

Making B2B Online Surveys Work Effectively

You are conducting an online market research survey for a B2B client. The survey questions are all agreed, the sample size and market segmentation profile are confirmed and you are ready to go. Then you hit a roadblock. The client wants a mix of both their existing customers and their non customers in the survey sample, which is reasonable enough. The benefits of surveying non customers are obvious. But how do you find them?

From my 20 plus years of experience with B2B market research, I have often observed that while the client would have some sort of database of their existing customers, they have almost no data on their non customers. Save for an occasional list of “potential contacts” that some of their sales team may have. But these contacts may not fit the market segment profile for the research, so back to square one.

How do we solve this problem?

The first option could be to employ a survey panel or data base provider. However these providers tend to focus on a range of general public consumers, so the B2C space. Which is fine if you are surveying the general public, but not much help when you are trying to find several hundred B2B customers of a certain segment description. Another issues is that the survey incidence rate for B2B surveys is typically so low that most panel providers will not even quote for this type of work. Even for those who do, this can still be a problematic exercise in terms of sampling control. Which is why one has to be careful when using survey panels in B2B research.

Which brings me to the second option, *improvisation*. By reversing the traditional sales rule that 80% of the business comes from 20% of the customers, we then revisit the client's data base again and look for those customers who are known to be “underspending” with the client. So they would come from the 80% of customers who only provide 20% of the client's sales. Now some profiling will have to happen here as some of these smaller customers will never spend a lot with the client, as they are simply not large enough. But among the 80% of the low spenders, there will always enough medium to large businesses that can spend more with our client, but have chosen not to.

Once we have done this, it becomes a straightforward exercise to break the overall sample down into the higher spending customers and the

lower spending (for now) customers. So a typical B2b survey sample of around 600 buyers can be broken down into: 300 actual high spenders and 300 potential high spenders. Our sampling problem is now solved.

Now you might ask: What about those specialist B2B clients who have much smaller niche markets? As these naturally generate a smaller survey sample. The answer here is to focus more on the qualitative research approach. Where a sample of 20 - 30 in depth interviews will represent the target market quite effectively. Thus providing all the marketing insights that a client will need. We can also include a small number of structured questions within each depth interview if we need to, so as to generate some quantitative data if required.