

Research Briefing

PR Research in the ICT Sector



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The Do's and Don'ts

Research Briefing Series

PR Surveys *in ICT Markets*

Over the years we have undertaken PR driven surveys for a wide range of customers within the ICT space. Some of these initiatives have proved considerably more successful than others and we thought it might be worth sharing a few thoughts. Hopefully these will be useful.

10 Most Common Mistakes Made in PR surveys...& the lessons we've learnt

1. **"Bandwagoning"** (Don't jump on anything that moves) Anyone who has worked in the ICT sector for any length of time knows that the industry can go through phases where just about everyone in the sector wants to jump on the bandwagon or the latest fad. Whether it be Y2K, e-commerce, Voice over IP, convergence or "compliance" – Once a news editor receives the 8th news release, about a survey on the same subject, the chances of getting decent coverage are virtually zero – especially when it appears to look at much the same issues and makes many of the same assumptions as all the other surveys. By all means jump on a bandwagon but be prepared to: be creative, look for new angles, analyse data by segment to identify differences between groups etc. otherwise you simply end up replicating what's already been done to death!
2. **"Truisms"** (I didn't need a survey to tell me that) It's best to avoid questions that generate truisms – i.e. provide obvious answers that anyone could predict in advance. Simple yes/no or agree/disagree questions run the risk of falling into this trap if they are poorly designed. We're happy to advise on the style of questions that work best.
3. **"Blunt instruments"** (That wasn't the answer I wanted) Direct questions are not always the best way to get the answer you want. Human nature is such that people are often very reluctant to criticise something – so if you're looking to highlight problems and pitfalls you often have to be more subtle in the type of question you ask. Sometimes a direct question can generate the very opposite result from the one you wanted and expected. Tell us the headlines you're looking for and let us design the questions.
4. **"IT people are not necessarily the right people"** (I didn't realise it cost that much to run a survey) Literally hundreds of PR studies are commissioned every year to interview senior IT managers in large multinationals. Their popularity is explained by the fact that the IT companies want to sell to senior IT executives in large multinationals. This can be a valid approach – BUT, is it always the best approach? Senior IT executives are not necessarily interested in the opinions of other senior IT executives! People sometimes forget that the real aim of any study is to attract the interest of this audience rather than simply playing back their own opinions. A senior IT executive in a large multinational might well be more interested in reading about the opinions of Business Decision Makers

(BDM's). The IT executives need to satisfy the needs of these customers, so understanding demand patterns can be critical. Additionally, research amongst senior IT executives is becoming increasingly expensive as a result of over-researching so, alternative ways of producing survey information that this audience wants to read about can be a more cost effective alternative.

5. **"1000 isn't a magic number"** People frequently have misconceptions about how many interviews are required to get a valid survey result. Consequently, there is a danger of over-specifying a survey and making the whole programme more expensive than it needs to be. This misconception stems from the fact that historically many consumer surveys have been based on 1,000 interviews. There is however no absolute requirement for this number and while it might be appropriate or desirable for consumer studies Business to Business (B2B) projects can frequently be conducted with a lot fewer interviews. From a research perspective the number of interviews recommended is ultimately determined by the level of segmentation or sub group analysis required. Of course there might be different requirements for interview numbers for PR purposes (i.e. achieving impact and credibility with journalists) but call us when you're developing your ideas and we'll happily advise on the number of interviews you need from a research perspective.
6. **"Being precisely wrong"** It is better to be approximately right than precisely wrong. Getting people to give a precise answer to questions involving values (e.g. spend) or percentages is asking a lot. Many people can't answer questions of this type accurately so they don't answer them at all. Consider giving them a list of options or a range of answers to choose from – that way a far greater number of people will answer the question and we can work out answers within a range. The information you get back won't be so precise BUT it will be a lot more accurate.
7. **"Keep it simple"** Don't over complicate issues in a PR survey – getting lots of detail on one particular aspect of a subject might run the risk of drilling down into such minutia that the information is hard to present concisely and difficult for journalists (or their readers) to comprehend. It might be better to consider a range of issues to broaden the appeal of the results.
8. **"Understanding what people really think"** Open questions have the advantage of allowing respondents the freedom to say exactly what they like. Which is good if you are looking for a wide range of different ideas and opinions BUT it's not necessarily helpful if you are looking to make a clear cut statement for PR purposes. Ask a question in a totally open way and, very often, 100 people will give 100 different answers. OK that's an exaggeration, but in all probability, it's unlikely that more than 10% of people will give exactly the same answer – so you won't end up with any headline grabbing statements such as of *"8 out of 10 cats said their owners preferred it..."* Use open questions cautiously and if you want statistics use prompts or pre coded questions.

9. **“Make the most of the research opportunity”** While the main aim of a PR survey is to generate headlines, the same survey can also provide additional insight into the client’s target audience. The ICT industry is notorious for inventing acronyms, technical terms or ways of describing concepts and sometimes these can cause more confusion than interest. If you are planning to launch a marketing / PR campaign it makes sense to ensure that the target audience actually understands your language and that your communications messages are hitting the right buttons. If you are undertaking a PR survey amongst the target audience anyway, make the most of the opportunity to test your intended messages to make sure people are going to understand/respond positively to them. You could reach the entire market with your marketing message – but if the market doesn’t understand or isn’t interested in what you’re talking about then.....

10. **“I only want to ask 5 questions”** Although it’s quite often possible to pay for a specific number of questions in consumer studies it’s far more difficult in B2B work and frequently it costs as much to ask 20 questions as it does 5. The cost is in getting through to people and persuading them complete the interview. So, it makes sense, wherever possible, to combine PR studies with broader marketing initiatives. You might only want to ask 5 questions for the Press campaign you are planning but, the client might want to ask other questions or alternatively you could use the opportunity to check up on media consumption habits, message resonance etc. We can provide costs for different options within 24 hours so please don’t be afraid to ask.

Dos & Don'ts

from a Research Perspective

Do...

- ❖ Involve us early
- ❖ Define objectives (Headlines required)
- ❖ Be clear about outputs required
- ❖ Identify groups required for analysis
- ❖ Establish links to marketing plans
- ❖ Seek long term value

Don't...

- ❖ Write the questionnaires
- ❖ Focus on "C" levels
- ❖ Get stuck on the PR perspective
- ❖ Promise the unattainable
- ❖ Commit to unrealistic deadlines
- ❖ Use 1,000 interviews as a default
- ❖ Do what you've always done