

# Best Practices for Marketing-Focused Research

*There are so many things to consider before determining the most impactful research approach.*

The first key step should be to contact a specialized market-research firm, like MSR Group, to discuss your objectives and define how best to reach your target audience and gather the data you need. Thoughtful and effective planning on the front-end works to deliver quality, usable results every time.

Our goal in working with marketing and advertising agencies is to provide support on client projects in both the



quantitative and qualitative realm, whichever is most effective to pull information to benefit a one-time or ongoing project. We can provide expertise on various methodologies and approaches.

Oftentimes, clients come to us with a very specific research project in mind to uncover data related to a client plan. They may have already defined the method and approach to the research. While it's a never a bad thing to have any sort of jumping off point, the agency may have already unknowingly dived headfirst into the pool, without gaging its depth or temperature.

While research may be imperative, the methodology of how it must be done should never be preordained before consultation with

a company like MSR Group. Before quantitative or qualitative methods are discussed, it must first be clear what are the client's objectives. What do you need to learn? What do you hope to learn? And what does the client expect to do with the information?

Perhaps the marketer needs context or nuance surrounding a new product launch or perhaps he or she is looking for hard numbers to validate success of an ad campaign that's already launched. Whatever the case, one of the hardest things for some clients to do is loosen the reins. While many agencies are research savvy, sometimes they're too close to the project to see the best research solution. At MSR Group we implement both quantitative and qualitative research – focused on targeted solutions that can achieve client objectives.

While we provide expertise for both qualitative and quantitative projects, here are some guidelines and best practices to be sure any survey project is successful.

## 1) Survey Size Matters

In keeping with the sub-bullet, we'll keep this brief. Size matters. Ultimately, we're not asking questions of consumers, we're asking questions of human beings. And, nowadays, in our fast-paced, short-attention-span, show-me-the-money lives, few human beings want to take 30-minute surveys. More and more, many don't want to take a 10-minute one. If you must fill all your quotas and prefer lucid responses, don't make the survey any longer than it must be. If you weren't able to ask everything you wanted, consider an additional line of questioning.

## 2) Do the Questions Make Sense

When crafting a survey – simpler is always better. Think about who you are targeting and speak directly to that audience in language that makes sense. Doing this will make for cleaner results. Don't leave room for confusion or interpretation on the part of the respondent.

Question structure should be concise. It's vital that each question can be answered in a way that meets the objective. Provide an adequate range of appropriate responses to ensure your ability to truly capture the answers you need. Recently, we saw a retail giant ask a scale question where the top-two boxes on a five-point scale were "extremely likely" and "very likely." A scale designed in this way does not provide enough distinction to be able to accurately measure

likelihood to take a specific action. The line in this type of situation becomes somewhat blurred, and results can suffer.

# ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS



## 3) Saving Money Could Make a Monkey of You

If you're using a free online survey tool for your research needs, you'll find, more often than not, that you get what you pay for. Doing it yourself is like cutting your own hair. The job will almost certainly be done, but it just won't look right.

A key component of survey success is effectively managing the sample to make sure you pull the desired mix and numbers you need. The MSR Group knows how to ensure your pool of respondents will be representative of your

targeted audience and fill all your necessary quotas. It's important that results are statistically valid and representative of your target as a whole, in order to guide decision-making and strategies going forward.

In the end, the money you thought you were saving by going the free route will leave you with dubious results and you will wind up paying, only not in the way that's acceptable.

## 4) Just Because Questions Have Answers, It Doesn't Mean They'll Result in Solutions

Asking the right questions is key to garnering the results you need in any survey. Forethought while crafting each question ensures that data collected will indeed tell a story that provides clean answers to client questions. In addition, conclusions from the data will demonstrate valid, actionable items.

In addition, selecting the optimum format for each question will help you maximize survey results. As you'll discover working with MSR Group, there may appear to be seemingly limitless ways to ask a survey question, when there is indeed most likely one. The data desired drives the type of question and format - whether it be a five-point scale question to measure satisfaction, or open-ended question to gather additional client input around a topic.

When it comes time to whittling down survey length to make it manageable to fit client budget, as well as match the attention span of respondents, it's imperative to ask yourself beforehand: Best-case scenario, what will the answer to this question provide that'll bring us any closer to reaching our objectives? Think long and hard about whether or not you really need each question.

These are just four of the many ask-first situations marketers find themselves in every day. At the very least, we hope they steer you in the right direction. To help avoid these and many other pitfalls related to research, contact MSR Group for a free consultation.