



Top 10 B2B Research Mistakes

We work with a lot of clients who are in the B2B space—or who are USUALLY in the B2B space and need to do some research. Often these projects are done infrequently for a company (and sometimes it is their first foray into research). Because many of these clients do not typically have an established market research function, the project is overseen internally by someone who is not an expert at conducting research and often does not have enough room on their plate to manage another project – no matter how important it may be.

All of this means that the partner you choose to conduct the research is the most important thing you need to decide to make sure you have a successful project. Of course, you will seek out a partner that is known for his expertise in designing and executing research. But it's equally as important to find an agency that has senior team members who have been on your side of the business —strategic partners who will advocate for you, as if they are an employee of your company, and will be on your side, looking out for your best interest throughout the project.

However, finding the best agency fit is only half the battle. Even then, there are things that clients can do to increase their chances for success when managing a research project. Here are the top ten mistakes we frequently see clients making that sabotage the effectiveness of research.

Mistake #1: Only talking to your current customers

While sometimes you need to research your existing customers only (for example, if you are trying to understand satisfaction), most of the time there are huge benefits in researching the broader market instead. By widening your research scope, you will understand current

perceptions in the market, your competitive position, and market needs – all critical insights you could not gain by focusing on your customers alone.

Mistake #2: Being too specific

It is tempting to define every word, cover every base, and assess every feasible option. This typically leads to wordy questions, wordy responses, long lists, and category lingo. All these things negatively impact data quality and response rates. This is where having a good research partner becomes imperative – providing objective, non-biased feedback, they will ensure your research tools will achieve your business goals while maintaining the integrity of responses.

Mistake #3: Not having sufficient sample

B2B sample is expensive. Really expensive. So, it is tempting to go with small sample sizes to keep research costs down. This is an area that requires some precision — figuring out the optimal sample size — small enough to keep costs as low as possible, and big enough to answer all the business questions in a statistically reliable way, which is one of the keys to a successful outcome.

Mistake #4: Having inferior quality sample

Even worse than not having enough sample, is having bad quality sample. Getting the right people to respond to the survey for your market is critical. Ensuring that the sample is who they say they are, is part of an established, professional research panel that is managed responsibly, and that the screening questions lead you to the right respondents who will pay attention to the questions and answer honestly, are all essential and not always easily achievable.

Mistake #5: Getting hung up on details

Should it be “GB” or “gb”? Should it be 1-2, 3-4, etc. or should we precisely say, “1 to less than 3”, “3 to less than 4”? We cannot end a question in a preposition, right? Let us add the words “responsible decision maker” everywhere throughout the survey to be sure the respondent knows exactly what we mean. Let us spell out International Business Machines instead of saying IBM. These types of “edits” are common in B2B surveys and can wreak co. on the timing, not to mention making the research instrument cumbersome and tedious for the respondent.

Mistake #6: Expecting precision

Conducting a survey is different from reading scanner data from a grocery store! Survey responses are human and are based on perceptions. Respondents may have different

impressions at different moments, they may confuse brand names or make assumptions. Guess what — that is the reality of the market! It may not match your market share numbers, but perceptions are reality, and you should look at them with appreciation, curiosity (why do they think that?) and keep them in perspective.

Mistake #7: Not having a point person

When there is not an internal research expert, it is tempting to let all members of the team provide inputs, offer wording suggestions, and add new areas. This can lead to conflicting inputs and shifting priorities. To ensure the research study does not stray from its original learning objectives, we see greater success when someone is “on point” to consolidate inputs, keep the study objectives as the focus, and ensure that internal edits and feedback are relevant and important to the business.

Mistake #8: Trying to boil the ocean

One research study cannot answer every question you have about the industry. It is important to keep focused on the specific learning objectives identified for the research study. Of course, every client wants to get the most out of any research project, but non-essential areas need to be assessed carefully to be sure they are not negatively impacting the key objectives of the project. Resist the temptation to tack-on additional questions that are “nice to know” and add length to the survey time.

Mistake #9: Not leveraging the expertise of your research partner

Excellent partners demonstrate strength in both the science and the art of research – being experts not only in the math, but also in the softer, human side of survey design. Writing questions that are easily understood, are unbiased and not leading, are clear and succinct is all part of their training and experience. RELY ON YOUR PARTNERS. And if this makes you uncomfortable, then maybe it is time to get a new research agency.

Mistake #10: Job titles do not cut it any more

There was a time when recruiting respondents based on job titles made a lot of sense. There was consistency in titles across industries, and you could rely on a set of job responsibilities associated with specific titles. That is out the window – there are unusual job titles (Growth Hacker), unclear titles (Foresight Officer), titles that could mean any number of different sets of responsibilities (Business Director), and even title rejecters. Focus on the specific area of responsibility, on the level of decision making, and any other pertinent criteria; and ask job title as a firmographic for profiling – but do not rely on it to get the right respondents.

