exactly what they're looking for". And then when it actually makes it to the market, there is not the result that the company expected. And that happens quite a lot.

And so as this happened more and more in my career, I started doing some research and trying to understand why is this happening. And that led me to learning about the intention-action gap. And I think any marketer who hears about this has a light bulb go off in their head. Because if you've ever conducted consumer research, you know, that this is a reality. And it was leading to conversations with clients where clients would say things like, "Well, consumers don't really know what they want". And you would say, "Well, you know, that's not necessarily the case. It's just that they may, you know, respond a certain way because this is what they believe about themselves".

And so, trying to figure out, like, how do I bridge this gap, when companies are looking to make data-based decisions, but then when they follow this traditional path of consumer research, it's not ending up with the results that they're hoping for. So once I sort of learned about the intention-action gap, that led me to sort of dig a little bit into behavioural insights through books like Thinking Fast and Slow, Freakonomics and started to become very interested in how this could be used in a marketing context.

APPELT: And from there, how did you get from books and reading to the Advanced Professional Certificate?

DEINES: At a certain point I felt like, "You know, this is really something I need to understand better". I'd gone to these one or two day things, which really if you've read a book like Thinking Fast and Slow, you're already sort of ahead of that and you want something more. But I could not and didn't really want to go back to school for two years full time. Wasn't feasible for me in any way.

And so I was looking for something that would offer me in-depth knowledge and practical knowledge that I could apply in the workplace and something that would be really solid, like felt like I had a solid understanding and I wanted to learn how to conduct experiments from a behavioural perspective. Not, you know, like I already was conducting market research, but it was mostly in the forms of, you know, focus groups and these typical types of market research. So I wanted to learn how to conduct experiments.

And, you know, I knew that there had to be something out there that could be in between doing a Master's degree and having that one day workshop. So this is what I found. And it was really ideal. And as a strategist and a marketing strategist, you know, I just wanted to have more tools in my toolbox, and I wanted to make sure that it was something that I could walk away from with skills, not just sort of like a high level understanding. So that was what I was looking for. This is what I found and it was the right fit.

APPELT: Excellent. Yeah. And I think what you were saying about the intention-action gap being an "Aha!" moment is so true for so many of us, whether you're working in marketing and you're like, "But we told them it exists and it's what they said they want it". Or if you're in government and it's like, "Well, this is the problem we're all facing and here's the policy". But it's just, you know, those barriers, whether it's something about the product, it's not clicking, why it meets your needs or how you get it. So true that that's a fundamental place to start the BI inquiry.

DEINES: And it's very relevant to, you know, a lot of the time with a client wants to do something differently. So say for example a lot of CPG brands want to make their packaging more sustainable, but sometimes when they change their packaging, and they do all this research and say, "Oh, consumers want sustainable packaging, they don't want all this excess packaging". But then when you're changing the packaging, sometimes you're making it a little bit more inconvenient for the consumer to carry, or maybe the products they don't feel it's going to be as secure or safe.

So sometimes those things are unsuccessful for clients because they didn't take a behavioural approach. They just thought, "Oh, this is what consumers want. We'll give it to them". But they didn't think about it in that perspective. And so it's really helpful when you're trying to do anything different that the consumer is going to look at it and say, "What's this? This is not what I was expecting". You know, it's so helpful.

APPELT: Totally. Totally. And for folks who may not live in the marketing world, just clarifying CPG is consumer packaged goods. I know before I taught marketing, I was like what is this acronym.

DEINES: Sorry. Yes, consumer packaged goods. So anything you find in a package in a grocery store or a hardware store or anything that comes in a package. That's what we're talking about.

APPELT: Perfect. Well, flashing forward, it's been over a year since you started the program, hard to believe, and a season since you graduated. How are you now using BI in your work? What opportunities have you found?

DEINES: So I'm really lucky that I work for a company that's been super supportive of me taking this course. They were very excited for me to take it and paid for me to take it and are extremely enthusiastic about bringing it into our work. So I've had a lot of opportunities to integrate it and an example of how we've been using it is over the past year with all of these sort of labor disruptions, a lot of companies are looking at evaluating their employer brand and trying to develop engagement projects or different engagement programs to help them hire and retain people. So we've done a couple of these projects and we've used a behavioural approach, and that includes testing and a lot of simplification, because there's a lot of sludge in these processes.

And there's just, what I've discovered through this process, is that for a lot of teams, I kind of refer to them as like cultural mythologies. So a lot of companies have developed sort of their own ideas and beliefs about things that are not necessarily statistically true. And they really can become biases within the own organization that are preventing them from either hiring or engaging their employees. So that has been something where we've been able to immediately integrate BI and it's been quite successful.

Another way is just through our own processes, is discovering where we have biases and there's a lot that get in the way of making things better. And just one of them is just status quo bias. And always assuming that the way we've always done things is always going to be the best way. And just thinking about that objectively and saying, "Wait a minute, let's take a step back and let's look at this challenge. Let's look at this client and this moment in time".

And one of the things that really stuck with me is, I think it was you who actually said "Context matters", and you really emphasized that point. And designers think that way, too. But sometimes you just, you know, you get on a roll and you're just going through the motions and you forget how much context matters. So that's been something that has personally, for me helped me sort of take a different approach to things that I had been doing the same way for years and thinking, "Okay, let's just take a step back and look at it holistically and see if we're doing it in the most effective way".

Something that's coming up is we're about to be working on a huge transformation project for a retail company that has a franchise network. And so part of my role will be to help ensure that the franchisees are being brought through the whole process in an effective way that will ensure that once the transformation elements are complete, so that would be things like store signage that they can include in their store, or different kiosks that they might be able to include in their store, to ensure that they are engaged in the

process of transformation, but then they want to actually put these things into their store once it's done. So that is something that's just starting up. And I will be taking a behavioural approach and hopefully we haven't quite outlined the scope of work, there might even be opportunity for testing on that one.

APPELT: That's so exciting. One thing I really liked in what you were saying is the idea of, like, every organization has sludge. There's just, you know, things are usually not optimally designed, whether it's intentionally, unintentionally, historical. And that that feels like something that no matter what kind of position you're in, there's probably something where you're like, "Oh my God, I can't believe this is the way that works". And that's a great place to start thinking about how to wiggle some BI into what you're doing.

Why have we always done it this way? Why is the default that our meeting is 60 minutes when it should be 45 minutes? Why is the default that we send 40 emails we could send one? There's something there where we're all dealing with sludge. That feels like a very approachable way to start.

DEINES: Yeah, one project that I worked on, there had been so many different systems layered on top of systems, that one particular job function had to jump through so many hoops to complete a task that could have been done in two or three steps. And so I actually mapped out all the different steps that they had to take.

And when I showed them the map, the client, they could see their jaws just dropped, because they knew that there was a problem, but just seeing it visually was like, "Oh my God, no wonder the people in this role are so frustrated. This is crazy. We can't have this many steps". It's just slowing things down and having tools to sort of help people visualize things or see it in an easy to understand way, is one of the things that I've taken from the program.

APPELT: Absolutely. I have to tell you, my favourite example of sludge is at a university I was at one point affiliated with, I won't say the university, the payment systems were such that a certain rank of employee was consistently mispaid, and rather than fix that system, they developed an Office of Overpayment Recovery, where there was a new branch that was wholly dedicated to clawing back the times that they had overpaid employees.

DEINES: Oh my goodness.

APPELT: So yes, sludge. Sludge is real. And so you've mentioned some concepts that have stuck with you from the program. Are there any other particular concepts or skills that you find yourself kind of using as go-to's, whether it's in on the job or in life?

DEINES: One of the things that that I'm using a lot is the EAST Framework, and it integrates really well with design processes. But one thing that kind of stuck with me personally was really making an ethical framework part of the process as opposed to kind of like an afterthought. I think a lot of the time in the business world, it's something that although it's becoming more important, and certainly to the individual people that I work with on the client side, it's important to them individually. But to kind of make it a part of the process was something that, you know, it just wasn't something that I was really thinking about. So, going through a process that has that as part, as one of the steps that you take, really resonated with me.

I think another thing was, you know, working on the Capstone project, just having that experience, it was really fun. It was a little bit crazy sometimes because my team was working in three different time zones, and working with a client that was in a different time zone from us, so four time zones. But to go through all the steps that you would take if you were doing a full behavioural project was you are applying what you're

learning in the course in real time. And that was, you know, learning that you can't trade that for anything else.

APPELT: Totally. Yeah. And so glad to hear that you all enjoyed it, even though you were battling time zones. And I know you all had a monster dataset with, I think it was like 500,000 sales point data.

DEINES: Yeah, it was 480 something.

APPELT: Yeah, we'll round. We'll give you the extra 20,000. Yeah. Wow. Yeah. I have to say, too, with what you were saying about the ethical framework, that's something that we've really been happy about, how we've been able to integrate that, because a lot of times there's pressure to add a course on ethics. But I find that that makes it feel like you said like an add on rather than being something that's integral to the process that you return to at each stage of the process and each stage having that thought about like, let's do our ethical check-in. So I'm really glad to hear that resonated.

DEINES: I think another thing that is, I find this one kind of humorous, is that now like once you learn about, you know, cognitive biases on a little bit of a deeper level, you just start seeing them everywhere, and you're like, "Oh, oh, oh no", you can't address them all, but you do start to see them everywhere. And I find that kind of humorous.

For me, one of them is like when I go to the grocery store, so because I work with companies that sell their products in grocery stores, whenever I go grocery shopping, I'm always paying attention to package design and in-store merchandising and that kind of thing. And so I'll often notice things that are either a misuse of a BI tool or an effective use. So it kind of feels like a big experiment.

And also notice myself being influenced by these things and say, "Oh, that one got me, that got me, or that one did not work at all. I think they need to revise that one". Another humorous one is that I read, so as I was taking the course, my partner and I hired a financial advisor and somewhere I'd read the statistic that only 13% of people actually follow their financial advisor's help. And this was in the context of behavioural insights. And so I was really determined. I'm like, "I'm not going to be one of the 87%". And of course, like a year later, like, we've done about 25% of the things she said, like, ugh, I am one of the 87%. There you go.

APPELT: It does feel like the more you know, the more you feel like you're going to be better armed. And I think in some ways we are like you were saying, you mentioned like, "Oh, I noticed that and I didn't fall for that one". But still, like, "How many times do I set my alarm to get up and exercise and still hits snooze even though I know. Still totally falling for that one".

Well, one thing I was hoping we could chat about, and I think we've already started to pull in, is just this idea of the intersection of brand strategy and marketing and BI. And since you are working on strategy and marketing at a design firm, I was wondering if, well, maybe first we could just walk through those pieces. What is brand strategy, what is marketing, what is design? And then think about how they intersect with BI.

DEINES: Yeah, absolutely. So, brand strategy is at the core of every brand. So, it's kind of like the reason that the brand exists, personified. Say for example, we took a brand like Nike, we could say that their position is that they provide the best tools so that everyone can be an athlete. And then their brand strategy is sort of how they live and breathe that promise in everything that they do. So that would be from product development to their store design to social media to the types of influencers that they partner with.

And then the design is the embodiment of all those elements through which you experience the brand. So that could be the store, it could be the website. And then marketing is the storytelling of that position through a wide range of media. So they all kind of work together quite organically.

APPELT: That is a perfect walkthrough. So how do you find them intersecting with BI? How does it change your approaches to strategy, marketing and design?

DEINES: They work together really, really well. And I would say that anyone who is in marketing or design should really learn as much as they can about behavioural tools because they are such a great boost to what you already do. Brand strategy and marketing are a little bit more like if we were talking about the force field model, I think they're looking a little bit more at those, the driving forces, and they tend to focus on "How can we push people and give them more encouragement?".

And sometimes that can create a little friction because if there are still restraining forces and you're pushing and you're coming up against the walls. I think understanding that can help marketers be smarter about what kind of forces that they're pushing on and making sure that they're not creating that friction. But I think ultimately marketers and strategists will really kind of intuitively click with BI because a lot of it just kind makes a lot of sense because you will have seen behavioural challenges that you couldn't quite resolve. You understood what was going on there. Because marketing means you do need empathy for your end user. And so you understand there's something happening, but you just might not have known, "How can I resolve this?". So I see it as like a huge booster for marketing and brand strategy.

For design, I feel like it's a really great integral tool. The processes of design thinking and a behavioural process have a lot in common. And it is about having empathy for the end user and thinking about their experience. I think design might be sometimes more about causing people to have a feeling or a type of experience rather than changing their behaviour. But behaviour is often part of a design process, so I think it's a really great thing to integrate into a design process because it solves a piece of the puzzle that design thinking on its own can't always resolve.

A lot of designers also kind of intuitively understand these tools, and I find a lot of designers and marketers will intuitively use BI tools, but because they don't know they're using them and they don't really understand the psychological strings that they're pulling, sometimes they're not very effective. They might backfire. There's a lot of hit and miss. You're kind of guessing. So it's nice to be specific and based on something and understand these tools that you kind of intuitively lean towards, and some that, you know, you might intuitively lean towards and then you might discover by learning about BI that, actually, that's completely wrong. What's intuitive is actually the wrong thing to do.

So, you know, a good example of that is when talking about healthy food or sustainable food, intuitively marketers are like, "Oh, we've got to talk about how healthy this is. We've got to talk about how sustainable this is". But I have learned that that is exactly the wrong thing to do, that you actually need to talk even more about how delicious it is because people will have this reaction in thinking that healthy food or sustainable food isn't going to be delicious or not as delicious as other foods. So it is a counterintuitive thing. So I feel like designers and marketers, they're going to naturally connect with BI tools. But a lot of the tools that you're using intuitively, you may be misusing and there's many that you may not know about that you could absolutely integrate into your toolkit and into your process.

APPELT: Yeah, the way you're describing it kind of reminds me of like the bonus chapter at the end of the book that you didn't realize you were missing. And then if you get the later edition, it has this "Oh, there's this other little bit of content we were missing. We had all the pieces there, but we were just missing this extra little bit".

DEINES: I kind of think of it also is like if you watch a TV series or movie that's based on a book, but then if you didn't read the book, you don't know all those little extra details and the director might have put them in there, but if you didn't read the book, you don't know what they mean and you don't know what they're about.

APPELT: Yeah, that's a great way. Oh, I like that analogy, I'm going to use that one. Well, on the flipside, how did brand strategy, marketing, design, how did they change your perspective in the course or how do you find them enriching how you use and understand BI even now?

DEINES: I think what marketers and designers are really good at is tapping into emotions and really understanding some of these intangible things that we can't quite put a number on. We can't always measure emotion scientifically. I mean, I think there are different tools in terms of neuroscience and biometrics that are starting to help us use some sort of scientific measurement to understand emotions. But I think where, you know, sometimes I would find like if I was looking at BI solutions, I would see examples of them, they seem quite dry to me because I know that that the whoever's designed the intervention really wants to make sure they're measuring the intervention and not adding anything to it.

But from a design perspective, I know if I was to ever show that to my design team, they would be like, "Oh, we can't do that because they would think this is not attractive, we can't put that out there". And I think leaning into the emotional side, I think for people who are really data focused and really, you know, like, "No, we can't measure this, it's impossible". I think there's some nice overlap there, where yes, it's intuitive, but also there are some especially really marketers who've been doing it for a really long time, or designers who've been doing it for a really long time will know, based on their experience, that certain things are successful, that certain say, for example, a certain colour will evoke a certain type of response.

And it isn't always an intuitive thing. It's sometimes, it's just year after year after year of doing certain things you'll understand that certain things will work a certain way. So that is, I think, something that BI practitioners might want to pull from, just looking at making sure that if we're going to use the EAST framework, that when we talk about attractive, things can be attractive, and if they're both equally attractive, then you're still measuring the intervention because it's the only thing that's different.

APPELT: Absolutely. And I think that also speaks a little bit to the distinctions between BI and more lab-based behavioural decision science. The lab-based science is very-- each version has to have the exact same word count and it has to have the same number of pixels, and we can't have any distinguishing factors. Whereas more of the field projects realize like, "Okay, it has to, it has to look good, it has to resonate". So and I think, like you said, that something that is, even in the field trials, is often something that has a distance to go for the actual final product, once you've found which underlying BI insights work.

DEINES: Particularly if you're working in, say, for example, the digital realm, if you're doing something like an email test where you're wanting to see what happens, is that a lot of the time people will simply not open or look at a particular email because it just doesn't look right to them. And so I think sometimes you just have to take some of those things as part of the project, because otherwise you might not get a result that's true. If you had designed this as an actual email you were sending out, you probably would have made it look nice. So you should approach it the same way that you would approach it in the real world instead of removing all that for the sake of purity.

APPELT: Totally. Totally. Yeah. If you're not getting them to engage in the first place, you're-- you've lost the battle before you've started. So, totally. Another piece I wanted to get your input on is, you do have this role

in communications, and you work with people who are in the marketing and strategy and design spaces, so like you said, there's some kinship with the ideas, but then they may not be familiar with BI ideas as they're expressed in BI or some of the terminology. So how do you talk about the BI with folks who have varying levels of familiarity with the concepts?

DEINES: I think you have to keep it really simple, but also be kind of specific. So, for example, using a definition like saying BI tries to understand and influence decision making, and then I find using an example of the intention-action gap to kind of frame it is really healthy, something that's really relatable, like trying to eat healthy or trying to save money. There are some really good case study examples. I talk a lot about the Save More Tomorrow program because it's something that really everybody can understand that, and relate to it, and it's been so successful. So it really demonstrates the power of BI. So keeping it really simple.

But then also I think a lot of people have a misunderstanding that it's like, "Oh, we're hypnotizing people and you just press a button and like now we're just going to make everybody do what we want". So sometimes you have to kind of like, "No, that's not how it works. It's not a magic wand that we're waving here, because a lot of times people are looking for something fast, easy and quick, and it's going to solve all my problems". And it can, like any other topic that starts to become really popular, people can kind of think it's the new magic solution to everything.

And I think it's really important to explain to people how it integrates into other things that you're doing. But it can't solve all your problems because sometimes people think that, you know, they want it to solve a problem that's not even a behavioural problem. And then you say, "No, we can't. You know, this isn't actually relevant to a behavioural approach". So making sure that people understand that we're not hypnotizing people. I find I bump up against that idea a little bit sometimes.

APPELT: Totally. As someone with a psychology PhD, I've been asked a number of times like, "Oh, so you know what I'm thinking?" Like, no, that's not how it works. No mind reading or hypnosis here. Well, looking ahead, where are you going from here? How do you want to continue to use BI in your career going forward?

DEINES: I really want to make it a main focus of my role on the team at SLD. It won't be the only thing that I do, but to have it be something that we integrate it into our design process, first of all, so that even if it's not something we're going to end up taking all the way to say like testing, that there's always that element because most of the time the projects that we're looking at are going to require somebody to do something differently somewhere within the organization at the very least, but often in the consumer or the employee experience, we're going to be asking people to do things differently.

So making sure that we're always applying that lens is something that is important to me, but also using it to change up some of the things that we do at the company and challenging our own, you know, comfort zone and making sure that if we're doing something, let's make sure we're doing it the most effectively that we can. And, you know, in any organization, people get used to doing things a certain way, and sometimes it can be difficult to change things.

So sometimes I find that I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to have to use this on my own team. And I also really am hoping that we can, we're already, using it to hone our research skills, so that when we are conducting even traditional market research, that using that lens will help us to bridge the intention-action gap". And we'll understand, like, "Okay, this particular research component over here is going to need to be married up with something on the on the back end so that we're making sure that we're recognizing the limitations of the different types of research that we're conducting," and filling in those gaps with maybe a test on the end or



some sort of results-based data that we pull out at the end, even if it's not like a randomized controlled trial, to make sure that we're understanding what the limitations are on the front end, I guess.

APPELT: Yeah. Wow, that sounds exciting. I'm excited to hear how all of that goes. I always get a little tingle of excitement when I hear the ways people are using BI in their work. So thinking about tingles, what are you excited about in terms of BI like where you see it going, ideas, research, events, anything in the BI space? What's got you excited?

DEINES: I think like lots of people, I'm really encouraged by all the work that's being done around encouraging more sustainable choices. And we're conducting a study right now on how to integrate circular systems into retail stores. And so we've done some audits where we've gone into stores that have different systems, like refilling your household cleaning supplies or, you know, taking an item in and having it repaired rather than having it replaced.

And there's some I mean, we haven't even finished the research, there's already some interesting behavioural insights. We discovered one company had been during the pandemic, they started refilling bottles for the consumer, things like shampoo and this type of thing. And they did it because of concerns around sanitation. But they found that consumers liked it better because the consumers were maybe like not as confident about refilling and they were worried that they would do it wrong, and make a mess. So they're going to continue doing it. So I'm excited about how we can help our clients, all of whom are looking to figure out how can we be more sustainable to integrate different, whether it's a circular system or a more sustainable product into their businesses. So that's one thing.

Another way that I can see it, I'm hoping I mean, I don't know whether this will happen, but I'm hoping that it can help us change our behaviour in online platforms. You know, I just like deleted my Twitter account the other day. I was like, "I don't see any purpose in this anymore", and it's unfortunate because there's so much potential for good to come from some of these platforms. So I hope that someone tackles that problem. We'll see, yeah. And I find it quite interesting to see that a lot of younger people are gravitating towards closed social platforms like Discord, where people can't just come in from outside, because of all of these things that are happening. And maybe that will encourage these companies to figure out, because there's lots of ways that they could use BI to encourage more ethical online behaviour.

APPELT: Yeah. Yeah, that is a ripe area. I'm excited to see what comes there. Well, we're running out of time, so I'll ask my traditional final question, which is, do you have a message for our BI practitioners in training?

DEINES: I would just say, you know, there's such a huge appetite across every industry that I come in contact with, to understand how BI can help. And so it's a great field to grow your expertise. And really I mean, I'm talking about banking, food service, health, everyone that I've come in contact with, who I talk to about this is excited about it.

APPELT: That, of course, resonates with me. I'll be in the choir with you. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to join us today. It's really exciting to see how you're already using BI and all the ways you'll be continuing to use BI, and I love the idea of these ways you're working with organizations around sustainability. So I'm looking forward to cheering on your BI journey as it continues.

DEINES: Thank you so much for having me. And yeah, have a great day.

APPELT: And thanks to everyone for joining another episode of Calling DIBS.