

Useless Questions, Useless Answers

by: Bob Kaden (author of Guerrilla Marketing Research)

Guerrilla's investing in customer or prospect focus groups or surveys don't have money to waste. Therefore, making sure you are asking the right questions is critical.

Without clear research questions, it's impossible to determine whether the answers you get will be meaningful. Without clear questions, you will get answers that are likely to suggest actions you are unwilling or unable to take.

Below is a conversation between the marketing director of a company that sells wallpaper and a researcher:

Company Marketing Director: Something must be wrong with my catalog because a lot of people who look through it don't buy.

Researcher: What people?

CMD: A lot of people request a catalog from the company and then don't buy when it's mailed it to them.

Researcher: What makes you think it has anything to do with your catalog?

CMD: Well, they asked for one, didn't they? Why would they ask for one if they weren't interested in buying?

Researcher: Maybe they were just shopping around and still might buy in the future? Maybe they love the catalog. Maybe the reasons they didn't buy have more to do with things other than the catalog.

CMD: What do you suggest?

Researcher: I would suggest studying why people don't buy and the role of the catalog in the buying process.

If the marketing director's initial research question ("**Something must be wrong with my catalog because a lot of people who look it don't buy**") was accepted on face value, the research would be very narrow in its scope. Further, the results might suggest the need for a great many expensive changes to the catalog that if followed might make the catalog better but still not influence the number of people who buy from it.

By studying the larger question (**What is the role of the catalog in the buying process?**), a much greater opportunity exists for learning the problems of converting catalog requestors to buyers and whether changes to the catalog would be a major or minor influence to this conversion.

It's easy for research to provide answers to questions. It is hard to determine whether the questions are worth answering in the first place. When creating questions for research, it is usually prudent to get input from others. Follow these guidelines:

1. Write down all the questions that you have for the research.
2. Rewrite the same questions but use different wording. If rewriting gives you a different slant on them, create a new question list.
3. Read each question one at a time to an associate. Pose this question to your associate, "*What will be learned if we get answers to this question?*"

4. If you find that your associate's response doesn't reinforce what you hope to learn from the question, your question is unclear. Reword it again.
5. Have the associate take your questions and conduct the same exercise with yet a third associate. Again, reword as necessary.

You will be amazed at how this simple process will make your questions more succinct and expressive of what you want to learn. And, as a result, your research will become even more targeted and action oriented.

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Guerrilla Marketing Research is available in hard copy @ \$15 and e-copy @\$10