



KNOWLEDGE BITES- BROUGHT TO YOU BY D&M RESEARCH

Welcome to Knowledge Bites, periodic bite sized pieces of knowledge exchange, designed to be consumed immediately without ruining your appetite for the rest of the day.

ONLINE GROUPS: WHAT ARE THEY?



ENTRÉE

Continuing to build our reputation as an innovative, result-oriented research company, D&M has introduced a new, qualitative technique, on-line focus groups. This service extends our qualitative capabilities for our clients.

We've found on-line groups are best used tactically to meet specific needs rather than as a direct substitute for all traditional face-to-face groups.

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What are on-line groups?

Exactly what they sound like: focus groups run on a purpose-built website.

How do online groups work?

There are two types of on-line groups, 'real time' (synchronic) and 'bulletin board' (asynchronic).





- In 'real time' groups, all the respondents and the moderator are on-line simultaneously, the discussion taking about 90 minutes. This approach is quick, but it favours those with good computer skills.
- 'Bulletin board' groups are like blogs. They are run over a longer period of time, usually three days, so respondents can participate when it is convenient for them. We ask them to log on a minimum number of times over the survey period. This approach takes longer, but it is possible to run several groups simultaneously.

We have been using the bulletin-board style for our clients in preference to the 'real time' method. We have found that allows respondents to think about the topic and give us considered replies as there are no time pressures on them.

What advantages do on-line groups have over traditional focus groups?

We've found that on-line groups have several specific advantages over traditional focus groups in certain instances:

- Respondents who are geographically widely dispersed can participate in the same on-line group.
- The groups can be larger, as everyone has ample time to have their say. We have been using groups of 12 -16 respondents successfully.
- We can reach very specific or low-incidence target segments.
- It is easier to reach time-poor respondents, e.g. IT managers, business people, as they can log into the group at any time which suits them.
- In some situations, on-line groups can be turned round more quickly than traditional groups.
- On-line groups provide anonymity when discussing sensitive topics.
- Sometimes (but not always) it can cost less to use on-line rather than face-to-face groups, depending on the recruitment method we need to use.
- Transcripts of the groups are available immediately, saving reporting time.



What are the drawbacks of online groups?

There is no visual or physical contact with the respondents:

- The moderator has no visual cues as to respondents' feelings, although we have found that they can express themselves volubly using punctuation and emoticons as well as language.
- You can show concepts, ads., pack shots and videos on line, but not physical products. Some US companies have, however, overcome this problem by delivering product samples to respondents to try and then discussing their reactions online.
- The use of projective techniques is limited. You can use verbal techniques (e.g. sentence completion) but not non-verbal exercises (e.g. collages).

So when is it appropriate to use on-line groups?

We've found on-line groups work best in specific situations:

- When you want broad geographical coverage, saving time and money.
- When you have hard-to-reach or time-poor respondents.
- For sensitive topics, as the respondents remain anonymous.
- To save time (sometimes).
- To save money (sometimes)
- When you do not need to show respondents a physical product.
- When you do not need to use projective techniques extensively.

What kinds of qualitative projects have D&M conducted online?

The projects we've conducted using online groups vary considerably. For example:

Social issues:

We explored attitudes towards solving the problem of childhood obesity within the very specific target group whose children are more likely to be overweight: mothers of primary school children in below-average income Western Sydney households. We reported the findings in our last edition of Knowledge Bites: please contact us if you would like a copy.



Testing the appeal of a new, web-based service.

We tested the concept of a financial services website, then asked respondents to 'test drive' the site and give us their reactions. This project included consumers throughout Australia.

Looking at the appeal of magazine covers.

We looked at men's attitudes towards buying magazines and showed them some recent covers to comment on in detail. This was also a national project.

SECOND HELPINGS!

If you would like to see a demonstration of an on-line group, or discuss traditional or on-line groups with us, please contact Catherine Huntington on 9565 2655 or catherine@dandmresearch.com.au.

Want to know more about Knowledge Bites? We are happy to provide more details on any of the information in our reports. To get dessert please forward your requests to Trudie at trudie@dandmresearch.com.au or call us on 9565 2655.

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