



## **Online market research**

*How has the internet revolution impacted on traditional research techniques?*

### **Lindridge:**

Peter, how is the Internet changing the marketing research industry in how we get data?

### **Jackson:**

The Internet's moving into every crack and gap in research, whether it's qualitative or quantitative. Some of the advantages that we're getting from it are that it's very, very quick, it's instant response. It's less expensive than a lot of conventional research, we can dip in and out quickly, and we can get to some very hard to reach groups.

### **Lindridge:**

What are the drawbacks?

### **Jackson:**

Some of the possible drawbacks of online research are that we're not face-to-face quite self-evidently with the respondent. So we can't look at them, we can't metaphorically touch them and see how they react to things. It's possibly harder to read their minds, we can't see their body language. We don't really know who they are, they're numbers effectively on the end of a computer and historically they would have been on the end of a telephone line. But if they're on the end of a computer, are we sure that they're the real people and that they're saying the real things. So there are a whole host of drawbacks Andrew around the idea that we don't know who they are. Are they, for instance, a panel of people who are addicted to market research, they just get a kick out of market research, of getting the incentive that goes with that market research. Who are they? Are they on a panel, are they on multiple panels? At the moment the research business is not sufficiently integrated or together to know whether they should cooperate to find out whether Mr A or Mrs B is on this panel, that panel or the other panel. So are we asking the right people the right questions? Are the people out there the people we think that are out there?

### **Lindridge:**

If I was a manager, what advice would you give me about what questions I should be asking, if I'm buying in internet data?

**Jackson:**

Funnily enough, on the way up here, I spoke to one of the big online quantitative companies who also do some qualitative research online, and asked them how they provide for quality control. So I'd first of all say to your students, who are going to go into situations where they buy market research, that will inevitably be online because of the benefits of speed, the benefits of financial viability of economy, what have you got to do to actually check that the research is bona fide, and I wasn't entirely, shall we say, satisfied with some of the answers that I got. But what they would say is that they try very hard to vet the people who are on their online panels, and some of these panels are bought in by the online companies, they're not even using their own panels. These are massive panels that have been built up over time, by massive companies who are not essentially market research companies, who may be less bothered or less concerned about quality than the market research historically would have been. So if I'm buying this kind of research, I would say my first stop is to find a company where I trust the brand, so a very well known, traditional market research company that happens to have a division that's online, would be my first port of call. I've got to know that this is a good brand, that they're Market Research Society recognised, that they abide by the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, much as I would any kind of market research, qualitative or quantitative, traditional or modern. Second, I would ask them to show me how they actually screen their respondents. So if I screen respondents to be users of a particular brand of milk, how do they know that these people are users of that particular brand of milk? I've got to be sure that they use a kind of dual-screening process so that they know something about that respondent before we contact them, they know something about that respondent as a result of the contact, and that they send out the email questionnaire and that questionnaire screens people. So the respondent doesn't really know, a lot of the time, what they're getting themselves into, and although they may be seeking a Boots voucher, or a £5 cheque, or whatever it is, to take part in the survey, we should be as sure as possible that they are what they say they are and they're not just doing it for the money. But the big fear I have is a user, and we're a primarily a qualitative research company, as you know, we buy a lot of quantitative research, it's been a very, very good source of information for us and for our clients, and our clients like us to buy it because we already, in a sense, poacher turned gamekeeper. We know what some of the tricks of the trade are of people saying they are what they're not.