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THE UPA VOICE

The Mystery of Recruiting

by Lauren Lundgren and Tina Osinski

Lauren Lundgren is the founder of **Infoco, Inc.**, the first virtual nationwide recruiting service, and Tina Osinski is Project and Marketing Director for **Infoco, Inc.** Together they have 38 years experience in market research. You can find out more about Infoco, Inc. at www.infocousa.com.

We love a good detective novel, so it is no surprise that the sometimes mysterious nature in which market research operates gives us a similar kick. As the great Sherlock Holmes poses the endless questions for his unfortunate sidekick, Watson, it behooves us to do the same in our line of work: What is the ultimate goal of the ubiquitously mysterious end-client? Who will benefit from this study? Who ultimately has the means, the motive and the opportunity to participate?

That Elusive Sponsor

Clearly the sponsor most often needs to remain anonymous to the potential respondents; however it is *extremely* beneficial for the recruiting agencies to have a clear objective stated up front so that they can understand the goals and the nature of the study. To populate a study well, the recruiter must be able to determine that the respondent is thoroughly qualified to give the sort of feedback the study requires, and, there is no better insurance for that than a clear understanding on the recruiters' end of the project's objectives.

To ascertain respondent qualifications, recruiters rely on the screening document. This usually comes from a study's sponsor or moderator. The best screeners cover all the qualifying points in as succinct and conversational way as is possible. They ask open-ended questions, so potential respondents are unable to second-guess the right answers. They give clear directives on terminations and segmentations in as streamlined a format as possible to ensure that the exact target audience is recruited. In short, the ideal screeners leave no "shades of grey"; respondents are either qualified or not. When one combines a well-crafted screener with a clear outline of the objective, the recruitment firm is then armed and ready to find the best-suited respondents for the study as efficiently as possible.

Features and Benefits

Yes, it's a hackneyed sales term; however, having now identified the desired target, it is critical to show potential respondents a demonstrable benefit to them. They may benefit monetarily if the incentive is high enough to be worth their time, but if one recruits someone whose primary interest is money, his input is likely to be less valuable than that of someone who is genuinely interested in the topic at hand; it guarantees a lively and cogent discussion of salient points. In order to find such people, the recruiter must be able to tell potential respondents that they will be trying out a product or web site that relates to them in a significant way.

The standard introduction that goes something like, "We'd like to include your opinions in a very interesting study about technology products," does not quite meet that criterion. One needs to say something along the lines of, "We're conducting a usability study for a web site used for researching business entities." Anyone who

needs to know about corporate demographics to do his job will be immediately interested in learning about such a tool, and the common sponsor fear that he'll "know too much" about the study to give spontaneous responses pales in comparison to the quality and interest of such a respondent.

Getting Them There

Turning to the matter of who has the means, motive and opportunity to participate in a study, it is extremely important to consider *timing*. Not only does the recruiter need adequate time to contact and recruit qualified people, (usually a minimum of two weeks) sponsors should be aware of respondents' availability. It may be more convenient for sponsors to conduct their studies during their workday, but how easy is it for professionals to leave their jobs mid-day to participate in something only marginally related to their work? It is far better to schedule times before work, over lunch, and immediately after work, assuming the usability site is close to major industrial areas. Most especially, if sponsors' usability labs are out in the boonies, there is no way people will be able to set aside during business hours the amount of time it takes to get to and from the lab, on top of the ninety minutes to two hours usually required for a complete usability. These logistics need to be considered.

Even when studies are scheduled appropriately, sponsors need to be aware that emergencies arise, and even the most committed respondent may have to cancel at the last minute. To cover that contingency, it is advisable when doing individual in-depth interviews to plan for more time slots than are needed and/or to have "floaters" scheduled. Floaters are people who are recruited to come in and wait for two to three hours to fill in if a scheduled respondent fails to show up. They should be paid proportionately to the amount of time they're being asked to devote to assuring a fully populated study.

Money Talks

It is worthwhile to mention that money matters, despite the perspective that the most desirable respondents attend from enthusiasm. A reasonable incentive demonstrates respect for the respondent, because it acknowledges the value of his expertise and time, so again in the interest of garnering truly useful information, study sponsors are well advised to budget for reasonable incentives. The old adage "You get what you pay for" holds true in the mysterious world of market research, where inadequate incentives equal inadequate show rates and respondent participation. It is far worth it to budget the extra amount per respondent to ensure your desired number of completes. Sponsors should be able to rely on their contracted recruitment firm to advise them on the going incentive rates in the individual markets.

Armed with a clear and complete understanding of a study's objectives, a targeted screener, an appropriate schedule, and reasonable incentives, a good recruiter will be able to hunt down and schedule *exactly* the people sponsors desire to solve the mystery of the marketplace. And isn't that one of the most compelling unsolved mysteries of all?

[Contact the Voice](#)

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