

## **HOW TO GET GOOD RESULTS FROM MARKET RESEARCH**

Good results from market research depend on good preparation and good design. As a manager contemplating hiring or conducting market research there are design steps that will help you get the most for your money. Good design applies to any instrument you are going to administer. It doesn't matter if it is on paper, online, phone, interview format, or experimental. If you do not design a quality instrument, you will not have good data to analyze. (If you are hiring a market research firm, rather than conducting the research yourself, look for these same steps). It is important to spend the time up front.

The first step is determining what you need to know. What areas do you need information in order to make decisions, plan strategy, or track trends? Generate a list of areas that you need information, then take this list and brainstorm questions (don't worry about format, that comes later). Next, examine each question, work on the format, ask yourself: what am I asking – what type of response will it generate? Is each question generating the type of response you expect? If not, then you are not asking the question in the correct way. Now that you have a rough list of questions, edit the list. Ideally, several people will have been involved in creating the list of questions, but you need to show it to someone unfamiliar with the project for feedback – how much time does it take them to answer the questions, what aspects are unclear? With this feedback, you can alter questions for clarity and cut the list to what we must know vs. what would be nice or interesting. Keep the necessary, debate the extras. Remember that it costs time and money to conduct research; the longer the survey, the fewer respondents that will participate and the higher the cost. You should know how you will use the information gathered for each question. After the instrument has been finalized, you should pretest it again for clarity of instructions, questions, and timing with someone unfamiliar with the project.

In market research, it is important to look at the survey from the respondent's viewpoint, not just the typical respondent, but the outliers too – be sure a full range of possible answers are available or provide a space for "other" answers when using multiple choice formats. Don't irritate the respondent; put sensitive questions last, such as age and income. Avoid asking for information no one can accurately provide. You might really want to know how many times in the last 12 months the respondent purchased your product, but if it's a frequently purchased item, like cereal, they won't know – but will guess or skip the question. Better to ask if they purchased that type of product in the last two weeks. The data will be much more accurate. Remember the saying, "garbage in, garbage out."



**TELL US  
WHAT YOU  
THINK**

So you have completed the data collection stage of your market research, now what? If you are doing your own research in-house, then you can analyze and use the information at will. If you have purchased your research from an outside vendor, you will receive specific outputs. Before you agree to a contract there are some questions you should ask. Are you purchasing ready made questions or will the vendor work with you as outlined above? Where will the data be housed? I believe it is important that the servers used are in Canada, not the US, due to NSA rules (this also applies to research done in-house with applications such as Survey Monkey). After the data is collected, what kind of output will you receive? Will you get a summary of the responses to each question, and if you have additional analysis that you wish conducted, can the vendor comply? Will there be a presentation of the results where your team can ask questions? Will there be a written report? Will you receive a file of the raw data? (This is potentially important for conducting future analysis or comparisons.) All of these questions imply costs of which you should be aware.

Lastly, be clear about ethics. Are you or the vendor promising to keep information confidential or anonymous? If anonymous, then no identifying information can be collected on individuals or businesses. If confidential, then you know who they are, but keep the information private. It is ethical to tell the respondents what the data will be used for, who you are, and who to contact if they have questions about the research. Many ethical consumer surveys do not reveal the clients, but do provide information about the research vendor.

There are many other aspects of market research that I have not touched on, such as bias in sampling, and compensating respondents, but these tips should help you get started.

Contact us for further information or to share your experiences with surveys.

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