



Fitter, leaner research

Making your research budget stretch further in a recession is easier said than done, but by following a few simple tips, you can make your investment work harder and even enhance the insights gained

We all know the saying: 'Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves.'

Well, the same is true in getting the best from your insight – numerous small savings really do add up. Also, by following some simple rules, you will find your insight will be fitter, leaner and better directed.

Before spending any money, email colleagues to make sure nothing similar has been recently undertaken. It is not uncommon in companies for similar projects to be commissioned by different departments without each other's knowledge.

To overcome this, we have set up client research 'libraries', where a simple search facility can find relevant material and avoid duplication of effort.

Consider whether data you already hold could be interrogated further to provide the required information. For example, analytics can be used on sales and customer data to build predictive models and segment customer types.

If you have an agency roster, halve it and give twice as much work to each agency still on it. Fewer agencies doing more work will enable them to gain deeper knowledge of your company and markets. It will save briefing time, lead to more insightful results and give you the opportunity to negotiate retrospective discounts based on agreed spending levels.

Rather than giving a project the go-ahead over the phone, invite the agency to a meeting; use it to make sure your research will be as focused as possible.

Review the proposed methodology with a critical eye. Would telephone interviews suffice, instead of face-to-face? Could the number of focus groups be halved if, for example, assumptions were made about the effects of limiting the locations sampled? Test these assumptions with a few telephone



depths rather than convening full groups to cover every variable.

Look for creative methodologies to provide the information needed. We have developed a hybrid qualitative/quantitative methodology that runs simultaneously using the same sample. This can lead to substantial savings.

Keep questions focused and tightly worded – stick to the 'must-knows'; eliminate the 'nice-to-knows'. Cutting one minute from a five-minute telephone interview

can save about 15%. Also, do you really need 1000 interviews when, in most cases, 400 is the optimum sample size? Perhaps you could run a biannual tracking survey instead of a quarterly one.

Look at your sample structure: the more complex it is, the greater the cost. Do you really need a quota of left-handed, grey-haired grannies in Kent? Often, it's easier and cheaper to let numbers fall out naturally and apply weightings to the final data.

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If commissioning focus groups, consider whether it is essential that you attend accompanied by numerous colleagues. Travel and accommodation expenses can be horrendous, and nowadays you can view the groups online or download a video to your office the following day.

When it comes to the final report, decide just how detailed it needs to be. Naturally, a two- or three-page summary of key issues will cost a lot less than a detailed report running to many pages.

Instead of hard copies, use online methods to circulate findings and recommendations; McCallum Layton's Hub enables clients to log in to their own secure area on our server and access a library containing virtually everything to do with their project, from questionnaire design to data tables. There is even a tool that enables clients to analyse their data further, as well as design their own charts.

These are just a few pointers, but there are many more.

However, I offer a few last words of advice: do not confuse stretching your budget with purchasing cheap research. If you look for cheap research, that is exactly what you will get. ■

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