

One of the key principles in good qualitative research is talking to the right audience. It is essential to talk to respondents who will help achieve the goals of the research... you can't afford to talk to the wrong people. If you are asking the right questions to the wrong group of people, you're not going to get the results companies need. One interview I still remember from years ago involved a project in which we were talking with consumers; trying to understand why they chose and purchased a particular beverage.

I was talking with a young man, who in our recruiting efforts was indeed determined to be a heavy drinker of our beverage of interest. However, as we quickly got into the interview, I realized that it was not going to be good, as he wasn't the beverage "chooser". As I asked him why he drank the particular beverage...his response was "it's what's in the refrigerator" – which was stocked by several roommates. I tried several different lines of questioning to identify any affinity toward the product, but at the end of the day...whatever was in the refrigerator was what he was going to drink...made no difference to him what was there. Needless to say, this didn't help our research efforts at all and we had to offer a few apologies to those in the backroom. From that incident, one of the lessons that I learned is to screen for a respondent that has some decision making control over the choice.

## Talking with the right people....

The importance of a good qualitative sample



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# Use an appropriate methodology...

At M/A/R/C Research we often spend as much time in our qualitative projects identifying the sample and developing the screener as we do in developing our discussion guides. A good sample is truly one of the core pillars of good qualitative research... we need to have a purpose and a reason for inviting every respondent in a qualitative research project ... every respondent counts!! If we want to understand when and why people shop at one store versus another, we need to make sure we talk with people who shop at both. If we want to understand why people switch back and forth between two brands, we need to make sure we talk with people who switch... it won't do much good for this research objective if we talk only to loyal users of both brands.

Ensuring the right sample is a combination of thinking through the people we want to talk with (designing the sample) and then asking the relevant questions that make sure we get who we want (developing the screener). Before sample design, you need to have clear, concise study objectives. After goals have been developed and approved, identify who you need to talk with in order to meet those objectives. Again, be as specific as possible in identifying the people you want to talk with. Looking at the recruiting process, I like to think of it as the "4Ds"; 1) Define study objectives, 2) Design the sample, 3) Develop the screener, and 4) Defend – run through some "dummy" scenarios in the screener to ensure you are going to get the sample you intended.

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Once you've identified who you want, there are a couple of items to keep in mind which will help with recruiting efforts and getting the most out of each participant:

1) Use an appropriate methodology...one that is conducive to your targets participation. M/A/R/C has many qualitative methodologies that we use and it is important to weigh the audience with the type of platform that they will be using. Is it a hard to reach audience that is constrained by time...do we need to go to them or conduct an online session? Is it difficult to get the audience type together at the same time...do we need one-on-ones (either in-person or phone) or online methods where they can come in at their own convenience. Is the methodology age appropriate or skill level appropriate...almost anyone who can type an email can participate in an online bulletin board, but one must generally be a little more "tech savvy" and hopefully a faster typist to participate in an online focus group which typically moves at a much faster pace. Part of our responsibility as qualitative researchers is to identify the best methods to encourage audience participation; often we'll recommend to our clients a methodology different than what they were originally envisioning knowing it will help to give them the audience they want or need.

2) Compensate adequately...make it worthwhile for your audience to participate. Always plan ahead and make sure you know what the "going rate" for your audience is. Compensation may not always be monetary and never underestimate the importance of information...for some B2B studies we'll provide condensed or limited study results as compensation. If timing is an issue or it is critical to ensure that you recruit all of an audience, it's often worthwhile to add a little extra to the honoraria and make it harder for the respondent to say "no". We recently conducted a study with an audience that was essential to meet our study objectives; the sample was fairly limited and restricted. Working with our client, we offered upfront almost 30% more in honoraria than we would typically offer for this type of audience, the result...recruiting was actually completed in about half the time and all but two who were recruited, ended up participating. As you are going through the recruiting process, it's never a perfect solution, but don't be afraid to increase compensation if you find many qualified respondents aren't willing to participate.

The importance of having the right audience in your research endeavors can't be overlooked. Spending the time upfront to identify who you want to talk with, asking the right questions to get them in the study, and helping ensure that respondents participate fully will help make your qualitative research efforts successful.