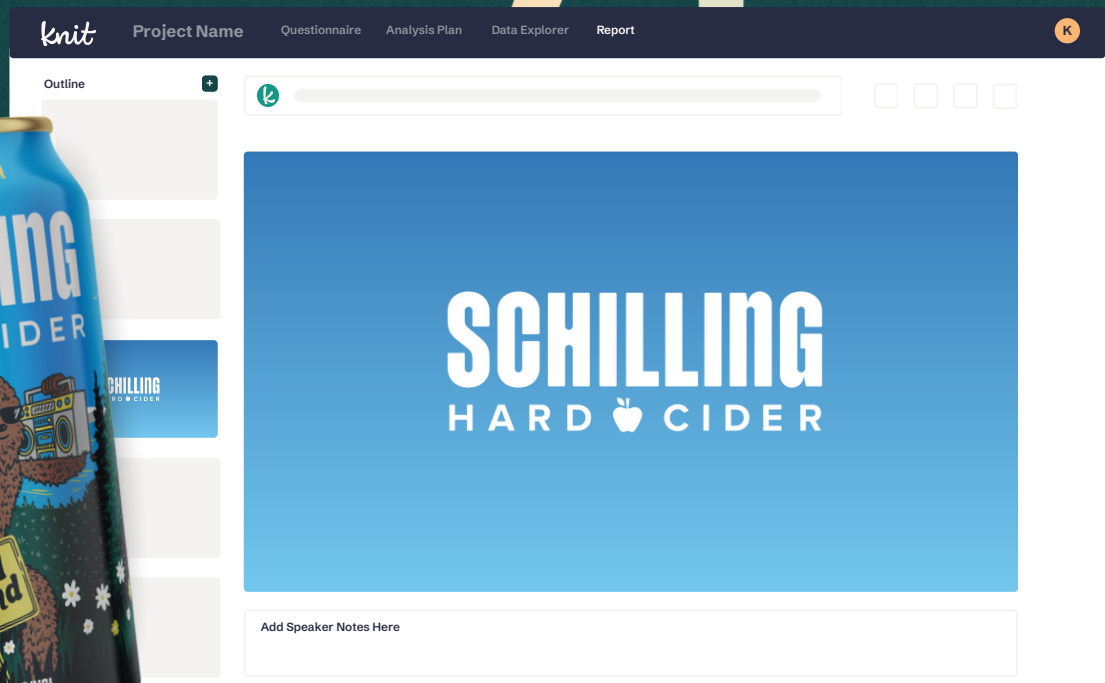


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How Schilling Cider Uses Researcher-Driven AI

*to guide brand strategy and
rebrand with confidence*

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At IIEEX NA 2025 in Washington DC, Rachel Thomas, Chief Marketing Officer of Schilling Cider, joined Aneesh Dhawan, Co-Founder and CEO of Knit, to share how the brand used Knit's Researcher-Driven AI to reimagine insights at a pivotal growth moment.

Schilling Cider was riding a wave of rapid growth — but didn't know *why*. With a lean team and a mandate to rebrand, Rachel needed to bring structure, evidence, and consumer voice into the process. What she found in Knit wasn't just data. It was a way to change the role of insights across her organization.



Rachel Thomas
CMO

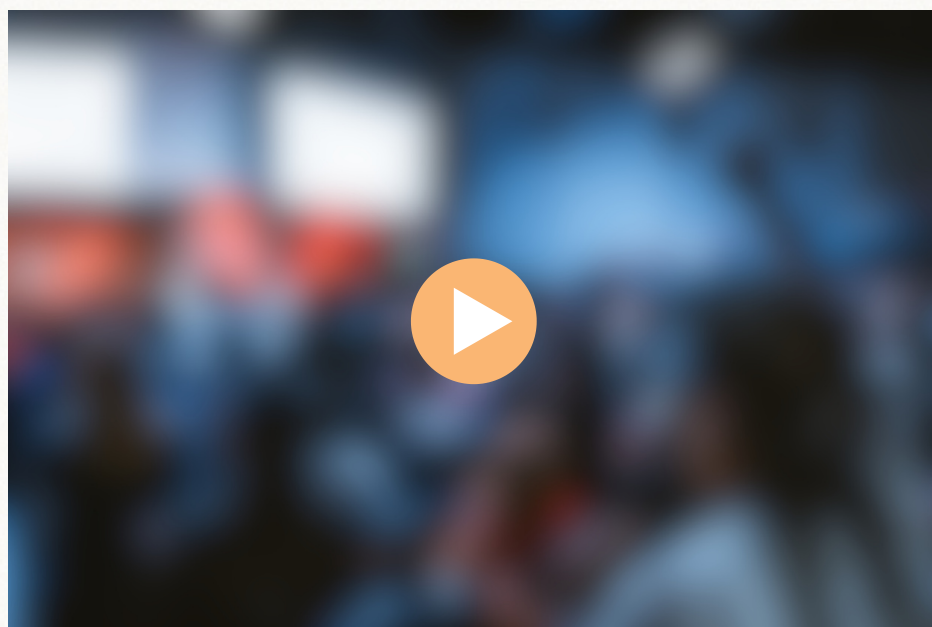
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Aneesh Dhawan
Co-Founder & CEO

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Watch the full session between Schilling & Knit:



Watch Now

goknit.com/events/iiex-na-2025

The Challenge

Rebranding Without Guesswork

When Rachel joined Schilling, the brand was growing fast — faster than its understanding of *why*.

“We didn’t know why we were growing. We knew the drink was good, the packaging was fun — but we had no idea if our messages were landing.”

Her task: rebrand four product lines in a category where hard cider represents less than 1% of the total beverage alcohol market. But selling the need for research internally was a challenge. The leadership team had been burned by past vendors, citing delays, confusing data, and research that “died where it was.”

Rachel needed a partner that could:

-  **Flex with a team of one**, without requiring deep analytics support.
-  **Deliver fast, clear answers** to guide brand and packaging decisions.
-  **Help turn consumer truths into creative confidence** across the organization.

That’s when she found Knit.



Why Schilling Turned to Knit

A colleague shared a Knit study on **Gen Z beverage preferences** — where Schilling was mentioned by name. Intrigued, Rachel reached out.

From her first conversation with the Knit team, it clicked.

Knit's **Researcher-Driven AI platform** gave her:

- 👍 **Flexibility** to launch studies on her own schedule — even after a full day of meetings.
- 🗣️ **Human support** from Knit's research team when she needed it.
- 🔄 **AI-powered UX** that guided her through study setup, question design, and analysis.
- 📺 **Quant + qual in one view**, powered by video-based feedback that brought real consumer emotion to life.

"I've always been told I ask too many questions — the insufferable 'why' child. Knit let me be curious again."



Human + AI: A Partnership That Scales

Rather than replacing her expertise, Knit amplified it.

Rachel leaned on AI to handle logistics — prompting better questions, surfacing early trends, and separating signal from noise — while her own human instincts, along with Knit's research team's, brought interpretation and brand context.

"I could see data in real time. If I was slow to respond, they kept things rolling without losing speed."

This hybrid approach made it possible for a single marketer to run complex packaging, messaging, and go-to-market studies without missing a beat.

From Koala to Clarity:

The Power of Video Insight

One of Schilling's first Knit studies tested new **packaging concepts** during its rebrand. For a brand that stands by the phrase "Characters Welcome," its suite of engaging animal mascots was becoming a staple of the brand.

But when diving into new package testing, a fan-favorite design — a beach-loving koala — triggered negative reactions among Gen Z consumers.

At first glance through quantitative data, it looked like a rejection of the character altogether. But by watching video responses, Rachel uncovered the real "why":

"It wasn't that they hated koalas. They hated beach bro koala."

That nuance changed everything. Schilling avoided costly creative missteps, saved a beloved character internally, and refined the tone of its design direction — while previewing a future mascot trend (hello, penguins).



Turning Insights into Strategy

The next step: understanding how consumers discover and choose Schilling.

Through Knit's quant + qual video responses, Rachel found that:

- Nearly 50% of shoppers discovered Schilling through in-store displays.
- Social media and events were neck-and-neck as the next major discovery drivers.

Those findings drove a reallocation of marketing budget:

- 🛒 Doubling down on **displays** — where Schilling could “be the weird brand we are.”
- 📢 Investing in **social media** — which scaled faster and more efficiently than field marketing.
- 👤 Keeping **in-person activations** lean but powerful.

“The data didn’t just give us a direction — it made the decision for us.”



Shifting Culture Inside the Organization

What started as skepticism turned into enthusiasm.

After sharing Knit's showreels — short, edited clips of real consumers reacting on video — Rachel's leadership team “dorked out.” The voices of actual customers made the data impossible to ignore.

“It's my favorite thing to hold over their head. I love being able to say, ‘I told you so.’”

Today, the Schilling team regularly requests new studies — even niche ones — to gut-check sales trends, marketing ideas, and packaging updates.

“Now they nerd out on connecting consumer data with sales data.”

The Results



Faster, more confident decisions: Packaging, message testing, and channel strategy grounded in real consumer feedback.



Higher internal buy-in: Executives now see insights as essential to brand direction.



A scalable system: One person can manage a continuous insights pipeline — powered by AI, guided by curiosity.



“Knit changed everything for me.

As a team of one, I finally had a platform that could flex with me — whether I had 20 minutes between meetings or needed a partner to help keep things moving.

I could dig into data when curiosity struck, see insights in real time, and actually feel connected to the people behind the numbers.

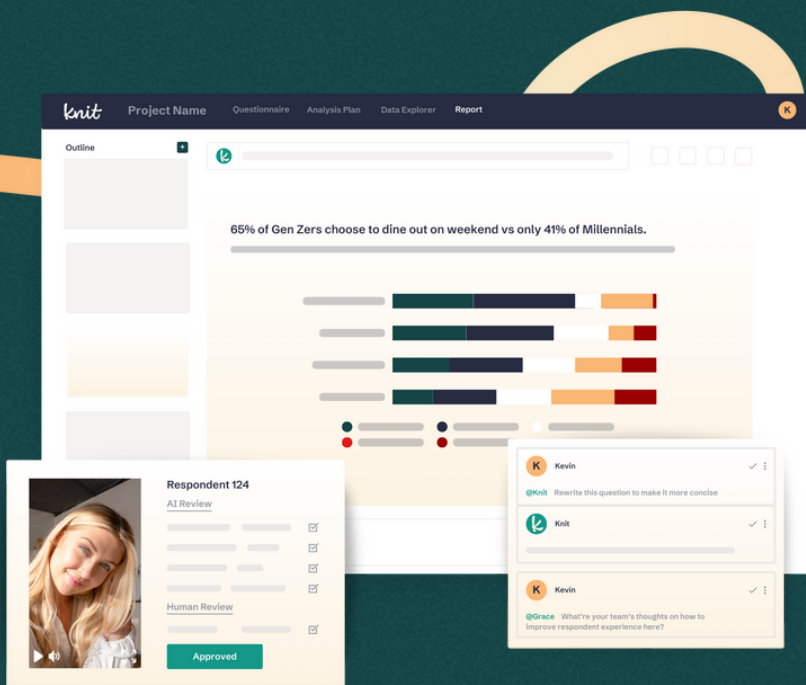
We didn’t just get data — we got understanding.”



Rachel Thomas
CMO

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Why Not Try Knit?

With that, I've just got one ask:

Why not experience the power of AI-Powered Quant + Video Research for yourself?

Find out how Knit can transform your research process and help you deliver deeper, more actionable insights in a matter of days. Whether you're looking to streamline your existing processes, enhance the quality of your insights, or simply reduce the time and cost associated with market research, Knit is here to help. Join the movement towards Researcher-Driven AI and take your market research to the next level.

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