



action line

occasional news and notes from action marketing research

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Web Site Stickiness

As a unique combination of a new distribution and communication channel, the Internet requires a new set of standards for evaluation. Conceptually, the "stickiness" of a web site seems to be a good standard. But what, specifically, does this mean?

Research presented in Admap gives us some answers (July/August 2000). The authors collected evaluations of several web sites in several European countries. One important finding is that the average time spent at sites is unrelated to other measures of satisfaction, intent to return, intent to buy, comparison to other sites, etc. The message is clear that entrapping someone in your site for a long time does not mean they feel bonded to it!

For various reasons, the authors conclude that a composite based on these four measures will serve as a versatile and meaningful index of web stickiness:

- Overall site evaluation
- Likelihood of revisiting
- Likelihood of referring site to others
- Comparison of site to others

Furthermore, this stickiness index correlates strongly with another series of performance attributes (see the original article). A web host would do well to assure that the site is meeting users' needs on all of these in order to maximize that site's stickiness.

Labor Shortages

The trade press has been full of stories about the shortage of skilled marketing researchers, particularly those with quantitative skills. Much of the blame is attributed to the disappearance of training programs on both the corporate and

supplier sides. Corporate research staffs often are leaner than they were 15-20 years ago, and everyone is more reluctant to train entry-level people who may soon depart for greener pastures. Statistics show that salaries for experienced researchers are increasing nicely—but that does little to bring younger people into the pipeline.

We don't have all the answers but do have one firm opinion: that undergraduate courses in marketing research are a major disincentive for entering the field. A good teacher can make a lot of difference, but it is hard to find a textbook that is not focused on statistical methods. A knowledge of statistics is one of many useful skills, but hardly the only one. Worse yet are the instructors' manuals and test banks—inevitably written by graduate students—that dwell on trivial lists and statements unique to that book. Is it critically important to be able to define "alerting the field?"

Research should be a fascinating enterprise and inherently interesting to those who like to think, evaluate sometimes-ambiguous data, and ultimately solve business problems. Yet none of that is native to marketing research textbooks, and it is only the occasional gifted teacher who can get "outside the box" and get students' minds engaged in thinking. By all means, prospective researchers must have a grasp of fundamental (social science) methodology and some set of practical skills (statistics, interviewing, writing). Yet our academic colleagues persist in scaring off young people by an obsession with narrow methods at the expense of learning how to think and analyze.



Latest Thinking on Internet Research

Like the technology itself, our thinking about Internet-based research continues to evolve. Lately we have had very good success with an "e-panel" supplier. Like traditional panel firms, they maintain a pool of consumers who are willing to participate in studies. For a given study, a cross-section of panelists is invited by e-mail to click on a link to a URL.

We always have and always will critically evaluate the options for data collection for a given project. However, we have come to believe that the merits of e-panels outweigh their shortcomings for many kinds of studies.

For comparative tests involving a modest amount of visual stimulus material, an e-panel may be the best choice. What we would replace, more often than not, are mall intercept methods. If we recommend this type of Internet research to you, we will gladly justify its choice versus other alternatives.

Test Design Terminology

Experimental research uses a lot of technical language. Some of it comes out of the scientific literature; some of it is jargon that we practitioners made up to make ourselves look more scientific. Here are some common terms.

When you wish to infer that a particular stimulus (e.g. a new positioning statement) causes a particular response (e.g. purchase interest), you need to use one or the other of these two designs.

Pre-Post Design. The response variable (e.g. purchase interest) is measured both before and after exposure to the stimulus among the same group of subjects.

or

Control Group Design. The response of a group exposed to the stimulus is compared to the response of an identical group that is not exposed. The latter is called the control group.

If your test includes several discrete stimuli you need to test, you have several options.

Monadic Test. Several different products, concepts, ads, or other stimuli are to be tested, but a given subject (respondent) is exposed to only one of them. Monadic designs tend to be more expensive because you need a separate sample for each concept.

Sequential Monadic Test. Following the pattern of Hollywood marriages, respondents may deal with only one stimulus (concept, product, ad) at a time, but may be exposed to several over time. This design makes more economical use of test subjects.

Comparison Test. The design calls for respondents to compare two or more stimuli at once. This is pretty obvious, but stands in contrast to monadic designs.

There are many variations on these themes, and even more ways to foul up a test. If you do not have formal training in experimental design, always consult another researcher or statistician who does.

Segmentation Research

While segmentation studies are inherently interesting and potentially valuable, we have seen a couple of examples lately that prove that spending lots of money on them is no guarantee of their value. It is not hard to find suppliers who gladly sell their off-the-shelf models with a stock set of questions on every imaginable topic. And we can't think of a better recipe for finding vague, unactionable segments.

You must think through the dimensions of consumer attitudes and behavior that will matter in your marketing in advance, and design a customized questionnaire accordingly. Doing so assures you better, less-costly and more satisfying results.