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MOVE THE NEEDLE

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The Ultimate Guide to Research

By AMPERAGE Research



“When it comes to judging the value of... research,
which measure is better: “quality” or “impact?”

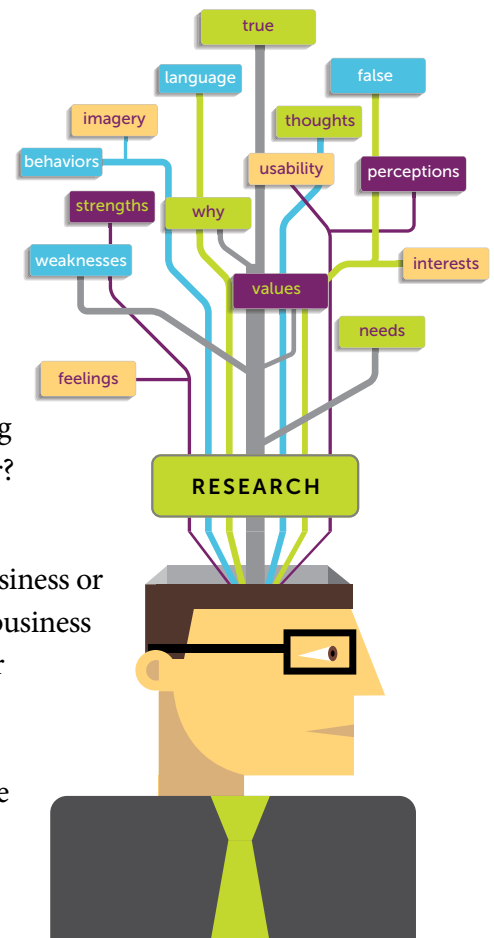
— Michael Spence, Vice Chancellor
of the University of Sydney

Research Guide

Both quality and impact are vital to generating actionable research results. Quality means collecting the most accurate and useful data possible, while impact refers to the value of resulting positive effects the research can have to solve a problem, whether that's financial-, market-, customer- or product-based.

For example, you may be seeking answers to these types of questions:

- Are your customers happy with your customer service and products, or is there a hidden problem somewhere?
- Why is your product not selling the way it should?
- Is your pricing model working correctly?
- How do you go about entering new markets?
- Does your key stakeholders' perception of your brand align with the brand positioning you want to portray?
- What is your brand's value compared to your competitors' brands?
- Are your current internal and external marketing efforts working? What could you be doing better?



The Ultimate Guide to Research is designed for any business or organization that needs information to uncover new business opportunities and previously unseen solutions to their business problems.

The best way to start the process is to review this guide then contact Amperage Marketing Research Coordinator, Erin Bishop, for a free consultation to determine how she can best help you discover the information you seek.

Amperage Research

Our goal is to connect our clients with their customers in order to motivate measurable results. We do that by using the right method to ask the right people the right questions for the right results—results that are not only measurable, but actionable. The results provide you with the information you need for high-level, knowledge-based decision making, rather than relying on uninformed assumptions. This electrifying combination gives us the tools we need to *Move the Needle* for you.

THE CASE FOR RESEARCH

Marketing research is the first critical step to implementing integrated marketing. In short, marketing research helps you:

Guide your communications with current and potential customers.

Marketing research gives you the information you need to create effective, customized and tailored communications and marketing strategies. You will be able to ensure your message is relevant and centered on your customer; you'll also be able to allocate your marketing budget more efficiently and effectively.

Identify new business opportunities.

Are the wants and needs of your target market shifting? Are there pockets of your market that are un-served or under-served? Marketing research can help you identify changing market trends, which bring new business opportunities. This information allows you clients to create a targeted sales and marketing strategy designed to capitalize on these new opportunities.

People's appreciation of game-changing new technologies frequently ignores the long, often twisting path that transforms an idea from fundamental discovery to practical application ... For example, it was basic research presented in a then-obscure scientific paper by Albert Einstein in 1917 that ultimately translated into the invention of laser technology four decades later.

– The White House on Research



Make informed business decisions with less risk.

Marketing research gives you the information you need to make knowledge-based decisions, instead of decisions based on what you think you know. This allows you to maximize your marketing investment by “doing it right the first time,” ensuring your message and positioning are relevant to and centered on your customer.

Measure your reputation.

How do you stack up against your competitors? Marketing research can help you determine how your target market perceives you compared to your competitors, and then take action to overcome any perceived shortcomings.

Uncover and identify potential problems.

You can get customers’ reactions to new products, services, or marketing materials while they’re still being developed, which ultimately saves you time and money.

Establish trends.

When done as an ongoing exercise, marketing research gives you a lot of data that can help you benchmark and monitor your progress. This information is invaluable as you work to measure the success of your marketing tactics, analyze your customer, and establish trends.

Establish market positioning.

It’s important for you to know the position of your business at particular moments in time. Marketing research data helps you benchmark and monitor your progress, which is very useful as you make decisions and take action.

Determine the most persuasive promise.

We all know that every brand needs to make a promise. Marketing research can help you determine what your brand’s promise is—or should be—and update your current marketing materials and messaging in order to clearly reflect that promise.

Find compromise.

The team involved in the launch of a new marketing campaign all have their individual perceptions and gut feelings. While these feelings shouldn’t be ignored, going straight to the target audience gives you direct feedback from people who are less biased and/or less emotionally attached to the task at-hand.

Research 101

There are two basic approaches to research: qualitative and quantitative. These two approaches can also be combined to create a third approach, one that mixes qualitative research methods with quantitative research methods in order to deliver to you the most complete information possible.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

According to the Marketing Research Association, qualitative research is defined as: *Research conducted that cannot be quantified or analyzed quantitatively. Qualitative data requires subjective analysis as it is not collected empirically.*

Qualitative research can help you:

- Understand the feelings, values and perceptions that influence behavior.
- Identify customer needs.
- Capture the language and imagery customers use to describe and relate to a product, service, brand, etc.
- Understand customer perceptions of marketing/communication messages.
- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of your brand.
- Understand the “why” behind information gathered during a quantitative study.
- Assess the usability of websites or other interactive products.

Qualitative research generally engages fewer respondents, but digs deeper into respondent thoughts, feelings, behaviors and perceptions. Focus groups, interviews and open-ended questions are all forms of qualitative research. Survey instruments are composed of mostly open-ended questions, designed to engage respondents in a discussion and uncover “nuggets” of information that would otherwise be unknown. Research findings are not conclusive and cannot be used to make generalizations about the population of interest; however, they will give you an initial understanding and a sound base for further decision making.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

According to the Marketing Research Association, quantitative research is defined as: *Research performed in search of empirical evaluations explaining consumer attitudes, behavior and/or performance. Conducted to forecast numerical measurements of product acceptance and consumer purchase intents.*

Quantitative research can help you:

- Use statistics to generalize a finding.
- Substantiate the findings from qualitative research.
- Project research findings onto the broader population.
- Understand customer attitudes and behaviors.
- Reduce or restructure complex problems to a limited number of variables.
- Look at a relationship between variables and establish cause and effect in highly controlled circumstances.

Respondent groups are typically much larger when conducting quantitative research—group sizes generally fall between 100-400 respondents, depending on the nature of the project and the size of the total population being studied. Quantitative data is most often collected via telephone surveys, online surveys or mail surveys, and survey instruments are designed to include mostly multiple choice, true/false and ranking/rating questions. Research findings are generally conclusive and can be used to make generalizations about the population of interest.

Qualitative Research Methods

FOCUS GROUPS

Definition

A marketing research technique for qualitative data that involves a small group of people that share a common set characteristics (demographics, attitudes, etc.) and participate in a discussion of predetermined topics led by a moderator in an interactive group setting.

— Marketing Research Association, 2015

Methodology

What participants say during the discussion is the essential data in focus groups. An ideal focus group session consists of 8-12 participants. Depending on the project goals, two to three focus group sessions are conducted, with each session lasting between 60-90 minutes. Typically, participants are offered an incentive to thank them for their participation and provided refreshments.

Focus groups can be conducted in-person, with the moderator and participants all gathered together in a single location, or online using a web-based platform that takes advantage of webcam technology and streaming video to provide real-time “face-to-face” research.

When to Use Focus Groups

- To create opportunities for point-counterpoint discussion and resolution.
- As an excellent approach for broad, exploratory topics, and as a mechanism for helping people generate and share their ideas.
- When the interaction between the participants triggers a discussion that enlightens a topic.
- When you are early in the exploration of a concept or topic.
- When you want to be engaged in the research process.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Definition

A type of qualitative research involving an unstructured [or semi-structured] personal interview with a single respondent, conducted by a highly skilled interviewer. The purpose of in-depth interviews is to understand the underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings of respondents on a particular subject.

— Marketing Research Association, 2015

Methodology

Again, what participants say during their discussions is the essential data in in-depth interviews (IDIs); however, unlike focus groups, IDIs are conducted with a single respondent. Typically, 20-30 interviews are conducted, each with a duration of approximately 30-60 minutes. Interviews can be conducted in-person, over the phone or online, and respondents are generally offered an incentive to thank them for their participation.

When to Use In-Depth Interviews

- When it is easier to reach target respondents with IDIs.
- When it is preferable to collect responses without the group influence factor.
- When a device or process is being tested for usability.
- If the topic is highly sensitive or highly personal.

Quantitative Research Methods

ONLINE SURVEYS

Definition

A large group of respondents are surveyed via an online survey platform.

Methodology

Online survey instruments are generally shorter in duration, roughly 10-15 minutes, and are designed to collect data more numeric in nature by utilizing multiple choice, true/false and ranking/rating questions. Unlike more qualitative studies, the targeted respondent group usually falls between 100-400 responses. This larger sample size allows us to perform additional statistical analysis that can often be projected onto the entire population.



Pros and Cons of Online Surveys

PROS

- Ease and speed of data collection.
- Lower cost.
- Automated data collection with a smaller possibility of errors.
- Participants can respond at their convenience and at their own pace.
- Complex surveys can be easily programmed so respondents aren't confused.
- Surveys can easily incorporate colors, images, hyperlinks, graphics, videos, etc. in a visually pleasing and interactive design.
- Respondents may be more likely to address sensitive topics because they are not responding directly to a person.
- Ability to track participants and follow-up with those who haven't responded in an easy, cost effective, timely manner.

CONS

- Response rates are typically lower for online studies, which makes it necessary to over-recruit by a large percentage in order to collect the desired number of responses.
- Purchased email records are traditionally not as reliable as direct mail or telephone records, and are typically more expensive.
- There is no trained interviewer to answer respondent questions or dig deeper into open-ended responses.
- It can be difficult to reach certain populations, such as the elderly, who are less likely to have Internet access and respond to online questionnaires.
- Technical glitches.
- It can sometimes be difficult to weed out "bad" participants—that is, people who take the survey just to receive the incentive and do not provide truthful responses.

TELEPHONE SURVEYS

Definition

A large group of respondents are surveyed via telephone.

Methodology

Like online surveys, telephone surveys are generally shorter in duration, roughly 10-15 minutes, and are designed to collect data more numeric in nature by utilizing multiple choice, true/false and ranking/rating questions. Again, the targeted respondent group usually falls between 100-400 respondents to allow for additional statistical analysis that can often be projected onto the entire population



Pros and Cons of Telephone Survey

PROS

- Relatively high response rates.
- Phone numbers are generally readily available and affordable.
- Respondents have an interviewer to interact with that can clarify misunderstandings.
- You can generally reach nearly all populations over the phone—either via a landline or cell phone.
- Better quality control—interviewers can easily pick out “bad” respondents and employ extra measures to elicit meaningful responses.
- Interviewer can ensure they’re speaking with a qualified respondent.

CONS

- Higher cost compared to online surveys.
- Graphical elements cannot be shown to respondents over the phone.
- Increasingly, younger respondent groups are turning away from landlines and, while researchers can call cell phones, the lists are typically more expensive to purchase and regulations surrounding cell phone numbers increase the cost of data collection.
- There is limited flexibility in survey design; telephone survey questions must be simply constructed and clearly stated.
- Interviewers can sometimes inadvertently introduce interviewer bias.

Targeted Research Methods

COMPREHENSIVE BRAND ALIGNMENT SURVEYS

Definition

Comprehensive Brand Alignment Surveys are designed to help you learn more about how your key stakeholders' perception of your brand aligns with the brand positioning you want to portray. Brand Alignment Surveys are ideal for businesses or organizations who want to change a name, name a product or service, create a new service or develop a tagline.

Methodology

Once the project goals and objectives are defined, an interview script is designed utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods, including open ended, scoring and metaphorical questions. At the end of the interview respondents participate in a visualization exercise, during which they develop an ad for the sponsoring organization. Responses are then aggregated and an ad is developed representing respondents' cumulative thoughts. Typically, 25-30 interviews of approximately 45-60 minutes are conducted.

BRAND PERCEPTION STUDIES

Definition

Brand Perception Studies are designed to help you understand your brand's value as determined by consumer's positive or negative attitudes as they relate to both your brand and your competitors' brands. Brand Perception Studies are ideal for businesses or organizations who want to understand if consumers are familiar with their brand and what characteristics consumers associate with their brand. This information helps you strategically position yourselves in the marketplace and overcome any perceived shortcomings.

Methodology

Once the project goals and objectives are defined, a quantitative survey instrument is designed utilizing mostly multiple choice and rating/ranking questions, with the goal of keeping the survey duration between 10-15 minutes. Participants can be recruited and data can be collected using various research methods: telephone only, online only, or a combination of telephone recruitment and online survey administration. The targeted respondent group usually falls around 400 respondents to allow for additional statistical analysis that can often be projected onto the entire population.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION STUDIES

Definition

Customer Satisfaction Studies are designed to help you measure how your products and services meet, exceed or fall short of customer expectations. Customer Satisfaction Studies are ideal for business or organizations who want to understand what keeps customers coming back (or what's keeping them away) by asking them targeted questions about products and services, price, customer service and convenience. The fastest way for you to improve is to listen and then act upon what your customers really want.

Methodology

Once the project goals and objectives are defined, a quantitative survey document is designed utilizing mostly multiple choice and rating/ranking questions, with the goal of keeping the survey duration between 10-15 minutes. Participants can be recruited and data can be collected using various research methods: telephone only, online only, or a combination of telephone recruitment and online survey administration. The targeted respondent group usually falls around 400 respondents to allow for additional statistical analysis that can often be projected onto the entire population.

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS AUDITS

Definition

Marketing and communication audits are a way to evaluate the marketing/communication needs (both internally and externally) of your organization. Audits provide guidance and direction on how marketing/communications can be improved, and also assess the readership of routine communication pieces and provide benchmarks for future marketing/communications activities. Such an analysis includes, but is not limited to: image, pricing, advertising message and delivery & quality of service.

Methodology

Personal interviews with key staff members and key stakeholders, such as members of the press, funders, advisory board members, customers and other key recipients of the organization's communication material form a basis for the audit's findings. Informal, on-site visits with key personnel and an in-depth analysis of marketing materials, strategic plans, goals, target audiences, position structure and expenditures supplement the analysis.

MYSTERY SHOPPING

Definition

A type of observation study where someone is sent into a business location to act in the role of a customer to evaluate the performance of a business or an employee.

— Marketing Research Association, 2015

Methodology

Mystery shopping is one of the most often used research techniques to measure customer/employee interaction. Used as a benchmark, mystery shopping can pinpoint your strengths and weaknesses for training operations and policy refinements. Mystery shopping is used not only to monitor but also to motivate and reward performance. Mystery shopping can be done as a single project to establish benchmarks for future training and evaluation or it can be an ongoing, sustained program of six months or longer.



Summary

CUSTOMIZED QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

We specialize in customized research solutions, designed to meet your specific needs. We begin by discussing your overall business objectives, with a focus on the insights you need to meet those objectives.

We have expertise in a wide variety of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and focus on finding an approach that effectively and efficiently provides you the research results you need.

We use both methods to capture the right data to help solve your marketing challenges. You can feel confident that you are making smart, strategic marketing decisions based on actionable data. By getting it right the first time, you can save time and money, not to mention potential harm to your brand.

Amperage will walk you through the process step-by-step and provide a final research report that includes specific strategies and recommendations to help you get it right the first time.

Deliverables – Actionable Results and Written Reports

We provide you with actionable research results—information that you can use to improve your business, your brand, your products and customer satisfaction. Our proven research processes ensure that marketing research brings value to your company. And, we'll help you each step along the way.

But you get more than just data. Every research project we do, whether it's related to brand, market, product, customer or employee satisfaction, includes a written deliverable that outlines specific research-based strategies and recommendations that will make your marketing and communication efforts more effective. You get a research roadmap that you can implement with our help or on your own, designed to help you make smarter business decisions, because the last thing we want to you to do after you complete a research study is put the results on a shelf to collect dust.



About the Author:

Erin Bishop, Marketing Research Coordinator

A business professional with over nine years of experience, Erin Bishop has a successful record of leading teams in the development, administration and presentation of market research and analysis projects for business clients across multiple industries. As Marketing Research Coordinator, Erin's primary responsibilities at Amperage include: communicating with clients to understand and document their research needs, working with clients to develop methodologies specific to their business needs, administering and managing qualitative and quantitative research techniques, analyzing and interpreting data, making actionable recommendations and compiling and presenting final research findings.

Prior to joining Amperage, Erin served as Program Manager at Strategic Marketing Services (SMS) at the University of Northern Iowa. During her tenure at SMS, Erin's responsibilities were focused on both formulating and managing a wide variety of research and analysis projects aimed at meeting clients' most pressing business intelligence needs.

Erin holds a B.A. in Communication Arts and Business from Wartburg College. During her professional career, she has participated in numerous continuing education opportunities, including various international conferences and seminars. Erin has been a member of the Marketing Research Association since 2011, and has brought experience to the organization in marketing research, marketing, communications, management and sales.

Learn more about AMPERAGE

800-728-2656 | Mark@AMPERAGEmarketing.com