

The Dozen Dos...

RECRUITING TIPS from Our Colleagues in the Trenches

BY JUDY LANGER

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Collaborate upfront. During the research design phase, get the facility project manager's advice on recruiting, incentives, screeners, scheduling and other factors in his or her market.

It does not matter how good a moderator you are if you have the wrong people in your research or, maybe worse, if no one shows up. Qualitative research consultants are usually responsible for overseeing the fieldwork to recruit respondents, yet many of us know relatively little about the process. As a result, we may unwittingly write screeners and set up the research in a way that actually discourages good recruitment and/or increases the costs.

The QRCA Field Committee turned to the experts — fieldwork service recruiters — for their views on what qualitative consultants and end clients do that either encourages or discourages respondent cooperation. We did what we do best, conducting qualitative research (ten focus groups) with fieldwork service recruiters in five markets.

While more people are aware of qualitative research (and focus groups, in particular) than in the past, it is more difficult to recruit today because of factors such as highly pressured lifestyles, tougher policies at many companies against employee participation, difficulty reaching cell phones and respondents' distracted attention. The recession makes the lure of incentives greater, but it can also attract the kinds of people we do not want, ones who try (and often lie) to get into a lot of studies just for the money.

Emerging from our study, here are the top “Dozen Dos” for better recruiting quality. If some of these tips sound obvious, they are on the list because recruiters say many qualitative consultants and clients still disregard them. If you must ignore a tip, keep in mind that it will probably raise the costs of the study.



✓ **Do #1**

Collaborate upfront. During the research design phase, get the facility project manager's advice on recruiting, incentives, screeners, scheduling and other factors in his or her market.

✓ **Do #6**

Keep screeners short (under 10 minutes). Ask only questions needed for recruitment and respondent selection. Doing so, you avoid the illusion that tallying "nice to know" answers are projectable.

✓ **Do #2**

Communicate with clients about the consequences of studies with very narrow specifications. If they really need to be so restrictive, the study will likely take more time and expense to recruit.

✓ **Do #7**

Outwit the gamers. Ask open-ended security and other key recruiting questions, so that cheaters/repeaters cannot figure out what you are looking for.

✓ **Do #3**

Communicate purpose. Talk with the facility manager about the types of respondents desired for the study.

✓ **Do #8**

Put terminate questions at the beginning of the screener. Don't waste the recruiters' and respondents' time. (Exceptions are sensitive questions like income.)

✓ **Do #4**

Write engaging screener introductions about the study topic or purpose, and avoid boring, generic explanations.

✓ **Do #9**

Avoid screener algorithms. Multi-question formulas that must be calculated complicate recruiting, annoy respondents, significantly increase costs and may not even work well.

✓ **Do #5**

Tell people on a client list who the study's sponsor is, if possible; these people may not be familiar with qualitative research and may be wary about how we got their name and contact information. (In most studies, sharing the name of the sponsor does not bias respondents' answers.)

✓ **Do #10**


Keep homework in perspective. Be realistic in how much time your respondent target has, and offer incentives in line with the demands.

✓ **Do #11**

Schedule groups to fit respondents' schedules, not for the convenience of the researcher or his or her clients. (For example, a recruit of mothers of young children for a 3 p.m. slot is likely to fail!)

✓ **Do #12**

Stay in touch with your project manager. When you respond quickly to his or her questions (approve respondents on hold, etc.), you reduce the risk of losing quality respondents.

The full report, "On the Qualitative Frontline: Fieldwork Recruiters' Views on Respondent Cooperation," is posted on the QRCA website. QRCA member companies who volunteered to conduct this study included Lohs Research Group, Opinions Unlimited, Meadowlands and New York Consumer Centers, Shugoll Research, Trotter Associates and Smith Research. Transcripts were contributed by Transcription Services Inc., Mark Hampton Transcripts, MCC Field and Transcription. 

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