

Web use and the case against flying from Manhattan to Newark

Our meeting in downtown Manhattan ended on time and my business partner suggested that we fly by plane to Newark. “Why would anyone use a plane for such a short distance?” I asked. And his response was naively honest: “Because flying is one form of transportation!”

This seems to be today’s reality when in our market research practice everything is promoted as web-ready: because the web is one form of collecting data! We know that in the US time spent on the internet is around 12 hours per week (Forrester Research) and messaging, commenting, blogging, sharing and “liking” fill up 22 percent of all time spent online (Nielsen). There is simply no way that the professional market research community can ignore this reality – and it certainly does not! Market Research needs to be at the forefront of finding creative ways of using and developing the web to enhance insight and provide a better understanding of the market place.

Market Research vendors already use their ingenuity to develop products that make use of consumer web activity. In *The Willow Group* for example we are very successful with *One-on-One Virtual Interviews* because respondents will talk more freely on the internet about sensitive personal subjects than they would in group discussions; such interviews conducted through virtual meeting rooms provide seamless video conferencing, shared desktop and presentation capabilities. Sessions can be recorded for archiving or presentation purposes and provided in all popular video and audio formats for editing. (Technologies used: Webex, Adobe Connect, ooVoo).

At *The Willow Group* we offer this approach for the appropriate business situation, but we firmly believe that live interviews, e.g. live focus groups and one-on-one interviews, continue to be the gold standard; one simply can’t replace the firsthand experience of the respondent’s reactions and interactions *seen from behind the one-way mirror!* And when spontaneity is required - that immediate respondent reaction - online is just not the most effective approach.

Yes, conducting *Virtual Focus Groups* is a fantastic way to perform focus groups with the support of the web technology: timed online meetings enable a group of up to 20 people to connect, view audio visual materials, discuss materials, and engage in online polls. Like with *One-on-One Virtual Interviews*, sessions can be recorded for archiving or presentation purposes and provided in all popular video and audio formats for editing. Technologies also include the ability for whiteboard collaboration, file sharing, and one-to-one side conversations through chat (Technologies used: Webex, Adobe Connect, ooVoo). Again, *Virtual Focus Groups* are excellent for specific business situations: e.g. to allow for geographical diversity with no market limitations; they also allow bringing respondents together when we want the respondent to spend ‘more’ time to study documents. Of course, with *Virtual Focus Groups* one again loses

the firsthand experience; one *undisputable* advantage is that the web approach is perfect for the Payers and/or KOLs who are difficult to reach or to assemble in one place.

In addition to the pros and cons of web usage, there are limitations that need to be discussed: the frenzy around the web lets us easily forget them. And with regard to its limitations, the medium isn't so different from other media: e.g. telephone research *seems to* continue to assume that the respondent on the other end of the line is indeed the person that she/he claims to be.

The limitations of research via the web are obvious: let's take Facebook, Twitter and the like. Research subjects are limited to those who are motivated to share online. And how about those who Twitter for some time and then decide to stop their participation? While Market Research reports attitudes and behavior, describes certain persona derived from Facebook, Twitter and the like, we report that data as internet persona. There is nothing wrong with this outcome, as long as it is clear to the recipient of the information that the analysis is limited to the clicker. And with the support of the appropriate secondary data an extrapolation to the broader market is a perfect way to supplement forecasting and segmentation. However, a particular limit is that if *Market Research* uses the internet persona to enhance or supplement the forecasting or segmentation models, more light will shine on the market but without 100% illumination.

A straightforward *example* for a closed Twitter communication is what we call a *Rep Zeitgeist*: it determines the mindset and spirit of sales reps while also offering a closed Twitter communication tool to help sales reps communicate successful tactics and objection handling. While reps pose questions to their peers, present successful objection handlers, and generally share knowledge to help the team succeed, our researchers are able to analyze keywords and topic trends to determine the *Rep Zeitgeist* of your sales team (Technology used: Yammer)

Without a doubt, the web is a powerful medium in our MR portfolio, but the speed and accessibility of the web are not miracles: the web is just another medium. If the business situation in question merits the use the web – great! Just like you wouldn't use the plane to fly from Manhattan to Newark airport you would not use the web in all circumstances. The right approach must be method and medium follow business needs and not the other way around. And there is no way around it, even if you get a free upgrade from economy to business class!