

Why B-to-B Research is Like Herding Cats

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For marketers and researchers, B-to-B research can seem like herding cats.

Survey respondents want to go their own way. They have their own agenda and don't seem to really care about yours—or your research.

Fortunately, that world is changing.

Today's technology is helping marketers deliver surveys, questions and stimulus virtually anywhere, making it easier and more convenient for respondents to participate in B-to-B research whenever and wherever they want.

Why is this new technology important? Because convenience leads to higher research participation and lower costs, but those aren't the only benefits. It's equally important to deliver stimulus and collect information where the respondent lives or works, which gives the researcher contextual data that is far more informative than out-of-context data.

Key Takeaways

- Today's digital technology makes it easier than ever for B-to-B industry professionals to participate in surveys and focus groups.
- Using techniques such as the bulletin board platform and a live-streaming webcam helps respondents manage their time and be more engaged in the interview.
- "Decision-makers often have few opportunities to interact with peers, to learn, connect and share. So when given the chance to interact with people who understand their language and their problems, more of these leaders engage in peer research."

In-context data offers valuable insight into behaviors, questions, issues and products. In-context research also is more engaging for participants, and they'll be more likely to provide complete answers, finish the study and be willing to participate in more research.

Today's qualitative research specialists have noted significant increases in participation rates for B-to-B studies using two online interviewing techniques:

1. The threaded bulletin board platform: This platform allows respondents to participate in a group discussion at any time that is convenient for them. An adaptation of online forum technology, in which a person posts a question or comment and others can reply at their leisure, gives a moderator the opportunity to ask questions so that participants can respond to him or her and to one another. They don't have to travel to a focus group facility or make an appointment—they can participate when and where they want on the device that they want.

Likewise, our experience shows that a discussion that's run as a peer group inspires interest and engagement. Decision-makers often have few opportunities to interact with peers, to learn, connect and share. So when given the chance to interact with people who understand their language and their problems, more of these leaders engage in peer research.

Another "trick" to increase engagement and participation is to promise participants, especially high-level leaders, a report of the findings upon successful completion of the project.

2. The live video streaming interview: This type of interview can be completed from a computer webcam or a smartphone. All that's needed is a strong Internet connection to support the streaming video. The technology and setup are easy and often just as effective as face-to-face interviews. They are also much more convenient for the respondent, the researcher and the viewing clients.

Virtually all smartphones and computers are now sold with cameras capable of streaming video. A caveat here is that we've found Internet streaming to be less effective for focus groups than for individual interviews. The on-screen, *Brady Bunch* visual

showing all participants feels clunky to the respondents and is less natural for the moderators, as well. On the other hand, Web streaming is quickly becoming a preferred method for individual interviews because of its convenience and effectiveness for both researcher and B-to-B respondents.

Like the bulletin board application, Web streaming is convenient because the respondent does not have to abandon his or her regular activities to participate. For busy executives, we recommend scheduling the interview as an appointment on their calendar. The respondent can participate in the interview without leaving his or her office chair, and technical pre-checks can be scheduled with an assistant or an IT manager to be sure that the equipment is ready at the appointed time. It's very easy and convenient for the respondent, they get an honorarium, and they also can receive a summary report of the findings.

Technology is quickly changing how B-to-B research is conducted. These research technologies are more convenient for respondents, provide in-context insights for researchers and can be more engaging, leading to deeper insights and greater bottom line success.

And, certainly, it will be easier than herding cats.

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