



MARKETLINK
STRATEGIC MARKETING SERVICES

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF FOCUS GROUPS

This information is offered to our clients as a common sense guide to optimizing the return on their investment in focus group research. Qualitative research is a useful tool when used correctly. But like any tool, it can also be unproductive and even dangerous if used incorrectly. MarketLink is committed to our clients' successful use of focus group research – always.

Focus Group Research – What It Can Do...

- ❑ Reveal **what** people think and feel about an issue
- ❑ Illuminate reasons behind people's opinions
- ❑ Surface obvious losers, problems and pitfalls
- ❑ Raise yellow flags
- ❑ Provide **directional** learning

Focus Group Research – What It Cannot Do...

- ❑ Quantify issues
- ❑ Answer "**how many**" questions
- ❑ Project learning to a larger population or universe
- ❑ Provide **definitive** learning

Tips To Optimize The Benefits From Focus Group Research...

- ❑ Avoid the temptation to quantify (e.g.; "how many said this or that?")
- ❑ Look for recurring themes and reactions – patterns provide important clues to key issues
- ❑ Listen for the passion and intensity of responses as insights into strength of conviction
- ❑ Don't be a selective listener – also hear respondents whose opinions differ from yours
- ❑ Process **all** communication – what's said, what's not said, and body language
- ❑ Avoid coming to conclusions prematurely – acquire perspective and objectivity
- ❑ Assimilate insights from all sessions – each group yields threads that contribute to a stronger and more colorful tapestry of learning

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Focus Group Research – Some Common Pitfalls...

Respondent-Related

- ❑ Recruiting slip-up's – no matter how good the screener, some mis-recruits slip through
- ❑ Dominant respondents – they are annoying, but always manageable
- ❑ Low-energy groups – late-evening sessions are highest risk
- ❑ Accommodation – respondents telling the moderator what they think he wants to hear

Client-Related

- ❑ Covering too many issues in a single session – depth of insight is sacrificed for breadth
- ❑ Quasi-quantitative perspective – counting votes instead of observing conviction
- ❑ Premature closure on key issues – respondent “180's” from group-to-group are not uncommon
- ❑ Selective listening – hearing and remembering only those comments that support a coming-in point of view

Moderator-Related

- ❑ Lacking marketing know-how – serendipity is only possible when moderators have marketing training and experience that allows them to easily and quickly understand clients' business issues
- ❑ “Clock” management – allocating group discussion time to effectively balance between quantity and quality of insights
- ❑ Dynamics management – engaging respondents and making them feel safe; also salvaging derailed discussions when necessary

The MarketLink Focus Group Philosophy...

- ❑ Your moderator is a partner and a tool – empower your moderator with background and insight, then demand flexibility and creativity
- ❑ Focus Groups are one of the few remaining tools in which the ends justify the means – “where we end up” is more important than “how we got there”
- ❑ The discussion guide is fluid and flexible; anticipate that new issues will arise and discussion content and emphases will change throughout the course of a project
- ❑ Time allocations in a discussion guide are general targets reflecting a hierarchy of learning objectives – actual time utilization is dictated by group dynamics, emergent issues and insights, and a natural project learning curve
- ❑ Respondents often react better to tangible stimuli than to direct questioning – better to come prepared with more stimulus materials than less
- ❑ Projective techniques are often effective at getting beneath the surface of an issue and obtaining richer insights than would be possible via direct questioning