catalog of services

RPG

the Research & Planning Group

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The Research & Planning Group is a full-service qualitative and quantitative marketing research firm based in St. Louis, MO. We can handle projects of all shapes and sizes, anywhere in the world.

This catalog of services offers a look into our research philosophies and the various methodologies we can use to help you find out the information that you need to support your decisions. Of course, this catalog is by no means comprehensive; if you have a research project you'd like to conduct, contact us and we'll be happy to assess if it's within our realm of expertise.

Also, should you ever have any questions about research, please feel free to give us a call or send us an e-mail. We're here to be a resource to you, and we're always happy to share our advice, insight and experience to help answer the questions you might have!

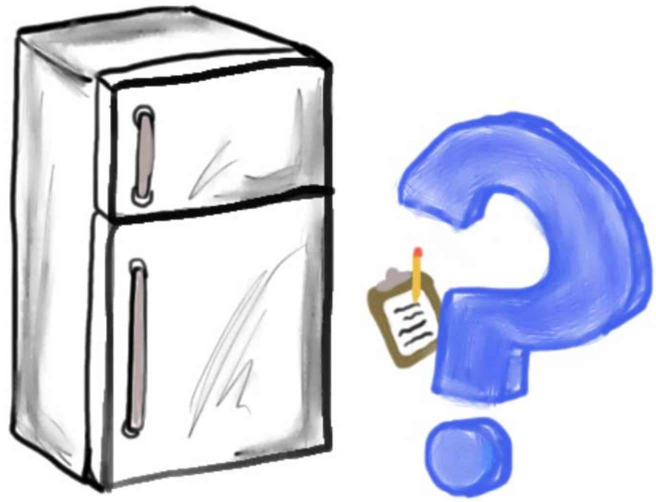
We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

David Rich
President, The Research & Planning Group

Sean J. Jordan
Research Director

The Reason for Research



Pretend for a moment that you're about to buy a new refrigerator for your home. Should you choose, on a whim, to rush out and buy the first refrigerator you find that meets your basic criteria (such as price, color, or size), you'll run the risk of buying a refrigerator that might make you unhappy in other ways. Perhaps it won't include a cold water dispenser, or perhaps it won't have an automatic ice maker, or perhaps the freezer that pulls out like a drawer will start to drive you crazy whenever you have to bend over to get out a frozen pizza for a late night snack.

One way that you can minimize this risk is to start what's known as an "information search." You can begin by looking on the Web or in magazines like Consumer Reports for the experiences and opinions that others have already expressed. This is known as "secondary research," and simply by taking the time to do it, you will find yourself approaching your purchasing decision better informed, better able to identify the refrigerator you want, and better able to avoid models that have design flaws or features you won't need.

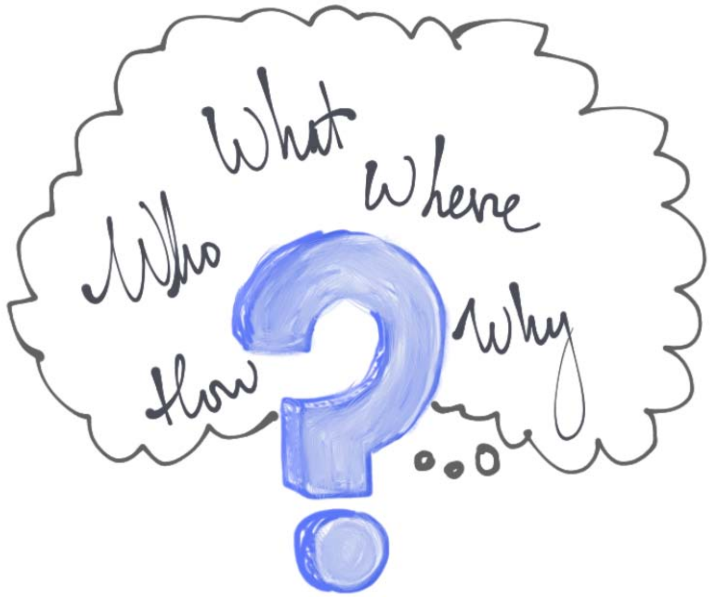
If secondary research doesn't provide enough information, you can conduct the research yourself by going to retailers who sell refrigerators, examining each model carefully, talking to the salespeople, and evaluating the available models by your own criteria. This "primary research" will require a greater investment on your part, but it will help you to be more certain that you have made the right choice. And though some risk may still exist in the decision process, it will be minimized by the research you've done.

Business decisions are often about issues that, like your refrigerator, require a significant investment and have a long-lasting impact on your organization. You can make those decisions with the information you already have, but in doing so, you may open yourself up to greater risks. Secondary research may help you to see what others have done in a similar situation. And primary research will help you to understand the implications of your decision where your own customers, channel partners, employees and stakeholders are concerned.

The Research & Planning Group is a full-service marketing research firm specializing in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. We are experts in designing studies that will help you get the data you need to make informed decisions for your organization.

This catalog of our services will help you to learn about the many ways in which your organization can conduct primary research to support decision-making. It will also show you how marketing research can be a powerful investment in your future success… and how you can apply cutting-edge methodologies to snatch meaningful answers to your management problems out of the constant chatter going on all around us.

Designing a Research Study



Once you've decided to consider conducting research, you need to ask yourself six important questions:

- **What** is my study trying to find out?
- **Why** do I need to know this information?
- **When** do I need to know this information?
- **Who** needs to be included in the respondent pool to get the answers I need?
- **Where** am I the most likely to reach my potential respondents?
- **How** am I going to conduct the research to obtain the information I need?

Though these questions might seem simple, they are tremendously important, because they bring the broad idea of "research" into a more narrow focus. They also help to zero in on the information you actually need so that you don't waste time and resources going after information you don't.

One common problem in designing research is what we refer to as the "everything but the kitchen sink survey" – asking respondents to go through a battery of questions that cover every conceivable topic related to your business. (It's a common occurrence to see online surveys, for example, that promise to require just a few minutes to fill out, but which are often loaded down with more questions than anyone would ever want to answer!)

In marketing research, bigger is not necessarily better, and respondents have a limited endurance for being probed and prodded before the quality of their answers begins to degrade. It's far better to design a study aimed at getting specific information to support a specific decision than to try to find out all of the information that's simply, "nice to know."

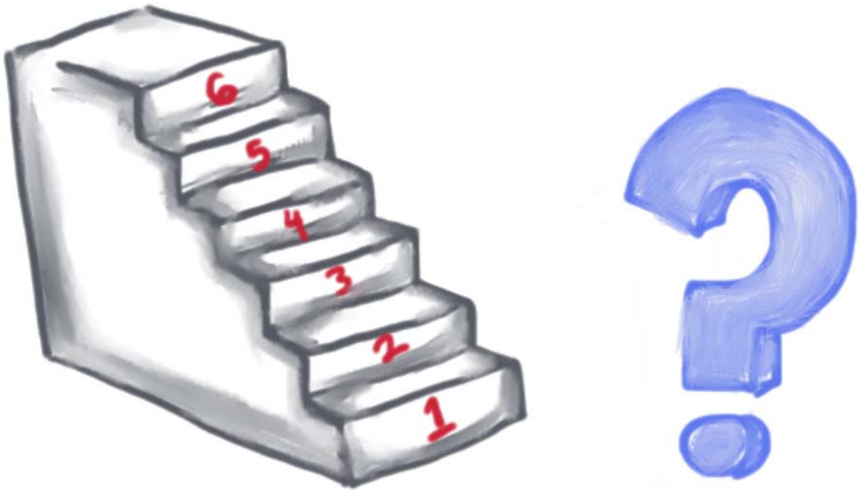
One of the first things we recommend is taking the time to develop a research purpose statement, a short paragraph with two or three sentences that answers all of the questions above. For example, the XYZ Company might begin with the idea that "we need to do research to improve our customer service," but after thinking about what the research should really accomplish, management might arrive at a research purpose statement that says:

"Management of the XYZ Company would like to gain a better understanding what customers are experiencing when they go through the XYZ customer service system. XYZ will conduct interviews with customers who have recently used the system to hear their own descriptions of the process. The data collected will be used to identify problems in the customer service experience and to improve procedures and training for customer service personnel."

Of course, developing a research purpose statement isn't always so straightforward. Fortunately, you're not alone -- all you have to do is call The Research & Planning Group! With one or two meetings in your office or over the phone, we can help you design your entire study for free – and get you on the fast track to getting your research program set up and moving! It's just one of the many services we offer.

The Six-Step System

At The Research & Planning Group, we use the following six-step system to help our clients design studies:



- ☑ **Step 1:** Define the Research Purpose. Construct a research purpose statement that sums up the whole idea of the research project in a single paragraph.

- ☑ **Step 2:** Define the Information Needed. Write out a list of the topics of information that will need to be collected in order to complete the study.

- ☑ **Step 3:** Define the Target Population. Write up a brief description of whom the survey should include, defining the target population in terms of demographic, geographic or psychographic details, or any other categories that may help to narrow the group down.

- ☑ **Step 4:** Define the Action Standards. Write up a brief explanation of how decision-making will be affected depending upon the outcomes of the research. The more specific the action standards can be, the more useful the research will be in the end!

- ☑ **Step 5:** Develop Research Objectives. Write out a hierarchy of the "big questions" and the "little questions" that are needed to answer them. Restate these "big questions" as statements to become Research Objectives; the associated "little questions" become the Research Questions that are used to shape the questions asked of respondents in the research.

- ☑ **Step 6:** Determine Methodology. Write up a roadmap for how the data will be collected, and in what form. Develop a tentative plan for data analysis and reporting. If necessary, stagger the research in stages so that multiple methodologies can be used to provide a more complete picture in the results.

The advantage of this six-step system is that it ensures that before the actual research even begins, the details of the entire study are carefully thought out. This helps to protect the integrity of the data that is being collected and helps the results to provide powerful support for decision-making.

At The Research & Planning Group, we walk our clients through these six steps during the process of developing a research proposal. We encourage clients to be involved at every stage of the planning, and we don't require any agreements or obligations until the proposal is accepted and the client is ready to proceed.

How Large Should My Sample Be?

One of the toughest questions to answer when designing a study involves the size of the sample needed. And, unfortunately, there's no magic formula that can tell you exactly what number of respondents you need to be sure that your answers aren't way off.

Many of the guidelines involve first asking some questions about the sample itself.

Is the study better conducted using a census or a sample? In a B2B study or a study with a relatively small number of respondents, this is actually an important question to ask, because often, extremely small populations can and should see every member included. The advantage of taking a census is that the data is 100% representative and has zero error due to sampling. For populations of less than 100, a census is the recommended approach.

Is the population more alike, or more different? If the population tends to consist of individuals whose answers very much alike, the sample size won't need to be as large as a population that consists of individuals who are likely to have some variation. Consumer studies should always assume maximum variability.

Is the study qualitative or quantitative in nature? Qualitative studies rarely require data to be representative of the population, and thus do not require as large of samples. Quantitative studies benefit from larger samples.

Are the results intended to be projected to the population as a whole? If the sample is probability based (also known as a scientific sample), the necessary sample size can be roughly calculated to account for the potential error. If the sample is non-probability based (also known as a convenience sample), the larger the sample, the better.

Will the data be used for sophisticated analysis, such as modeling? Many advanced data analysis techniques require a minimum number of responses to work correctly. This should always be accounted for in the sample.

The bottom line is that sample size requires the same care and planning as the research itself. The biggest drawback to having a large sample comes in the cost per completed survey. Larger samples tend to provide more reliable data, but the cost is significantly higher. Many times, a small or mid-sized sample can provide a sufficient amount of information without the heavy cost.

The Research & Planning Group includes sample size estimates and recommendations in its research proposals. These recommendations take many considerations into account and come with the added benefit of decades of experience.

What Kind of Research Do I Need?

One of the biggest mistakes clients make in approaching research firms is to decide upon the methodology before completing the other necessary steps in planning out a research project. For example:

> **XYZ COMPANY**: We need some focus groups.
>
> **RESEARCHER**: OK. What are you trying to find out?
>
> **XYZ COMPANY**: We want to hear about their experiences with our customer service system.
>
> **RESEARCHER**: You know, asking customers to talk about a process requires them to tell a story. Focus groups don't give individuals a lot of time to speak. You'd probably get better information if you conducted a national study with telephone interviews.
>
> **XYZ COMPANY**: Maybe. But I already told the Vice President of Marketing that she could sit in on these and watch them. So, we've got to do focus groups.

As it happens, the two most commonly-requested methodologies today – focus groups and online surveys – are the two methodologies that often provide the least information. There is nothing wrong with either technique, of course, when they are used properly. But when employed improperly, it's the equivalent of wearing five dollar flip flops to a hike up a rocky mountain trail; you may make it to your final destination in the end, but it's going to be difficult to appreciate the view.

The Research & Planning Group recommends a different approach to methodologies – become familiar with different techniques, but wait to decide upon them until you know exactly what sort of information you want to obtain.

The following pages showcase many of the methodologies that we have used to conduct research for our clients. We encourage you to take a look and to see some of the exciting things that modern marketing research techniques can do to provide you with powerful information that will support your decision-making.

In-Depth Interviews

In-Depth Interviews, or IDIs, are a powerful and popular method of conducting research. One of the biggest advantages of IDIs is that they can provide deep data that really gets to the heart of what a respondent thinks and feels about an issue.

Because of the back-and-forth exchange between the interviewer and the respondent, IDIs tend to produce the highest quality of data as well, since respondents have ample opportunity to ask for clarification when they're not sure what a question is trying to ask, and interviewers have the ability to probe answers that are vague or that hint at deeper data beneath the surface of the response.

IDIs are typically used in qualitative studies, since they tend to provide rich data that requires further analysis to properly quantify. Some IDIs are conducted using an unstructured process, where the interviewer engages the respondent in a conversation about a topic without having a predefined list of questions to ask. It is far more common, however, for IDIs to be conducted with a structured guide to ensure that each respondent is asked the same basic questions (though the probes themselves may differ).

IDIs can be observed live in a marketing research facility, over streaming video or over an audio stream, which allows observers to interject additional questions towards the end of the interview. IDIs are also particularly well-suited for concept testing, process testing and emotions-based research.

Traditional IDIs

A traditional IDI is conducted in person, typically in the respondent's home, at a professional research facility, in a hotel conference room, or some other comfortable location.

Traditional IDIs tend to function like a journalistic interview, where the interviewer begins with a predefined list of questions and probes responses for additional detail. Observers can also suggest additional questions to the interviewer for additional probing.

Advantages

- Traditional IDIs generate a deep pool of information that can offer some real insights into the minds of respondents.
- Questions can be tailored to the interview.
- Product and concept testing can be administered effectively and securely.

Telephone IDIs

By using the telephone to conduct an IDI, an interview process can be conducted much more efficiently than a series of in-person IDIs.

Busy respondents can be called at home, during a break, or while traveling and participate in research when it is convenient for them to do so. Clients may observe by listening in on these calls or to recordings of the calls, but many clients simply prefer categorized verbatim comments.

Advantages

- Interviews can be conducted regardless of geography.
- Telephone interviews are both comfortable and convenient for respondents.
- Costs are typically less than a traditional IDI since travel expenses, facility fees and refreshments are not needed.

Online IDIs

In-depth interviews can be conducted online via e-mail, chat, a private message board, a social network, audio chat or a video conferencing service.

IDIs involving written content (such as e-mail or chat interviews) are better for studies where there is a need for detailed information that may require some thought on the part of the respondent.

IDIs involving spoken content (such as audio or video chat) are better for studies where the interviewer may need to probe more often to gain insight into the respondent's point of view.

Advantages

- Using online media allows interviews to be conducted regardless of geography.
- Online interviews are both comfortable and convenient for respondents.
- Costs are typically less than a traditional IDI since travel expenses, facility fees and refreshments are not needed.

Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research involves studying people in their natural surroundings and might involve probing these people with questions to understand why they make the choices that they make.

In marketing research, ethnographic research is sometimes used to study customers as they shop in stores or participate in service exchanges. Ethnographic research can range from purely observational (no questions are asked) to something that resembles an interactive, unstructured interview.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are one of the most widely-used methods of qualitative research, and with good reason – they allow researchers to collect a large variety of data in a short period of time while the client sits behind the scenes and observes. Focus groups are great for gathering general reactions to questions and for studying reactions to diverse opinions.

Focus groups can be set up in many ways, but they generally involve bringing between six to twelve respondents together in a physical room, on a conference call, or a virtual online "room" and having a moderator sit with them and ask questions. At the end of the session, clients are able to have the moderator ask additional questions to probe the attitudes, ideas and interests of group members.

There are many varieties of focus groups, and each method has its own advantages. Ultimately, focus groups are about **discussion**. Respondents are asked to offer their own opinions about topics under study, but they are also asked to respond to the ideas that others are offering.

One of the advantages of focus groups is that each group can include a different makeup of respondents to ensure that multiple perspectives are considered. In order to generate useful data, we recommend that at least two groups are used for any variation. (This helps to alleviate concerns about bias specific to an individual group.)

Traditional Focus Group

A traditional focus group involves bringing participants into a physical room somewhere (either in a professional research facility, a hotel conference room, or some other location of the client's choosing), sitting around a table, and having a discussion. Clients typically observe from behind one-way glass or a live video feed. Audio and video recordings are also made for those who cannot attend.

Advantages

- Distractions can be controlled for, ensuring participants are focused on the discussion.
- Written exercises and creative activities are easiest to conduct and collect.
- Product concepts and ideas can be shared and tested with a group easily and securely.

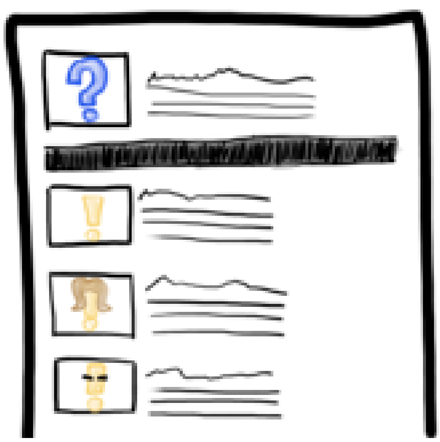
Telephone Focus Group

A telephone focus group involves bringing participants into a special telephone conference call. The moderator uses a computerized dashboard to see who is speaking and to keep the discussion under control. Observers are also able to dial in and listen to the call with muted lines.

Advantages

- Respondents can participate from anywhere in the world.
- Respondents participate from a comfortable setting and may be more candid about their feelings.
- Costs are typically less than a traditional focus group since travel expenses, facility fees and refreshments are not needed.

Social Network Focus Group



Also known as “focus blogs,” this style of focus group allows respondents to participate at their own convenience. Each respondent is given access to a special Web site where they are required to answer questions posed by a moderator over several days. Respondents are also able to respond with images, links to outside Web sites, videos and other rich media. Observers log in at any time and watch the conversation unfold.

Advantages

- Respondents can participate from any Web-enabled PC.
- Respondents have more time to offer deep responses and are able to think through their answers at their own pace.
- They can also demonstrate emotion with rich content.

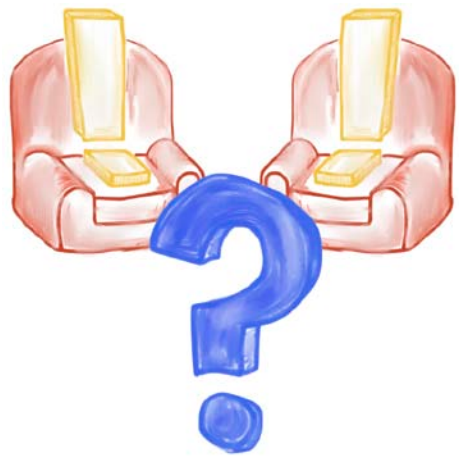
Online Video Focus Group

An online video focus group involves bringing four to eight people into a special video chat session using a Web-enabled computer, a webcam and a telephone. Observers log in to a special dashboard and are able to watch the group and offer real-time comments to the moderator.

Advantages

- Respondents can be recruited without as many concerns about geography or ease of access to a physical setting.
- Respondents participate from a comfortable setting and may be more candid about their feelings.
- The visual format allows for concepts and ideas to be tested. Participants often appreciate the novelty of high-tech video conferencing.
- Costs are typically less than a traditional focus group since travel expenses, facility fees and refreshments are not needed.

Small Groups



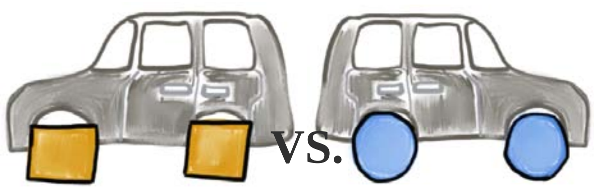
Sometimes, a researcher desires a small level of group interaction, but not quite on the scale of a focus group. Thus, techniques involving interviewing two people (a dyad), three people (a triad) or four to six people (a mini-group) have evolved.

Small groups can provide a level of social interaction that helps to provoke thought and foster discussion, and the conversation can be much less structured than the discussion in a focus group. Small groups can also be used for “warming up” or “cooling down” a focus group or interview session.

Advantages

- Small groups are less prone to being dominated by a single member and can foster deeper and richer discussions than focus groups.
- Small groups are versatile and can be used as a supplement to other methodologies.

Concept Testing



Concept tests can be conducted in a variety of ways, using interviews, small groups, focus groups, or even surveys.

Generally, concept tests present two or more alternatives and ask respondents to respond to the benefits and drawbacks of each alternative. Concept testing can be done quantitatively, but the data desired is often more qualitative in nature.

A limitation of concept testing is that sometimes, respondents do not provide clear preferences for a single concept, opting instead to suggest a new concept that incorporates some of the benefits of each existing concept. To get around this problem, concept testing can also employ conjoint or discrete analysis to determine which characteristics of a concept are most desired.

Emotions Research

Sometimes, it helps to get a fresh perspective on a product, service or brand. Rather than finding new ways to ask the same questions, some researchers prefer to dig deeper into a respondent's emotional connections.

By using a variety of techniques (including projection, mind mapping, blind alien interviews, collage-building, and others), researchers can get to the heart of how something feels to a consumer. Emotional techniques are qualitative in nature, but they can serve as the informational foundation for quantitative testing as well.

Advantages

- Emotion research targets different areas of the brain and can help bring fresh perspective to a mature service, product or brand.
- Emotion research can be useful in developing a new look for a logo or package for a product.

Mystery Shopping

We like to say that there are two types of mystery shopping studies: those that are done to catch employees behaving badly and those that are done to evaluate training and procedures. The former we do not recommend, since they can be a tremendous problem for morale and offer an unrealistic assessment of an employee's worth. But the latter we do recommend, since mystery shopping can often reveal gaps between what is supposed to be occurring on the front lines and what is actually occurring.

We provide custom mystery shopping studies, which look at the service experience from multiple angles and draw conclusions from a series of shops rather than a single encounter. Our mystery shopping services are a great way to get a solid reading on front line behavior, and they're also an excellent augmentation to an existing mystery shopping study.

Taking Research Online

One of the most common questions we've been hearing over the last few years is, "what sorts of research can be done online?" The answer, of course, is that **any** research project can be modified to become an online study. But the question that first needs to be asked is whether or not the research **should** be conducted online.

One of the biggest myths about online research is that it provides the same quality of data for a much lower price. It is true that online studies can be cheaper due to the automation of processes that software can provide. But the quality of the data is much harder to manage, and it is wise to be skeptical of any marketing research provider that is pushing online research as the preferred option. The truth is that the highest quality of data will always come from the low-tech solution of one-on-one interviews. Online options must always sacrifice some benefit of in-person interviews in order to provide value.

With that said, online research does present many new and exciting options that are worth considering. Some online techniques can even make use of social networking tools to provide data that is distinctly different from more conventional methodologies.

Qualitative Online Research

Perhaps the most exciting new frontiers in online research exist in the realm of qualitative research, where researchers are free to try creative (and sometimes unconventional!) approaches to acquire data.

We've covered some of the many ways that Internet technology can be used to enhance in-depth interviews and focus group research. But there are plenty of other options as well.

Online video diaries are one emerging technique that provide information that's part interview, part ethnography. The research team sends each respondent an inexpensive digital video recorder and ask the respondents to capture video footage of themselves using a product or service or talking about it (often working through a list of questions provided by the team). The respondents then upload their videos and the research team puts together a video report that incorporates the comments of the respondents into a cohesive narrative. One advantage of this style of research is that it provides an enormous amount of nonverbal and ethnographic information that is normally not captured by marketing research.

Content analysis is often used for secondary research, but it can be used for primary research as well. The idea of content analysis is to index data from Web-based communities (such as message boards or Twitter feeds) and use software to search for recurring words or phrases. This can help researchers to pinpoint hot button topics and to look for connections between behavior and attitude. Content analysis can also help locate vocal online detractors for the purposes of customer recovery.

Social Network Panels involve recruiting a group of specialized panelist respondents who participate in a private social network to offer their opinions on topics presented to them. To deliver value, these panels need to be made up of members who have some unique and useful characteristic in common (such as a panel of physicians, or a panel of young professionals). But these panels can be very useful for obtaining quick opinions from a community of well-qualified respondents, and the social media platform allows rich content (such as images, slide presentations, videos and audio clips) to be easily shared with members of the group.

Quantitative Online Research

Of course, the online technique most people are familiar with is the simple online survey, a technique that is becoming increasingly common due to its inexpensive nature and its relative ease of deployment.

Unfortunately, online surveys are often conducted in a "do-it-yourself " manner, often resulting in a low response rate and a questionable quality of data.

Our experience has taught us that online surveys must follow three rules to be effective:

- **They must be short.** We recommend no more than 10 questions (not counting demographic questions at the end, of course).
- **They must be easy**. We recommend no more than one or two open-ended questions. Everything else should involve selecting choices from a list or rating items on a scale.
- **They must be relevant.** As online surveys grow in popularity, more and more people are being asked to take them, resulting in a higher tendency for these people to ignore them or avoid them altogether. The one exception we have observed is when an online survey is being conducted by an organization to which the respondent feels a strong connection or a desire to help. So long as the survey is relevant to the respondent's interests, he or she is more likely to make an attempt to complete it.

One important limitation of online surveys is that it is extremely difficult to draw a random sample. This means that the results of online surveys are unlikely to be representative of the population as a whole – an important limitation to keep in mind if you are conducting consumer research.

As is true of any type of study, it is important that an online survey be well-designed and that the questions be clear and concise. We recommend, at the very least, having a research professional design the study, even if it will be administered by your own organization.

Quantitative Studies

One of the most common reasons for conducting marketing research is to generate statistics that can be used to discuss a target population. A well-designed quantitative study will provide those numbers… but that's just the beginning of what quantitative research can do.

As analytical techniques become more and more powerful, marketing researchers are finding new and better ways to find powerful insights in the data that they collect. Over the last decade, marketing research techniques for multivariate analysis have become much more common, resulting in the ability of marketing researchers to provide predictive models, cluster and factor analyses, and perceptual maps as centerpieces of marketing research reports.

Quantitative studies come in all sorts of varieties, and they are easy to customize and adapt to meet unique informational needs. We also recommend pairing quantitative studies with a qualitative phase of research to provide the maximum amount of context for the numbers that will be generated.

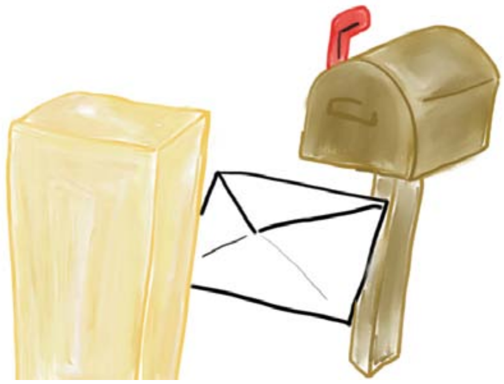
Administered Surveys

One of the biggest problems in conducting a quantitative survey is the low response rate. One of the best ways to ensure an adequate response rate in a quantitative survey is to have a member of the research team administer the survey, either in person, via the telephone or via the Web. This will help to ensure that minimum quotas for completed numbers of surveys are held.

A chief advantage of administration is that respondents have the ability to ask questions if they reach a question that they do not understand. Another advantage is that respondents see that their surveys are being handled by a third party (rather than the sponsor of the study) and thus are more likely to share their honest opinions.

Surveys can be administered in two ways. The first is to simply hand a survey to the respondents and allow them to complete it at their own pace, asking clarifying questions if they arise. This method is more appropriate in a situation where respondents are concerned about the confidentiality of their responses and do not want to be overheard expressing their opinions.

The second is to walk the respondents through the guide question by question. This method is most appropriate for telephone surveys, mall intercept surveys, or surveys where strict confidentiality is not a large concern among respondents.



Mail Surveys

Mail surveys have been a traditional favorite because of their relative low cost. Because mailing addresses are indexed, it is possible to conduct a mail study that offers a truly random sample.

Unfortunately, the chief drawback of mail surveys is the low response rate, which means that the quality of the data is suspect until it is validated by other research. Mail surveys are the best inexpensive way to reach older populations.

Phone Surveys

Telephone surveys offer all of the advantages of an administered survey while eliminating the problem of geography.

One of the reason telephone surveys have traditionally been preferred by national polling organizations is because they allow for a true random sample through a process known as “random digit dialing.” (Modern telephone surveys include a proportionate number of cellular phones as well.)

Telephone surveys are generally the best way to ensure a high quality of data.

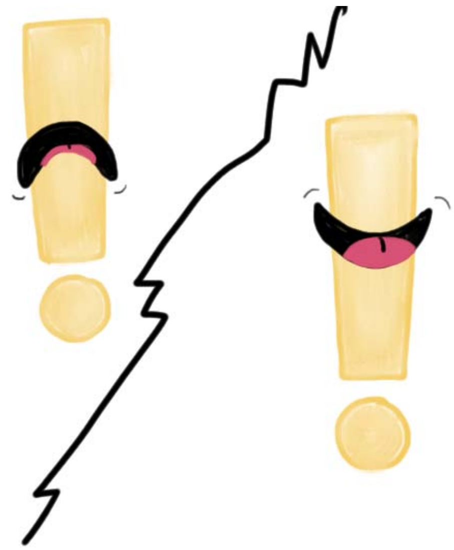
Online Surveys

Online surveys have become a popular alternative over the last decade because of their inexpensive nature and their instantaneous results.

One of the chief problems with online surveys is that it is difficult to conduct them with a truly random sample. The response rate for online surveys also tends to be very low (particularly in consumer studies), and since respondents are more easily distracted while taking online surveys, it’s more likely that responses that are gathered will not be complete, especially if the survey is longer than 10 questions.

Fortunately, online surveys do have their advantages. Online surveys are wonderful for sharing rich media (graphics, video, audio) and are also a wonderful way to obtain a quick response from respondents when no data exists. When carefully designed and controlled, online surveys can effectively fill the need for quick data – most responses arrive within 72 hours of the initial invitation.

Satisfaction Studies

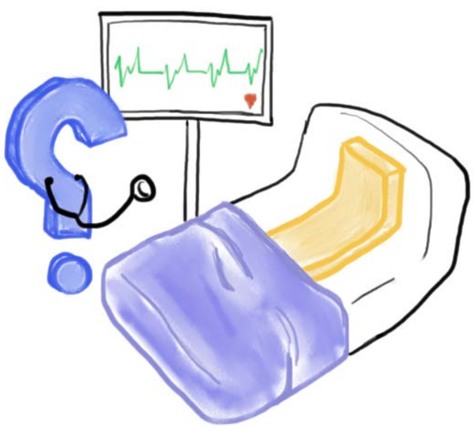


In the service sector, customer satisfaction is all-important, and many companies that have not traditionally seen themselves as service providers are beginning to understand that satisfaction statistics for areas such as customer service, warranty service and even employment can be important indicators of future behavior.

Organizations that have a good handle on the relative satisfaction of their customers, channel partners, employees and stakeholders tend to be organizations that also have a good handle on their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats – an important foundation for marketing strategy in the 21stcentury.

We recommend that quantitative satisfaction studies be paired with some form of qualitative research to provide context for any lack of satisfaction that crops up in the numbers. Often, lack of satisfaction is a symptom of a deeper problem, and qualitative research can help provide the proper diagnosis.

Diagnostic Research



Organizations that make service a priority tend to score very well on satisfaction surveys. But sometimes, there are dips in satisfaction that can serve as predictors of areas that could become problematic in delivering top-quality service.

By the same token, organizations that create products or services often have difficulty spotting the trends that indicate that a product or service category is about to move from maturity into decline. With the right information, these firms can spot the warning signs and work to either stimulate market demand or make plans to scale back or divest the category and invest in something new.

Diagnostic research can help in both of these scenarios, and many more. The premise of diagnostic research is that baseline statistics for vital areas are established and then monitored through a series of regular surveys (generally administered quarterly, semi-annually or annually). This allows the organization to spot sudden drops in vital statistics and to react before these drops manifest in lost customers or revenues. The research investment is relatively small compared to the potential losses that can be incurred in a problem is not spotted in time, and if the diagnostic research is augmented with occasional qualitative studies to ensure that the vital statistics are still relevant, it is possible for an organization to anticipate negative surprises before they happen… and to correct for them before they disrupt business.

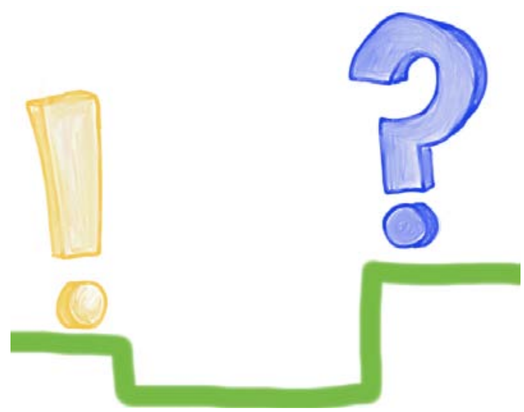
Market Segmentation Studies

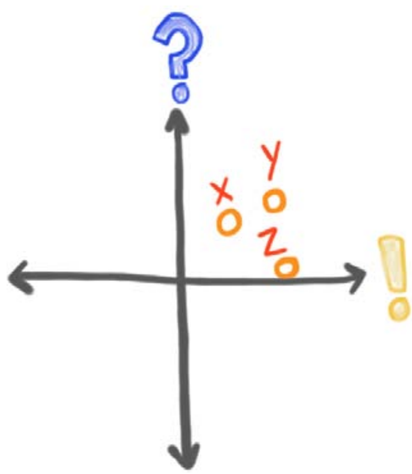
In this modern era of serving niche markets, it's more important than ever to understand the underlying market segments that exist within a customer base. Marketers have traditionally examined target markets by slicing groups up by demographic variables (such as age, gender and income level) and looking for key differences between these groups. Unfortunately, this method has many drawbacks, and it can lead to misleading results.

What marketers can do, however, is to conduct market segmentation studies to look for key differences between more sophisticated groups that may exist within the marketplace. Once these groups are identified, strategies for targeted growth are much easier to develop, and marketing communications can be targeted much more effectively.

Gap Analysis Studies

Academic research in services marketing has established four distinct gaps in service quality that can be minimized to improve the service experience. While these gaps are fairly intuitive, it's surprising how often service companies choose to overlook them… often resulting in lower sales and fleeing customers. A gap analysis study helps to identify how wide each of these service gaps are and offers insight into how these gaps can be reduced to improve service quality.





Perceptual Mapping Studies

Perceptual maps are a useful tool for sharing with upper management, because they condense some very complex research into a single graphic that plots customer perceptions of brands along two dimensions.

Powerful and intuitive, perceptual maps can help simplify marketing decision-making and provide some real insights into how brands need to be positioned to offer a maximum appeal to consumers. Perceptual maps can also offer insights into how brands can differentiate themselves from competitors and take control of a unique market space.

About The Research & Planning Group

The Research & Planning Group is a full service marketing research firm located in St. Louis, MO. For over 25 years, we have provided a variety of qualitative and quantitative marketing research services, including:

- Focus Groups
- In-depth interviews
- Telephone interviews
- Satisfaction studies
- Diagnostic studies
- B2B Research
- Concept testing
- Customized Mystery shopping
- Online surveys
- Service gap analysis

We specialize in interviewing tough-to-reach respondents, such as busy professionals, executives, and physicians. We also specialize in designing custom studies for consumer research that can really help businesses and organizations seeking specific information to find out exactly what they want to know.

Our Promise

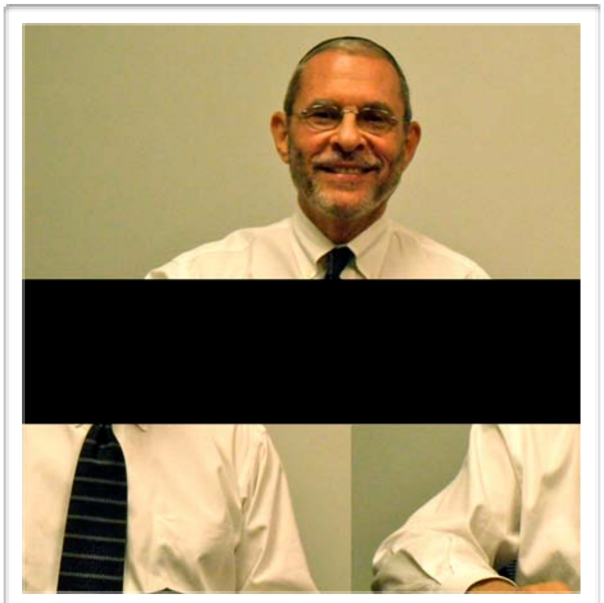
The Research & Planning Group will help your organization find out what you need to know. We will involve you in every step of the process, and we will strive to ensure that the data and analysis we provide will help to support the decisions that you need to make.

We will uphold the ethical guidelines set forth by professional organizations within our industry and will preserve the anonymity of respondents while still delivering the integrity of their responses.

We will help you to hear the voice of your customers, channel partners or stakeholders… and provide you with analysis and recommendations based firmly upon the data, tempered by our years of experience and advanced training.

We will deliver exceptional value for your investment in research, and we will always advise you of the best ways in which your resources can be used to obtain the information you're seeking.

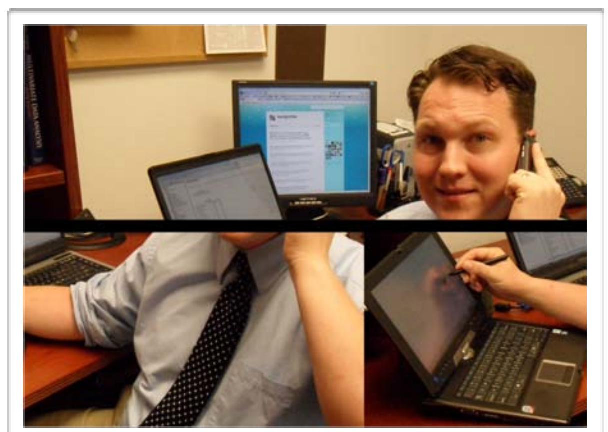
Our People



David Rich is the President and Founder of the Research & Planning Group. David's experience as a health care marketing research consultant and focus group moderator spans thirty years, and his experience in all aspects of b2b and b2c services and product research includes qualitative and quantitative research, executive interviewing and focus group moderation.

In 1982, David directed research and market planning for a St. Louis-based advertising and public relations agency. He also worked as a strategic planner for the University of Cincinnati's Institute for Research and Training in Higher Education, an internal consulting arm to all teaching departments of the university. He has consulted with numerous educational organizations, developing curriculum and marketing course offerings. Early in his career, he was a teacher in the inner city for the Cincinnati (OH) Public School System.

David earned a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Indiana University (1967) and a Masters in Community Planning from the University of Cincinnati (1972). He is a member of The Marketing Research Association, American Marketing Association, Business Marketing Association, and The Qualitative Research Consultants Association.



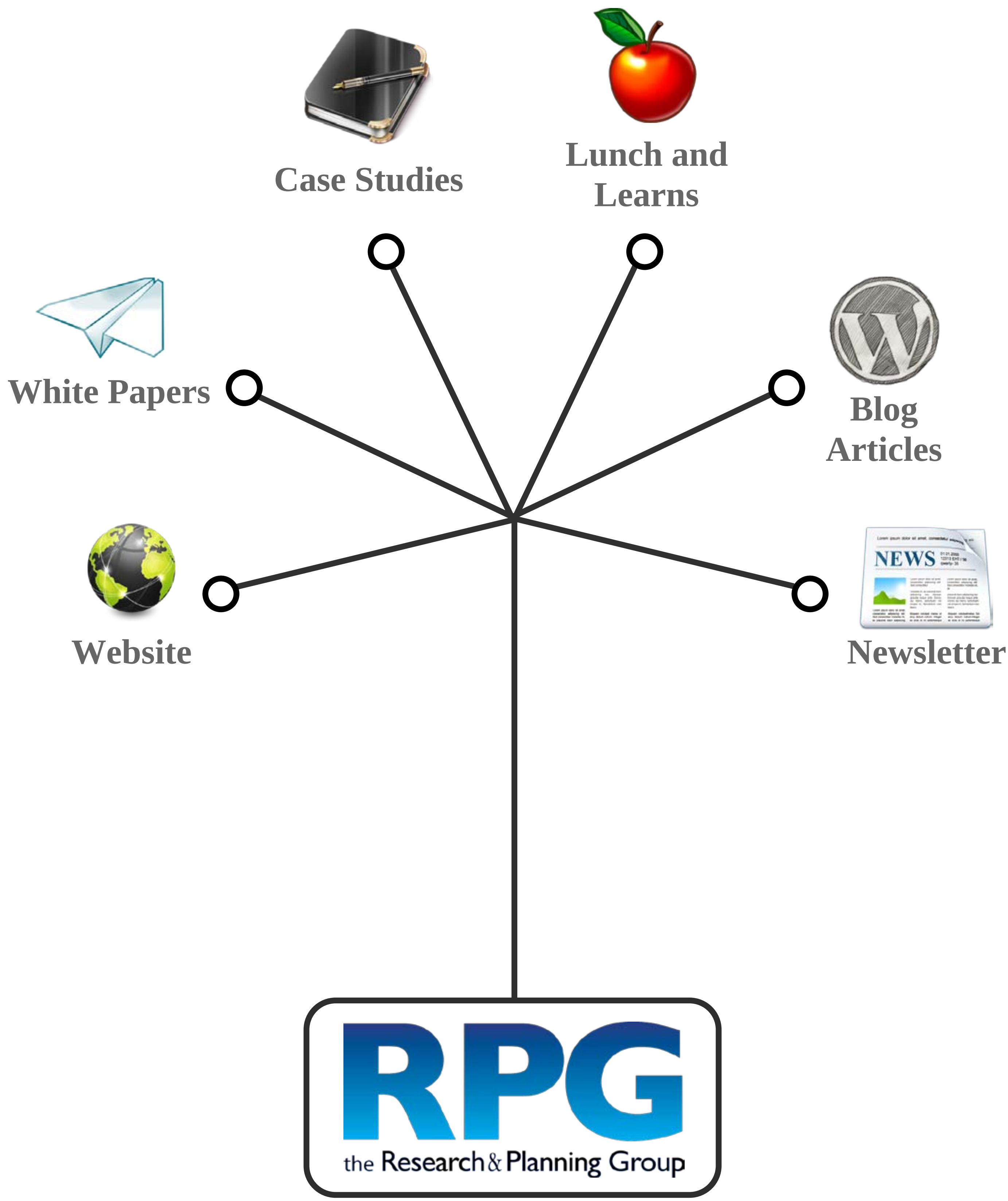
Sean J. Jordan is the Research Director for the Research & Planning Group. Sean is a graduate of one of the nation's only Master of Marketing Research (MMR) programs, which is offered at the Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville School of Business. This program equipped Sean with state-of-the-art qualitative and quantitative research skills.

As an experienced professional researcher, Sean possesses a number of skills that aid him in research design, data analysis and report presentation. Sean is also an expert in the fields of social media, quantitative research, online research, and mixed media research.

Sean's marketing background is diverse as well; he has been recognized as an outstanding guerilla marketer in retail sales, and he successfully vaulted an independent comic book company from obscurity to bestselling publisher during his time as marketing and public relations director.

You can read more about Sean on The Research & Planning Blog at http://blog.researchplan.com.

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS? TRY



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