

**HOW  
ONLINE MARKET RESEARCH  
CAN HELP YOUR BUSINESS**



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## INTRODUCTION

Successful businesses, no matter what their product, service or offering, do the same things.

Whether selling diamonds or ideas, offering life-changing advice or fulfilling wants as opposed to needs, successful businesses are good at two things in particular:

1. Attracting more customers and
2. Keeping them loyal for as long as possible.

How do they get good at this?

*They know what their customers want.*

And how do they know that?

*Market research.*

For a long time, 'market research' was something only undertaken by massive conglomerations intent on multi-national domination in their sector. It was something you did if you had millions in the business coffers and required highly statistical commercial, demographic, consumer or product profiling to achieve an incredibly high, wide-reaching level of success. It was expensive, time-consuming and, often, not at option.

Those days are gone. Indeed, these days you can't afford *not* do market research.

In the current tough financial times, consumers are increasingly savvy, more questioning, sometimes sceptical, and definitely in search of more bang for their buck. In many ways, the quality of the product or service is secondary to the quality of the marketing convincing customers of your higher value. Today,

marketing can make or break a company... and good marketing needs good market intelligence.

Fortunately, the market research options available today are increasingly quick, easy, affordable and, above all, effective.

In this white paper, we provide an overview of what market research is, and look at how you can make market research work for you.



# HOW ONLINE MARKET RESEARCH CAN HELP YOUR BUSINESS

## 1. What is Market Research?

Market research is described as the *“scientific, uncoloured collection – and analysis – of information about your prospects, customers, competition, and or marketplace”* ([business.wikinut.com](http://business.wikinut.com)).

Market research covers a broad spectrum of activities from multi-national, multi-person research possibly using an online platform, to asking a few customers in your shop why they buy (or why they don't), to confidential telephonic conversations asking specific questions of a niche market group. All research can provide valuable intelligence to guide your opinions and business decisions – however it is gathered.

There are two main ways of conducting market research:

### **Primary research**

This is the collection of new information directly from customers in your desired target market. This can include, for example, in-person market surveys, online panel surveys, telephone questionnaires and focus group research in direct contact with customers.

### **Secondary research**

Also known as desk research, this involves accessing data that is already available, for example economic trends and specific industry sector reports. (These days it also involves internet research – the power of Google is

immense, but needs to be managed carefully. See section in this paper 'Taking market research online'.)

Whatever your method, market research is about finding answers to questions about your product or service that can guide your future business practices.

Market research is only as valuable as the actions that arise out of the information that is gathered. Information for information's sake has very little place in today's competitive marketplace. For it to be truly effective and have any value whatsoever, market research must be used as an objective way to increase company profits, efficiency or offerings. Actions, as they say, speak louder than words, and it is the actions that are influenced by market research, and implemented to provide greater efficiency or profit, that give it value.

## 2. When and Why You Should Use Market Research

Market research is one of the best ways to gather information about your customers, market and competitors. In fact, when used correctly, it can provide you with up to date and powerful information that's relevant to your business, making it one of the best marketing tools you can use to help you grow. Here some more specific examples of when and why a business should engage in market research:

### When...

Businesses commonly use market research when they are:

- Launching a new product or service
- Trying to break into a market

- Improving and updating customer service levels
- Exploring new ideas about existing products/services to determine new directions for the business
- Seeing changes in customers' spend and/or usage and need to discover the problems, needs and attitudes behind those changes
- Launching a new website design and need customer feedback on functionality and aesthetics

### Why...

Market research can help businesses:

- Assess the size of the market
- Gauge reaction to a product innovation/change
- Understand public opinion and gain a better understanding of how customers think, feel and behave. The more you understand these areas the easier it is to meet customer needs (better than your competitors!)
- Test customers' responses to new ideas or concepts and even get them involved in the development of new products or services
- Generate media hooks to help spread the word about your activities and ideas with statistical confidence. For example, conducting a formal survey allows you to make statements like "1 000 people surveyed agreed...".
- Boost customer loyalty

## 3. Taking Market Research Online

Traditional market research (we're talking the face-to-face variety) has become time consuming, costly, prone to human bias, error and irritation, and often ineffective in gathering reliable data. Now, with the advent of the

internet, businesses have several resources to use to conduct quick, easy, effective and low-cost market research. The internet allows you to gather market information with just a few mouse clicks and keystrokes. Consider these online tools for example:

### **The Keyword Search**

The transitive verb 'to google' wasn't added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2006 for nothing. The use of search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Wikipedia has transformed market research. By doing simple web searches, you can gather an astounding wealth of information on any topic. In relation to your own business, keyword searches can show the level of interest in your product or service, give you some idea of how many competitors you have in your market and even introduce you to product and market niches you may not have considered.

### **Competitor Links**

You can also use the internet to investigate your competitors, their prices, and their offerings. Conducting link research even allows you to see competitors' link development, publicity and marketing strategies and gives you ideas on how to improve your own online efforts.

### **Blogs**

The increasing use of blogs by the average Joe, well, Blogs, has revolutionised companies' ability to gauge public opinion. Blogs are not only updated regularly, they also offer a more informal tone which allows you to pick up genuine, real time opinions on existing products or services, and identify gaps in the market and products or services that are needed.

## **Email**

Emailing customers your research questions is one of the easiest, quickest and cheapest ways you can reach your target audience. Whether you spend money buying lists of email addresses for potential customers, use a list of existing customers' email addresses you have collected over time, or use an employee email address list, the potential and cost-effectiveness of email is certain. As with all tools, however, knowing how to use them makes all the difference. Emails can be missed, ignored or, worse, deleted without even being opened so it pays to take time to understand how and when this powerful medium delivers best.

## **Online panels**

The most powerful of all the online market research tools, however, would have to be the use of online panels to conduct online surveys. While the internet is a powerful tool for market research, the danger lies in believing everything you read online. In comparison with traditional print media that have some level of accountability and demand a certain amount of fact checking and truthfulness, the internet is accessible to anyone, anywhere, with anything to say – whether it's entirely truthful or not.

So when you're conducting online market research, you can't just rely on random answers given in Google or user forums that are freely available to anyone and everyone. Online panels allow you to harness the power of the internet without sacrificing reliability. They also give you access to pre-profiled, dedicated, engaged respondents who are actively committed to answering your questions and completing your survey. These are people who have joined a panel for the express purpose of providing feedback, and therefore won't be surprised or annoyed when they receive surveys.

## 4. Using Panels to Get the Most Out of Online Research

Online panel research helps you to get the most out of market research, especially when it is conducted by reputable providers in the field. Online panels:

- Give you easy access to a reliable, engaged respondent base motivated to respond promptly to online questionnaires
- Help you to identify respondents more precisely. The fact that you can target respondents by various demographic variables means you have access to a precise and qualitative results-pool which, in turn, ensures you'll get more reliable data
- Deliver the results you need, within your time and budget constraints
- Enable worldwide research to be conducted quickly and easily with access to respondents in multiple countries
- Offer a cost-effective research choice – with online panels you can reach hundreds of respondents at a fraction of the cost of traditional research
- Provide flexibility in questionnaire design – the use of video, images and audio means you can offer a richer questionnaire environment that engages respondents far more
- Ensure a rapid turnaround with research results available in just a few days as opposed to the several weeks – months even – often associated with the more traditional data collection methods
- Generate quality data - with online panels, the pool of respondents is carefully recruited and managed, giving you more control over the sample and, in turn, data quality.
- Broaden your access to more flexible, detailed results and analysis.

## 5. But What is an Online Panel, Exactly?

At its simplest, an online panel can be defined as a community of people registered to participate in market research – online.

More specifically, in the market research world, an online panel refers to a community of people – pre-recruited, pre-profiled, pre-approved and actively invited to join said community by a dedicated online panel provider – who have willingly signed up to be respondents in research undertakings such as surveys and customer feedback sessions. Online panels are also usually incentivised in some way, ensuring a more reliable response rate.

Online panels can range in size from 100 to 100 000 or more people – the size of the panel you use depends totally on you and how big you believe your sample needs to be to achieve success.



A growing phenomenon in the market research industry, online panels go some way towards bridging the gap between a population increasingly concerned with privacy and protective of their time (and therefore reluctant to cooperate with time-consuming, invasive one-on-one surveys whether by telephone or in person) – and the organisations that need to understand public perceptions and attitudes more than ever before.

## 6. How Does an Online Panel Work?

### Step 1: Quality sample

Panel research starts with providing clients with quality sample. Reputable online panel providers will provide you with access to respondents who have not only agreed to receive questionnaires and participate in surveys, but who are committed, engaged and actively interested in answering your questions. To make sure your provider is giving you the best panel possible, the first thing you need to understand is what kind of panels they offer in what sectors, where in the world they are able to access responders and what the demographics are for each panel. To this end, your panel provider should give you access to a panel book that gives you every statistic you need about the available panellists. This gives you the confidence that the panels on offer are diverse, well balanced and able to meet your needs.

### Step 2: Tell your provider what you want

What do you want answered?

By whom?

By when?

Give your online panel research provider the answer to these questions and then leave them to it.

Using your brief, a decent panel provider should:

- Source the relevant sample
- Provide assistance with survey and questionnaire design
- Help you to ensure clear objectives and a realistic scope have been set
- Ensure questionnaires are engaging and interesting enough to complete so that response rates are high

- Make sure you have considered your data and reporting requirements so that you know your survey will deliver the results you need
- Provide translation services so that respondents from all over the world can be surveyed in their own languages if required.

### **Step 3: Deployment**

Once you are satisfied with the survey design and sample makeup, your provider will deploy the questionnaire via email to the sample, including clear instructions. They will also normally send reminders to increase the response rate. Once sufficient responses to meet your sample have been received they will automatically close the survey.

### **Step 4: Reading the results**

When the results are in, your online panel provider should provide the data as you requested it. A reputable provider should be able to provide results in various formats including real-time results online and/or summary reports. They should also give you the option of customised dashboards, charts and graphs, so that you have all the tools you need to understand and analyse your research data.

## **7. What Makes Online Panels So Effective?**



If you're used to conducting a military operation every time you need research – organising briefing sessions, sending teams out to the streets and collecting hand-written surveys for lengthy analysis – you will probably find online panel research to be a breath of fresh air!

Given that online panels are pre-profiled, pre-recruited and ready to answer your questions, they allow for research that is:

- Quick
- Easy
- High quality and
- Cost effective.

More than this, thanks to the level of targeting possible with online panels that allows you to focus on the specific customer or client types you most need to talk to, online panels offer a powerfully focussed form of information gathering guaranteed to garner valuable intelligence for your business.

## 8. Top 10 Reasons to Use Online Panels

We know online panels can save you time, effort and money. Here are our top 10 reasons to choose online panels for your market research efforts:

### 1. Saving you time

Online panel surveys give you access to real insights in real time, really quickly. Furthermore, responses can be analysed as soon as they start coming in, which means that you can start acting on relevant information immediately.

### 2. Saving you money

Online surveys can be tailored to suit your budget. Even better, though, are the stats that show that internet surveys cost only 10% of those conducted by phone and 20% of traditional mail surveys. That's some serious saving.

**3. Saving you effort**

Online panel surveys are easy. Just tell your provider what questions you want answered, by whom and by when, leave the technical stuff to them, click send, and you're off and away.

**4. Saving you from customer irritation**

Online panellists have not only agreed, willingly, to participate and answer your questions, online surveys themselves are less intrusive and burdensome to respondents. They can be filled in at the convenience of the respondent, which gives them time to answer properly when they can. It's a win for them and you.

**5. Saving you from non-responses**

Because online surveys are usually designed to be completed quickly (usually between just five and 10 minutes), and are convenient, simple and give respondents the flexibility to answer at their leisure, respondents are more likely to complete the survey in its entirety. In a recent survey done by Rock Research, 90% of respondents said they would prefer to be surveyed online rather than complete a telephone survey.

**6. Saving you from survey error**

Online surveys can reduce survey error caused by human folly. No matter how efficient the researcher, he or she is, in the end, only human and human error when inputting information is completely understandable. With online surveys, there is no third party between the information being inputted and the final result – it goes directly from respondent to data capture, which means greater reliability can be placed on the integrity of the data.

**7. Saving you from bias**

Further to human error, human bias is another common factor that can taint research. Interviewers, for example, can have an effect on respondents' answers – things such as gender, voice intonation, interviewer mood and talking speed can all affect respondents, even if only subconsciously. Using online surveys eliminates this potential bias.

**8. Saving you from irrelevant samples**

Online surveys allow you to contact even the most incredibly niche or hard to reach target market. Online surveys have a far higher success rate of reaching groups other forms of research find difficult to locate.

**9. Saving you from inconclusive results**

Online panel providers are constantly introducing better practices, technology and tools that have much greater analysis capabilities. This means your results are more clearly presented, more easily understood, and more readily acted upon.

**10. Saving you from being boring**

Online surveys allow you to introduce multimedia tools such as video or sound clips that make the survey process much more interesting, engaging and interactive. This helps to increase response rate so you get the most valuable information possible.

## ABOUT SURVEYSHACK ONLINE PANEL RESEARCH

SurveyShack can provide access to online panel respondents in over 70 countries worldwide for any market research project.

Whether you require responses from consumers or specialist sectors, SurveyShack is able to provide the sample and deploy your questionnaire swiftly and cost effectively, even in multiple languages if required.

Using SurveyShack online panels gives you the luxury of a guaranteed number of responses at a fixed cost. This allows you to judge the potential yield and gives you much greater control over project costs.

SurveyShack's online panel research team has years of experience in planning, setting up and running successful surveys. This means clients get:

- Quick turnaround of panel respondent quotes and projects.
- Very competitive per-response costs.
- A value for money service that is transparent – you know how much it's going to cost from the outset.
- A carefully recruited global database of consumer panels.
- Access to a vast range of specialist sectors including health, business-to-business, mobile, auto, finance, cosmetics, fashion and others.
- Secure data hosting and processing.
- Beautifully designed questionnaires and stylish reports that are, above all, easy to understand.
- Timing certainty.

With the right online panels at your disposal, research results are reliable, accurate and always worthwhile.

## ABOUT SURVEYSHACK

SurveyShack specialises in developing and running flexible feedback and reporting systems that are designed to make collecting, analysing and reporting on data efficient and cost effective.

We use our own unique technology to automate questionnaire design, deployment, response collection and collation, data analysis and reporting. Feedback can be collected via multiple mediums such as web, email, or paper questionnaires.

We have helped a broad range of clients across several industries to gather insight about their customers, their staff, their products and issues that affect their businesses. We have helped organisations to:

- Understand and benchmark customer satisfaction levels
- Gather market research data from niche sectors
- Conduct reader surveys and audience polls
- Collect employee and member feedback
- Evaluate events
- Assess new products prior to launch
- Develop pricing, distribution and packaging strategies
- Measure brand awareness and advertising effectiveness
- Implement 360 degree appraisals of leadership and management teams
- Learn about current and desired organisational skills
- Identify training needs.
- Measure organisational stress and wellbeing.

We are accredited by the Market Research Society (MRS).

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