



Market research made simple

Benefit from simple research

Asking people questions may seem an obvious way of finding things out, but there are few better methods as long as you listen to the answers and use them in the right way. Getting it right can help you to understand your audiences and markets and develop appropriate and effective communications.

The benefits of research

There are quite a few.

Improve your products and services

You may love the design, name, offer, or whatever – especially if it's your 'baby' – but if your target market doesn't, who's going to buy it? Pre-testing new products or services – and seeking views on existing ones – can help you to make improvements that provide more value.

Improve relationships

Whatever the size of your company, research can strengthen the links between you and your stakeholders – the customers, suppliers, or any other group that has an impact on your success. People don't usually mind if you request their opinion – you just need to ask. You can learn a lot and they feel important and valued.

Kick-start old relationships

Asking a long-lost customer to take part might just start a new dialogue and shake the dust off the old relationship. Perhaps they'll become a customer again.

Let people have their say

You might not always like it, but sometimes being given the chance to let off steam is something that people relish. It doesn't mean they will abandon you if they are negative, so long as you make it clear what you're going to do with the information.

Raise awareness of what else you do

You don't just have to collect information when doing research, you can also disseminate it by discretely highlighting other parts of your offer to those you are interviewing.

Research Methods

- **One-on-one interviews.**

Face to face or on the phone, this is an excellent way of gathering information. To get the most out of it, ask each participant the same set of questions and spend the same amount of time – say up to half an hour. You can ask why they do business with you, what they think of your product or service, what they think of your competitors and a number of other questions.



- **Focus groups**

If you've never run one before, these can be hard to do on your own, but they can be a powerful tool in gathering information as the group dynamic can really get people talking. They work best with a specific segment of your audience and with around eight people.

- **Surveys**

These can be very simple with just a few questions. An example might be to ask a customer or client what they thought of your product or service. It needs to be really easy and quick to complete and is best done on a hard copy. You could e-mail a survey to an existing customer, but the response rate is likely to go down. The kind of questions might include: rate our performance on a scale of one to five; what was the best thing about doing business with us; what would you change, etc.

- **Mystery shopping.**

As the name suggests, this is anonymous testing of your company or organisation's performance. You need to be clear about the information you're after, and what you'll do with it. With all of these methods, you need to say thank you – and perhaps think of an incentive or gift to show your appreciation.

If you can, it's a good idea to try to quantify your findings. For example, going back to the survey, if you have a scale of one to five, you can gather all of these findings together and obtain an average, making it easier to draw conclusions.

To DIY or not DIY

You can do research yourself and obtain very useful results. You'll certainly save money, although it can be quite time consuming. The real advantage of getting someone else to do it is that people will often feel more comfortable saying what they really think to an outsider.