

Must-Do Tips No 27: Wot – No Research?

In the world of professional services, rampant anecdotalism often reigns.

To wit, if we had £10 for the number of strategic, marketing, or business development plans we have come across that state or imply that "*clients think*" or "*prospects think*" when it is really "*we (or even I) think*"....then we would have slightly less need to write this newsletter!

As a result, grandiose aims are founded on little more than the equivalent of what a man down the pub told somebody (allegedly) - and probably five years ago at that. Why do so many professional firms shy away from research - or botch it if they do attempt it - flying in the face of something that, if conducted properly, can provide an evidential basis on which to identify key business issues, confirm or deny potential strategies, assess competitive threats, and inform CRM and other client-facing activities?

This month's MDT focuses on the main stumbling blocks to the acceptance or achieved value of professionally-conducted marketing research, and some practical tips on how to overcome them.

Tip 1 - "Can't We Do It In-House?"

Here we may have a number of factors at work - most notably **ignorance, money, and fear** - a deadly combination. For some professionals (even very senior ones) the idea of just asking questions of clients, prospects or intermediaries is such an attractively simple concept that:

SURELY we can get someone in the marketing department to draft up a questionnaire, thereby saving us a pile of money (and ensuring that we keep control so that any negative comments from my clients don't appear)?

Sadly, what results from this is nearly always of little or no value. And, of course, the marketing department is delighted to accept the additional heavy workload imposed on it for a specialist discipline in which none of its members usually have any detailed expertise. Not.

The sensible riposte to all of this is to ask any self-respecting professional whether they would employ untrained, unqualified amateurs to do their highly complex, specialised jobs - and if they did, what their clients would think and do as a result.

Tip 2 - "We Want To Know It All"

Market researchers call this phenomenon *salesman questions* - a list of 'nice to know' things that: a) you'd have to conduct a census of the entire market to establish (very expensive); b) you'd have to tie respondents to a chair and grill them all day to get all the material asked for; and c) won't in any case provide any information on WHY business development isn't working or HOW to gain market share.

The solution here is to identify and agree clearly the key specific questions that the firm wants answered, and then commission just enough research field work to get a robust list of factors to analyse.

Tip 3 - "Yes...So What?"

The ability to produce a voluminous report crammed full of charts and data isn't the point. Having conducted a proper research process, the quality of its outputs is as important as the professionalism of the inputs. Here, professional firms need to be looking at the quality of interpretation of the data **and** the ability of research organisations to make sound, specific recommendations for action.

People Scope provides specialist business-to-business marketing research services for professional firms. If you wish to know more about these, hit 'Reply' and type **Marketing Research**. As a separate service, we also undertake independent client review interviews as part of a client care or CRM programme. For more about these, hit 'Reply' and type **Client Reviews**.

For more general information about what we do, go to www.peoplescope.com.

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Best regards.

JAMES NEWBERRY
Managing Partner
People Scope
6 River Court
Chartham
Canterbury
United Kingdom
Telephone: 44 (0)1227 730411
Email: peoplescope@aol.com
Website: www.peoplescope.com

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