

Brands must improve efforts to gather customer opinion, according to study into online surveys

Engaged respondents will take spend 80% longer and give twice as much feedback as bored ones

June 2009 - Response rates to online surveys can be radically improved by changes to questionnaire structure, innovative question mechanics, the use of visuals and animation and the deployment of imaginative techniques, such as role play, according to a study published today by Engage Research and GMi (Global Market Insite, Inc). Unless brands engage with consumers much more effectively, they risk alienating respondents and basing decisions on poor quality research data, the research reveals.

By enhancing the way in which online surveys are carried out, Engage and GMi discovered completion rates can be improved by more than 20%, together with significant growth in data quality and volume. By grabbing the attention of a respondent from the start of the survey with an animated introduction, for instance, consumers will spend up to 80% more time answering follow-up questions.

An imaginative approach maintains interest

Employing a range of role play techniques to motivate respondents was found to increase evaluation time by 70%, double the word count of responses and significantly increase the number and quality of ideas and suggestions.

Asking consumers to evaluate the impact of advertising from the perspective of someone working for an advertising agency, or placing themselves in the role of a boss of a company launching a new product, were just two examples of effective role play.

By showing respondents examples of how previous consumers had responded to an online question, the research revealed that the volume of responses could double, with word count jumping from 25 to 50 words. Equally, employing what are known as 'Energizer breaks' to provide a brief,

but fun departure from the survey provided light relief and prevented respondents from becoming bored.

Need to adapt traditional research questions

Grid questions bore respondents – causing 80% more drop out than other question types and being rated a 3/10 for respondent enjoyment. They are boring to fill in, so respondents try to speed through them and their answers flatline. Alternative and more enjoyable ways of asking the same questions radically improve interest and enjoyment (from scores of 3/10 to 8/10) and generate significantly more granular data

Question wording needs careful consideration. Online layouts can be visually clear and intuitive to fill in, rendering some instructions redundant. In one experiment we measured no significant differences in response patterns whether or not the scale was spelled out.

Social influence techniques can be used to great effect in setting an expectation. Used carefully, an instruction to “spend no more than ...” can multiply the time a respondent spends answering a question by a factor of 5. In some instances, it may be worth making a question optional. Prefacing with the phrase “Would you mind” was found to be a successful means of improving the volume and quality of data and, in our experiments, less than 10% elected to skip the question.

“Brands place huge emphasis on online consumer research, but the money they are spending could see a far better return if they overhaul their approach to engaging the interest of consumers,” explained Deborah Sleep, director at Engage Research in London. “The first stage of this study emphasised just how boring consumers can find the online survey process. Now that we have identified the issues and the solutions, we can help brands to put these techniques into practice.”

About Engage Research

Engage Research, a full-service market research firm based in London, UK, has worked across a wide variety of categories, markets and business issues, bringing an unparalleled wealth of experience to bear on every new research project.

Our focused approach means we can offer a level of flexibility and cost-effectiveness that is hard to beat, when combining the quality of thinking that a highly experience team provides. We offer well thought-through, flexible frameworks, which we combine with both qualitative and quantitative intelligent bespoke solutions to make sure our clients get the absolute best from their research. For further information, please visit us online at www.engage-research.co.uk or email us at d.sleep@engage-research.com.

About GMI

GMI (Global Market Insite, Inc.) supplies everything a researcher needs to conduct global market research with confidence. GMI global panels provide access to the opinions of millions of consumer and specialty panelists in 200 countries and territories, and are carefully managed to ensure the highest sample quality. GMI panel members are profiled on hundreds of attributes. Our array of specialty panels for hard-to-reach demographics includes IT professionals, ethnicities, gamers and more. GMI professional services, available 24x7x365, include survey programming, hosting and translation, data processing and delivery in multiple formats, report automation, interactive Flash[®] surveys and dashboards. Founded in 1999 with world headquarters in Seattle, Wash., GMI has operations on four continents. For more information, please [visit us online](#) or [email us](#).