

Volume

1

THE IN-DEPTH
BEST PRACTICES SERIES

Managing International Research[©]



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Introduction

Managing International Research

The globalization of today's economy places tremendous strains on many organizations. To remain competitive, they must sell their products internationally, but they often find themselves making global decisions based on little or no local data.

This demand for information from around the world has spurred the rapid growth of international research. While once the domain of only the largest and most sophisticated marketers, now companies, both large and small, are reaching out for global information.

This document was created to provide tips to help companies to better manage their international research and to ensure better results by stressing:

- Consistency. You must strike the right balance in allowing for cultural differences in research practices while ensuring a consistent research process.
- Coordination. You have to manage the information flow to your moderators.
- Control. No surprises are good surprises.

Achieving Consistent Results

The key is preparing the moderators.

Achieving a consistent research process with results you can trust is perhaps the greatest challenge facing anyone conducting international research. The focus group experience is different in each country and with each moderator. So, how can researchers create consistency without interfering with the unique cultural and social differences that they want to explore?

Consistency is best achieved by building a well-defined research template that clearly communicates research guidelines, but still allows each moderator to adapt the process to fit each local culture and individual style. Clearly articulating these ground rules will eliminate much of the ambiguity and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings occurring. Some simple suggestions include:

- Start the research in your home country (we'll assume you're a US-based company). That way, all the stakeholders have a chance to attend the groups and agree on how the research "should" look before you fan out across the globe.
- Send copies of the US tapes or DVDs to each foreign moderator. Remember that you may need to have the tapes converted to the appropriate video format for each country and pay to have a translator watch with the moderator.
- Have the US moderator schedule conference calls with each moderator to discuss the research process and to answer questions – after they have watched the videos.
- If your budget allows it, have the US moderator travel to each country. The US moderator can manage the research process locally, provide consistent directions to each moderator, and ensure that the research doesn't get off course.

Adapting the US Focus Group Guide

They do things differently out there

In the US, we have become accustomed to working with a long focus group guide that is bursting with excruciatingly detailed questions. This type of guide will not work well in most countries outside of the US.

Internationally, most moderators have a more “passive” moderating style. They generally like a more leisurely pace and a more open-group environment. As a result, you may not be able to cover as many topics as you might in the US; nor will you be able to drill down quite as deeply.

The process will go more smoothly and the moderators will do a better job if you:

- Use the experience you gained in the initial US focus groups to cut down on the length of the guide before going overseas. Then keep additional questions in your “back pocket” in case you end up with extra time.
- Set up conference calls to review the guide early with the moderators – and get their feedback on the length and structure. It’s important that they feel they’ve participated in the creation of the final document. The quality will be better if they buy into the process.
- Have any materials to be used in the group (e.g., concept statements, positionings, product descriptions) translated by a professional translation firm, and then have the translation reviewed by the client’s marketing group in each country. This two-stage process results in the highest quality and most reliable translation.
- Provide the moderator with product information (in their language) and allocate time to educate them on the product and its competitors.

The Realities of International Recruiting

Some things just take longer

Recruiting takes a little longer internationally, and throwing money at the recruiting process will not make it go faster or improve the quality of the respondents.

- In the US, we usually allot two weeks to recruit a group – give it at least three weeks in Europe or Japan. And, that’s after the screener has been translated. So, it is best to think of it as four weeks from the time you send the facility the English screener.
- Make sure you get the recruiter to commit to sending you profiles of the recruits on a DAILY basis. These daily updates serve two functions. First, they help you to stay on top of the project – and, secondly, they keep your project at the top of the recruiter’s mind.
- Be careful about specifying titles in the screener. Titles vary by country – a Director in the US and a Director in Germany are VERY different positions. Discuss titles carefully with your recruiter – and trust them to find the right people, regardless of what you think the title should be.
- Recruiting standards in some countries are slightly looser than in the US. Just as they have a more open approach to the moderating process – they may also have a more flexible perspective on recruiting. So, check your profiles carefully.

Tips for Some Major Countries

It's a different story in every country

Here are a few facts about conducting research in some of the major markets.

Japan

- Scheduling a large number of B2B groups can be a challenge in Japan since you can conduct only one focus group each night, not two, as we do in the US. Professionals have long commutes, they work late, and they can't leave early or participate in lunch groups. However, they are very willing to come in and take part in groups or interviews on weekends. So, if you need to organize six groups, think of doing three on Saturday and three on Sunday. But, remember, there's a lot of competition for space at facilities on the weekend, so book early.

Germany

- When doing any research in Germany – be aware that their privacy laws are probably the most restrictive in the world. Your ability to obtain names from email or publication lists or other databases can be severely constrained. Even using names from your own company database may be an issue.

France

- Paris is famous for strikes – especially among transportation workers. Check with the recruiter to see whether there are any strikes on the horizon. If strikes have been in the news, make sure you schedule enough replacements and expect some delays. If a transportation strike is expected, you can still do the research, but you should have the recruiter check with each respondent about her or his ability to get to the facility if there is a strike. And, make sure your hotel is within walking distance of the facility.

England

- There is a wide mix of educational levels among UK business people. Leaving school early is not uncommon in England, and many successful business people have relatively little formal education. If a degree is important, make sure to include it in the screener – don't assume it the way you would in the US. Conversely, don't require a degree in the screener unless you really feel it's important.

Scandinavia

- Companies often overlook the Scandinavian countries when planning European research. But, remember, they have the best technology infrastructure and the most educated and fluent English-speaking professionals in Europe.

International Holidays

- Europe shuts down during July and August. If you have to conduct groups in the summer, allow extra time for recruiting and expect cancellations. The same thing happens around Christmas. Remember, on average, Europeans receive over six weeks of vacation each year.
- Japanese workers receive fewer vacation days – but they have a plethora of national holidays. Make sure you have the recruiter check the calendar for local events and national holidays.

Managerial Computer Skills

- Do not assume that business managers in other countries have strong computer skills. Many managers still have secretaries and spend surprisingly little time using PCs. If strong computer skills are important for your research, make sure you ask about their skills in the screener and take that into account when building your group segmentation.

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