

Online Marketing Research Survival Guide



- Getting ROI from your research
- Where to buy off-the-shelf research
- How to find a research supplier
- The 31 Questions you need to ask about your online survey
- The 13 things you need to ask about your online qualitative

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Getting ROI

Planning for maximum value

1. Define the business issues and the marketing issues first. Then define the research objectives. → Marketing objectives are not the same as research objectives. Example marketing objective: Increase conversion rate of site visitors to increase sales. Possible research objective: Find out what site visitors are trying to do when they visit the site. Find out what distinguishes those that buy from those that don't.
2. What decisions will be based on the research? → If there aren't any, why are you doing the research?
3. How big is the business in dollar terms? How big are the decisions in dollar terms? How much can you improve the outcome with better knowledge? What are the consequences of getting this decision very wrong? → The answers here should guide the size of the research budget.
4. What do you and the organization already know? Have you learned everything you can from internal sources about the market, the competitors, the customers and their transactions? → Avoid spending money on nice-to-know information.
5. Do you have some hunches about what is going on? → Better research will result from being explicit about what you *think* is going on, your current hypothesis.
6. What would you like to know about the market and the customers? → Write this down in plain language. Now you have some research objectives.

Qualitative or Quantitative?

If you aren't sure what to ask or how to ask it, you probably need to do at least *some* qualitative research.

Qualitative research is best used to find out:

- What people are doing and how they go about it
- The language and vocabulary of the consumer
- Explore and refine alternative approaches
- Understand problems, barriers and irritants with your product or service
- What questions you should be asking i.e. generating hypotheses to test

Quantitative research is best used when:

- ☑ You need to know how many consumers share a set of behaviors or attitudes
- ☑ You want to estimate the size of a market by projecting survey statistics to a target group
- ☑ You want to define the size of market segments
- ☑ You want to use statistical methods that will tell you which variables are more important than others in determining decisions
- ☑ You need numbers, percentages, tables and graphs for the business case

Manifest or Latent: how to ask the right questions

1. Manifest variables are things that are directly observable and readily measurable, such as age. → You can get reasonably reliable answers by asking directly: i.e. what year were you born?
2. Some manifest variables are still hard to measure, such as how many books bought last week. → People can interpret this question many ways – they might eliminate gift purchases, for example, or books bought for school versus personal reading.
3. Some questions are socially sensitive, and people may not answer correctly, such as household income, and whether they floss their teeth every day.
4. Latent variables concern motivations and attitudes: how perfume makes me feel, why I bought a red car instead of a blue car, why I drink Coke and wear Nike. → Asking about these variables *directly* will not likely yield good results. People may not *know* the reason, or they may provide a reason which they believe is correct but is not, or they may be unwilling or unable to answer.
5. Consumer behavior is heavily influenced by emotional drivers. Many consumer behavior theorists think these are the *only* thing that counts. All emotional drivers are latent.
6. Business behavior is also influenced by latent variables.
7. Since we can't measure latent variables directly, we have to find clever ways to ask questions that are proxies for the variables we really want.

Off-the-shelf Research

How to find it, where to buy it

Market studies, multi-client syndicated research, and subscription research are available from a variety of sources. This type of study is a good way of obtaining basic information about your market/segment or a market you may be thinking about entering.

Studies vary widely in contents and quality

Things you may be able to find:

- market size and growth, past and future, consumption or behavior tracking
- market segmentation by product, channel, etc.
- suppliers
- distribution channels
- prices
- technical and marketing trends
- relevant socio-economic data e.g. GDP, housing starts, Internet usage

Price varies widely

Typical pricing is \$2-3,000 USD, although you may be able to purchase some sections of a report for less than that. Less expensive studies may not contain any original interview data, and rely heavily on published information. Studies or subscription services with new qualitative or quantitative data are more likely to be in the \$10-\$25,000 range or more.

Public resources – some even free

You can go through a professional search company to locate exactly the resources you need – many research consultants provide this service. To do your own searching, start with some of these resources:

<http://strategis.ic.gc.ca> – main portal for Government of Canada

<http://www.statcan.ca/> -- Statistics Canada summary reports and data

www.gdsourcing.com – lists many free research sources

<http://canadaonline.about.com/od/statistics/> – sources for business statistics

<http://vrl.torontopubliclibrary.ca/> -- provides access to many subscription resources if you have a library card, which is free

Where to Buy

You can go direct to various publishers of market studies and research, or you can go through a number of aggregators. There is considerable overlap between these services, and prices may vary for the same product. Some sites require registration to search. Most will provide a description of the research and number of pages of the report. Some will provide a table of contents, and list of all tables and charts.

Here are a few to get you started:

www.MarketResearch.Com – represents 350 research firms and consultancies

www.marketsearch-dir.com – represents 700 firms

www.mindbranch.com – represents 350 firms

www.northernlight.com – can subscribe to a single point customized search engine, which includes published sources as well as reports

www.researchandmarkets.com – claims to be largest global resource

www.snapshotsinternational.com – global coverage includes equity research

Industry associations often sponsor syndicated research studies, which may not be available through these secondary sources.

Thanks to John Cummings for his assistance with the preparation of the material on secondary research.

Finding Suppliers

Where to find a research company or consultant

The two best starting points to locate resources are the professional society websites:

<http://www.mria-arim.com/> Marketing Research & Intelligence Association – Searchable online directory of survey companies, consultants, moderators, software, facilities, panels and syndicated research. The directory is also available in printed form.

<http://www.qrca.org/> -- Qualitative Research Consultants Association – searchable directory – qualitative only (e.g. moderators). Some publications are available to non-members. Check out the online paper, “Online Research FAQ’s” that discusses the fine points of online qualitative research methods.

Other online directories of resources:

<http://www.researchinfo.com/> - has a directory of researchers, as well as articles, sample size calculators, glossary of terms, etc.

<http://www.quirks.com> – publishes a marketing research magazine, and has online searchable directories of various research specialties

For global requirements, ask a local supplier for referrals, as many maintain affiliations with firms in other countries.

Online Surveys

Questions to Ask and Points to Consider

Finding Respondents to Participate in Your Survey

1. Do *you* have a firm fix on who you want to survey? → Start with the ideal group, and then move out from there. Lower incidence groups will be more expensive -- e.g. cardiologists vs. single mothers -- but whose opinions do you want? This is a *critical* consideration.
2. Does your supplier handle the recruit themselves, or do they outsource this function? → Okay to outsource, but you want to know how this is being done.
3. Recruitment of participants can be by telephone, using e-mail, using web-site pop-ups – what method are they recommending and why?
4. Do they have their own panel, are they recruiting from a web site, (e.g. MSN) are they buying a list, or using other methods? → If it's a panel, see below
5. Will they recruit from your list, if you have one? → Make sure you adhere to your privacy policy.
6. Can they recruit from your web-site? → If you use this method, how will you screen respondents? Can you get enough qualified respondents this way?
7. Who is handling the incentives? → If you aren't using a panel, you need to provide incentives for people to respond. Cash or prize draws are the usual incentives for consumers. For professionals and special interest groups, a good incentive is to get a summary report of the findings, in addition to cash.

Using a Panel

8. Is it their panel, or are they renting access to a panel on your behalf? → Panels are great, but there are a few to choose from, of varying sizes and composition.
9. How often is the panel surveyed? What restrictions exist on how frequently a single respondent can be surveyed on any one topic? → Always a judgment call, but you'd like to avoid a situation where they answered these questions for someone else two weeks ago, as this may affect responses.
10. What testing is done to ensure the panel actually represents who they say they represent? → Good panels check this out on a regular basis.
11. Can you see some basic incidence and demographic data on the panel? → You will pay for a panel based on the type of individual you want to survey, and the incidence of those individuals in the panel. You need to be sure you can make your required sample size from the panel.

12. Who is handling the bounce-backs for e-mail invitations? → In order to give legitimacy to surveys, an e-mail address from your firm may be used on the invitation. Sometimes respondents will e-mail a question or other comment.

The Survey Software

13. Is it their software, or are they using another firm? Have they used it before?
14. Ask to see the interface for the online survey engine. Are you happy with the branding, the look and feel? Can you have your logo there if you want it? → These are your customers or prospective customers, and you may be disclosing who you are. All good reasons to ensure that the look is not glaringly inconsistent with your brand image.
15. Is the survey being done in HTML, or does the respondent need to use a plug-in? → Not necessarily a problem if the respondents are already likely to have the plug-in installed.
16. What question types can the software handle? → Applications vary widely in this respect. Some things you can do easily on paper or in person can be quite difficult on-line. And the reverse is also true.
17. Can the software be programmed to skip questions? → Avoids having respondents answer something that is irrelevant for them. Permits you to ask questions based on responses to a previous question.
18. Can the software pipe in answers? → Permits each respondent to receive a customized question based on answers already given. E.g. Responses from the list in question 5 are fed into question 6. Some software can do this for open-ended questions as well as lists. Note this *does* complicate analysis.
19. Can the respondent leave the survey and come back later? → This is important for longer surveys, and for professionals who may get interrupted. If you can't do this, abandonment rate will go up.
20. Can you embed links to other web sites, so the respondent can go and look at the other site and come back? Is there a white-board function to show images, or even show live web pages? → Caution: if you are testing confidential information, you may not be able to protect it from a respondent saving the page and sending it to their friend who works for your competitor. Not necessary in most cases, but if it is really sensitive, review this with your online provider.
21. How does the respondent gain access to the survey? Is there some security to prevent someone from sending the response link to five of their friends, or submitting multiple responses themselves? → Some people just don't have a life.

Writing the Questions and Programming

22. Is the survey firm going to assist you with questionnaire writing, or are you doing this? If you are doing it, will they check it for obvious problems with flow and logic? → It's shocking how complex online surveys can become, and how easy

it is to make fatal logic and routing errors once you start adding skips. For complex surveys, I use a flowchart to map the route different respondents will take through the questions.

23. Will your survey be bilingual? How are you handling translation? → For business research, this is critical, as there are many specialized terms in business that an average translator would not know.
24. Once the survey has been programmed, how difficult will it be and how much will it cost to make changes?
25. Will respondents be forced to answer every question or abandon the survey? → If you are going to force them to answer a question before clicking the next question, ensure that every respondent *can* answer the question. This usually means putting in a “Don’t Know” or “Prefer Not to Answer” option.

Going Into Field

26. What will be counted as a complete survey? How will incomplete surveys be handled? → You may be able to get some data about those who abandoned, and this may be useful to know
27. What kind of tracking will you get in the first couple of days? → We all want to know how many completes we have, and some firms provide this online. More important, if there is a problem with the study, you need to know this as soon as possible so you can strategize. If respondents are dropping out at a specific question, you may be able to fix this on-the-fly.
28. Will you be sending a reminder e-mail out? → Can boost response rate after the first week or so.
29. How long are you going to leave the survey up? → More than two weeks is unlikely to yield results. If you take down too quickly, you do risk offending some people who get locked out. This may or may not matter to you. *Do* plan a cut-off point, as you are likely paying for number of completed surveys.

Getting the Data and Analysis

30. What format will be used for giving you the data? → Clients should always ask for the original *raw* data set, so you can re-analyze on your own if you wish. Cross-tabs are nice, but raw data is gold. Make sure the data is in a format you can read i.e. not SPSS unless you have that software.
31. What analysis will the firm provide for you? → Some will provide standard cross-tabulations. Other firms can provide more sophisticated analysis. Note that high-end analytics can be valuable – and sometimes expensive – but you need to have data that supports this type of analysis, *before* you start. Some analysis you could ask about: multivariate, key driver, factor, derived importance, cluster, segmentation, structured equation modelling.

Online Qualitative

Questions to Ask and Points to Consider

Finding Respondents to Participate in Your Discussion

1. Do *you* have a firm fix on who you want to talk to? → Start with the ideal group, and then move out from there. Lower incidence groups will be more expensive — e.g. people who have used your software vs. people with computers — but whose opinions do you want? This is critical.
2. How many different groups do you need? → Just as in face-to-face qualitative, you need reasonably similar individuals to have a good discussion. E.g. Users in one group, non-users in another.
3. Do they handle the recruit themselves, or do they outsource this function? → Okay to outsource, but you want to know how this is being done. There is normally a screener questionnaire used to ensure participants meet your requirements, just as in face-to-face qualitative (e.g. focus groups).
4. Recruitment of participants can be by telephone or using e-mail → What method are they recommending and why? You may want/need to do both, to ensure that people know what to expect, and have made a commitment to take part in the discussion.
5. Are the respondents coming from a panel? → All the usual panel questions apply.
6. Will they recruit from your list, if you have one? → Make sure you adhere to your privacy policy.
7. Can they recruit from your web-site? → If you use this method, how will you screen respondents? Probably would want this group to answer some preliminary questions, and then be screened by telephone
8. Who is handling the incentives? → Cash is the usual incentive, and all participants are paid. You may be able to increase participation rates by emphasizing that respondents will get to see the responses of others. How will you handle no-shows, and partial shows? i.e. they answered one question on a three day bulletin board.

Software

1. Ask to see a demo site so you can see the interface. Does it look good to you? → This is your brand; make sure there are no glaring departures from your public image, especially if you will be revealed as the sponsor.
2. Are you going chat or bulletin board? → Chat is scheduled for live-time. Bulletin boards run over the course of a few days, and respondents can log-in at

- any time of day. Normally respondents are requested to log-in once or twice a day, as well as answer any follow-up questions posed.
3. How fast does the site load responses? How easy is it for respondents to navigate? → More important for less tech-savvy groups or busy people who might lose patience with a complicated interface.
 4. Can you download a complete transcript? → Some software provides more than one format, e.g. Excel or Word
 5. Can you isolate one respondent's answers? → Not essential, but can be useful
 6. How does the software handle links to live web-sites? Is there a whiteboard function? → Remember that confidential information may be captured by a respondent and shared with their buddy at your competitor. If you **must** ensure complete confidentiality, you may need to use another method.
 7. Can you set up anonymous screen-names? → It's a small world. You don't want people to recognize each other and freeze up. Or maybe it's okay if they know each other. Important to think this through.
 8. Can you, as the client, lurk in the discussion? Can you make secret posts that only the moderator can see? → You may want to have several people at your firm given client IDs so they can see the discussion evolve.

The Discussion Guide and the Moderator

9. Are you working together on the discussion guide? → Best approach is to be clear on what you want to learn, and rely on the moderator for guidance on the discussion flow. It should be a collaborative effort, bringing your unique insights from the business side into play.
10. Can you change the discussion guide after it is loaded in to the software? Can you add questions or probes? → Important to be able to shift on-the-fly, just as you can in a face-to-face group. Your moderator *does* need to sleep at some point, however, so be reasonable.
11. How often will the moderator be logging in? → For a national group covering all time zones, fairly often. To get a good discussion, the moderator must make people feel there is *someone there*. This means responding with probes, e-mailing respondents with follow-up questions, and keeping things on track. Ask them when and how often *you* and your team should plan to log in.

Analysis and Reporting

12. Will you be receiving full transcripts? → This is a big advantage of online groups, and you should receive these. In traditional qualitative, this is often an additional expense.
13. Will you be getting a report? → Just as with quantitative, the quality of the analysis is pretty important. Be sure you know what to expect.

Abbott Research & Consulting

Mission

We help clients achieve dramatic improvements in their business performance by rethinking the customer value proposition, and helping them create the front-end organization that can deliver it.

We use our **Six Rings of Value™** model to guide an integrated process that looks at all elements of the customer value proposition.

1. **Research:** understand customer desires and current experience within the context of the organization's strategy and current performance
2. **Experience engineering:** take the research learning and translate it into a blueprint for the targeted customer experience
3. **Change:** implementing the second step frequently involves changing what people think, say and do, or the organizational structure they work in.

Abbott Research & Consulting can help organizations with specific elements of this process, or with the entire journey. Call us, we can help.

Six Rings of Value
create the Integrated Customer Experience

