

What are Focus Groups?

The way they work and the importance of them in marketing

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Focus groups are in-depth discussion groups held with a small number of carefully selected individuals. They are regarded as a qualitative research method.

Qualitative methods are ways of collecting data which are concerned with describing meaning, rather than with drawing statistical inferences.

Focus Groups are usually held to discuss one or two predefined topics and provide an excellent way of obtaining feedback on visuals such as new logos or ad campaigns.

Examples

Examples of Focus Groups we have recently conducted include:- For a major government organisation that issues fine. Focus Groups were held with the objective of improving the form that people fill out when they receive a fine and want to allocate it to someone else.- A major association to identify new products and services that can be introduced to increase their value to members.- A major Victorian University to discuss marketing messages to its target groups.

The Value of Focus Groups

A key value of focus groups is that they generate information through the give and take of group discussion. With the skill of an experienced facilitator, discussion points are shared, discussed and progressed to a level that cannot be achieved via one or one interviews or online surveys.

As ideas are shared, new ideas are generated.

They also enable you to see reactions first hand and to understand them through further questioning.

Composition

The composition of a focus group is usually based on a pre-selected group (e.g. stage of life, interests, gender, members / clients). Bringing people with common interests or experiences together makes it easier for them to carry on a productive discussion.

The ideal size for a focus group is between six and twelve people. This size group encourages participants to contribute their ideas. Groups that are too small can be dominated by one or two members, or they may fall flat if too few people have anything to contribute. Too large a group lacks cohesion and may break up into side conversations, or people may become frustrated if they have to wait to have a say.

Questions

Focus group questions should be clearly formulated so that the question does not influence the answer. The facilitator's job is to keep the group "focused" and help participants generate a lively and productive discussion. Questions should be as open ended as possible.

The quality of information gained from focus groups depends on how effectively the facilitator asks the questions and how well they keep the discussion targeted on the research objectives. A Question Guide should be prepared in advance and approved by the client based on the client's objectives.

Recruitment

Participants are generally recruited by telephone and given a brief description of what the group will be about. A follow up email is then sent to provide information about the time and date of the focus group and further information about its objectives.

Payment

Participants are often offered an "in kind" reward (e.g. \$50 cash) for attending as an incentive.

How Many Focus Groups Do You Need?

The number of Focus Groups you should undertake depends on the project and your objectives.

To work out how many Focus Groups to undertake you need to take into account:- Whether the Focus Groups are being undertaken in isolation or form part of a bigger research project that has other components (e.g. plus an Online Survey or telephone research).- The size of the sample you need information from, e.g. State or national? How large is the age range of the people you are seeking feedback from? Etc...- Your budget.

Key Benefits

Focus Groups are a very effective Market Research tool with many benefits, including:- They provide qualitative data.- Provide immediate data (we provide an Outcomes Report to the client after each Focus Group).- Enable you to understand and explore ideas, thought processes and motivators.- Often generate new ideas and concepts.- Enable you to understand and test reactions to visual messaging.

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