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FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWING

Focus groups are an important market research technique for generating useful information about your customers' attitudes and perceptions. As opposed to more quantitative research methods, focus groups are qualitative in nature and are geared toward drawing out in-depth answers that help build understanding of the issues and concerns that might not otherwise come out in a more "closed-ended" line of questioning.

ADR Associates typically conduct 6-12 focus groups a month among key client constituents.

Types of Focus Groups

With more predictable access to the Internet, focus group discussions can now be done in a variety of formats specially tailored to your audience. The old standby of hosting a focus group in a facility with one way mirrors and a back room for monitoring can now be augmented with other formats that allow greater flexibility for difficult audiences.

- Full group (8 to 10 people) - typically among consumers done in-person at a central location
- Mini group (4-6 people) - typically among executives and professionals who are difficult to find and recruit, but still in-person at a central location
- Telephone group (4 to 10 people) - typically among geographically dispersed audiences
- Internet group (4 to 10 people) - typically among geographically dispersed audiences who will need to be able to view specific items and react to them

Advantages of Focus Groups

The Focus Group format will, to some extent, dictate what you get out of it. As you can easily imagine, focused group discussions that are "live" and in-person allow for enhanced group dynamics. Telephone groups can be difficult in obtaining group synergies that produce creative results. Internet groups rely upon written communication skills and typically work best with computer savvy respondents.

Compared to other methodologies, look for Focus Groups to enable the...

- Possibility to probe for in-depth understanding
- Opportunity to observe group of customers/consumers in one setting

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Focus Groups are...

- Useful when topic is not personally difficult to talk about
- Relatively cheap means of answering critical questions
- Able to be completed quickly

Limitations of Focus Groups

We must always be careful not to abuse the Focus Group phase of the research process. When used to gain an in-depth understanding or as a “cross-check” for management decisions, this methodology is hard to beat. However, we must be vigilant that we don’t take away too much from a discussion with 10 or 12 participants as this can hardly be considered representative.

Relative to other methodologies, Focus Groups can be...

- Difficult, costly to obtain geographic dispersion
- Not representative of your marketplace
- Interpretation is based on “soft” measures, not on reliably significant data
- Cost per respondent is high with expenses (such as participation incentives) going up every year

Uses of Focus Group Research

We find focus groups to be particularly useful for the following purposes:

- New product development studies
- Positioning studies
- Behavioral and usage studies
- Packaging assessments
- Attitude studies
- Advertising/copy evaluations
- Promotion evaluations
- Idea generation
- Employee attitude and motivation

Abuses of Focus Groups

Bottom line? Focus Group research has its place in the modern market research “arsenal” of tools, but some cautionary words of wisdom should always be in the back of your mind.

Always be careful NOT to use Focus Groups...

- As a cheap alternative to quantitative research
- To generate data that they are not intended to generate
- Implementing more groups than are necessary, using different locations unnecessarily
- Taking the technique too seriously, or not seriously enough



Focus Group White Paper

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ADR Associates, Inc

...Helping Connect With Customers

ADR Associates is a corporation founded in 1994 specializing in strategic positioning, market research and communication counsel. Based at Red Hawk Ranch, a unique executive off-site location, ADR brings the customer voice into management's focus. Helping clients understand customer perceptions is often the foundation of ADR's involvement and becomes a driving force for creating and fine-tuning successful business strategies.

Red Hawk Ranch is headquartered in California's Temecula Valley Wine Region. Visit us at www.redhawk ranch.tv.