

Topic:
B2B Research

Research in Practice

Make the most of your market research – tips on language barriers, lead numbers and much more

iCAD is produced by Business Advantage, a B2B research, business development and marketing consulting practice operating in the global IT, Digital and Telecommunications sectors.

Any fool can say "Ah" -- you need intelligence to say "Yes." (Tibetan Proverb)

Saying 'yes' to a particular marketing plan of action is a lot easier when you have good market intelligence on which to base your decisions. Structured market research is a vital aid to decision making, but for first-timers to this area, the early planning stage can prompt much head scratching when basic questions are raised. How many companies do I need to contact? Can I approach different countries in the same way? Here are some practical tips on getting the best from your market research budget.

Data Sources

Whether you're doing your research in-house or using an agency, you need to work out the type of data that suits your needs. Some surveys will suit a broad scatter-gun approach; for example you could buy general mechanical engineering source data in large volumes at low cost, and then conduct a large number of interviews to ensure a statistically reliable and representative sample. Niche markets will need a more precise approach; a vendor of surface modelling software wanting to assess the demand for a new product in the automotive industries in Italy, Germany and France will need to use a more refined database of contacts. The more niche the market, the more likely that contact data will need to be collated from various sources - but check with specialist market research companies to see if their databases can be segmented to the level that you require (far more cost effective than gathering data from scratch).

When discussing data with a list agency or a professional market research provider, find out:

- When was the data last updated?
- What is the level of accuracy?
- How heavily has it been used before?
- What type of decision maker do they have details of? Do they have telephone numbers for all of them?

Talking Heads

Going 'straight to the top' when contacting decision makers isn't always the best route to get information. It's important to consider the job description of the person best suited to providing the information you require, and ensure the researchers are briefed to find the

person with the right set of responsibilities. Selecting the right level of decision maker to approach also affects the 'strike rate' for successfully completed interviews. Talking to a CAD Manager is easier than getting through to the Technical Director of a large company for example. Speaking to high level decision makers may be a necessity however if the survey concerns strategic thinking. CAD Managers however would be the more appropriate contact for a usage and attitude study. There are budgetary implications here; the latter study will be cheaper than the first for the same sample size.

How Many Leads Make A Survey?

The number of leads needed to complete a survey of a certain size varies according to the type of research, and how targeted the contact data is. For a research project on a broad market issue using non-targeted leads, you tend to need seven times the amount of leads as you want to have completed interviews. This is where you're calling large numbers of people and if you can't get an interview on the first attempt, you move on (known as 'burning-off' leads). So if you want the findings from 200 interviews, you might buy around 1,500 records.

If however you have data on 1,000 companies in your target market, the value of each contact increases and it becomes cost-effective to make multiple attempts to conduct interviews until the desired total number is complete. The level of loyalty or familiarity that interviewees have with you will affect the interview success rate. It may be possible to complete interviews with 100% of selected clients for a [customer satisfaction](#) survey, but a much lower success rate should be anticipated for 'hard to get' information such as that sought through [competitor analysis](#) studies.

Asking The Right Questions

The construction of the questionnaire should be based on general good practice for interviewing technique, i.e. questions should:

- be concise
- be clear
- be unambiguous
- not contain two questions in one
- not be biased or leading.

Ideally a research project should include a pilot phase to ensure that interviewees are interpreting the questions consistently, and useable findings are being elicited. It is essential to avoid jargon, or to explain any acronyms used. Business Advantage has found that there is frequently a mismatch between suppliers' expectations of what terms end-users are familiar with, and their actual knowledge levels. Explaining issues in laymen's terms is essential.

Just One More Thing....

No matter how riveting the issue being explored, there's clearly a limit to the length of time that individuals are willing to be questioned. Fifteen minutes is a comfortable length of time for an interview; much longer than half an hour and even skilled interviewers may struggle to maintain the cooperation of respondents.

The Human Touch

High quality interviewing is essential to the success of a research project. Good interviewers will need to be friendly, professional and able to build a good rapport with the respondent (and with the 'gatekeeper' if trying to get past an assistant or secretary to a senior executive); they also need to be intuitive and understand when to use humour - all this while sticking to the script.

Interviewers will frequently have to answer the question 'what's in it for me?' Often it's enough if the interviewer explains clearly the need for market research, explaining for example that if vendors understand customers' views they can provide better solutions, or that research will enable better targeted advertising/marketing which ultimately benefits end users.

National Differences

Conducting research in foreign markets requires a whole new level of awareness of how best to approach your target market. Language is the first hurdle to clear. Having native speakers for the country you are researching is the best option, but knowing which second languages are useable in certain countries is important. In Scandinavia and Holland, English is usually acceptable except for complex or technical issues. For many countries, including France, Germany, Italy and Spain, you need local languages however. Business languages can be different in different countries; in Hungary for example the main business language is German.

The same information can be easier to obtain in some countries than others. Markets in Eastern Europe tend to be 'under-researched' and individuals are often more willing to talk; you may find that respondents in countries such as Germany, France and Italy are more survey-weary.

When drawing up your interviewing timetable, make sure it allows for the foreseeable times when people will be away from their desks. This could range from awareness of the frequency of the two hour lunch break in countries such as Spain and Italy, to knowing when the public holidays are in the country you are working in. Contact with people in the U.S. is less likely to be thwarted by holiday absences - but getting through to a voicemail message is a more common occurrence here than elsewhere.

Awareness of social etiquette further enhances the chances of completing an interview successfully. In Scandinavia for example it's acceptable to call people by their first name, whereas in Germany many people expect to be addressed as 'Herr' or 'Frau' unless you know them extremely well. However when researching certain countries, you or your selected agency need to consider whether the skills exist in-house to get the best results. When Business Advantage was asked recently to conduct research in Korea, they commissioned local researchers because the cultural differences are so great.

Conclusion

Think how you react when 'disturbed' by a market research call - and then consider the skills that are required by an interviewer to coax you into providing the information they want. We've covered just a few of the elements for a successful market research project; careful planning, knowledge of the target market and the social/business culture of the countries involved, and professional execution of the interviews are required. Backed by reliable intelligence, you can say 'yes' to the proposals in front of you with confidence.

If you need to know more about the attitudes, awareness and intentions within your target markets, find out how Business Advantage's [market research services](#) can provide the solution. If you'd like to discuss how best to meet your market intelligence needs for domestic or international markets, call Business Advantage on **+44 (0)1689 873636, or e-mail us at info@business-advantage.com.**

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