

Keeping In Touch With Customers

February 2002 newsletter

In our last newsletter we examined how plummeting response and cooperation rates ("Who Moved My Respondent?") have made it difficult to talk with customers. This month, we will address how online methodologies enable us to remain in touch with our customers as technology changes their lives.

Over the past few years, online surveys have moved from the fringe of the research world to be an accepted methodology. Many think, and we concur, that some form of Internet surveying will be the dominant research methodology soon in the future.

More than 60 percent of all households are wired to the Internet and about one-fifth of them have broadband access. The growth in Internet penetration has slowed because of economic factors, pricing resistance and saturation of the market.

But as the economy turns and tiered pricing models are developed, it would not be surprising to see Internet penetration approach, but probably never exceed, that of telephone service (currently at around 94%).

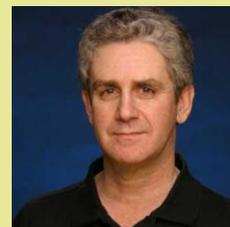
However, the true availability of telephone-using respondents is currently much lower, once we account for unlisted and unavailable households. And while response rates remain low for online work (at best, 10-15%), this is not much worse than what we are now experiencing using telephones.

The biggest issue remains sampling. There is no universal list of e-mail addresses from which we can develop a random sample, nor a way to develop an

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Prell Organization is a marketing research firm that uses qualitative and quantitative methods to help our clients and their agencies see their brands more clearly.

Brand Clarity is a process by which consumers reveal the essence of a brand to make sure that the products and services being offered are closely aligned to their needs.



equivalent of random digit dialing by sampling all known Internet services.

Sometimes, online researchers engage in quota sampling, which corrects for deficiencies in the responses from any one demographic group by over-sampling or weighting. This, however, ignores a fundamental issue of non-respondent bias: Internet users are different from non-users.

While one can never totally eliminate non-respondent bias, it can be minimized by making online surveys easier to complete. And as Internet penetration increases, it is inevitable that online methodologies will become preeminent, just as telephone interviewing replaced door-to-door.

WAYS TO REACH RESPONDENTS WHO DON'T WANT TO BE REACHED

- **Qualitative research**, which is not designed to be projected to the any population, is a good way to reach specific groups that need to be focused on.
- **Combine methodologies**, such as phone, mail, voice response or Internet to give respondents multiple completion paths.
- **Use panels** that have employ standardized incentives and have already received a certain level of cooperation from respondents.
- **Client lists**, if properly cleaned, can be very effective, especially if the research does not have to be blind. People respond well to companies they know.
- **Technologies**, such as sophisticated predictive dialers, can cut the costs of CATI interviewing while allowing critical sampling control that minimizes non-respondent bias.
- **The Internet**, is an excellent way to survey your customers and prospects, especially if most of them are already online.

Rick Weitzer
Principal

636-728-1557
rweitzer@prellorg.com
www.prellorg.com