A SHORT BUT *indispensable* GUIDE TO CUSTOMER RESEARCH

A reference manual for marketers and business owners

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"I shall try not to use statistics as a drunken man uses lamp-posts,
for support rather than for illumination."

—Andrew Lang, as recounted by Francis Yeats-Brown in *Lancer at Large*

Contents

Hello –

Before we get started, I wanted to share a shortcut to the most important things I've learned about market research over the years. If you read nothing else in this guide, please remember this:

- Customers are people, not walking dollar signs or equations to be optimized. Taking time to get their direct feedback is almost always worth it for business owners and marketers.

- Customer research can't solve everything, but it can point you in the right direction and track ongoing progress towards your goals.

- Not every customer is your target; effective research requires balancing being open to feedback with identifying and throwing out the input that isn't helpful for your business.

- The principles discussed in this guide apply to employees for the most part as well. Happier customers and employees make for healthier businesses in the long run.

Wishing you success in your research and business endeavors.

Kind regards,
Katerina

Why this guide exists

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"I think it's very important to have a feedback loop, where you're constantly thinking about what you've done and how you could be doing it better."
—Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX

I've worked with organizations ranging from early stage start-ups to Fortune 500 companies and one thing is consistent: all have more research questions to pursue than time and budget allow. This guide was written for any organization that wants to better understand its customers on a budget, for any business that wants to take a do-it-yourself approach to customer research, and for any marketer who wants to conduct an internal pilot before establishing a more formal program or improve their research skills in general.

You may be a successful online seller with thousands of transactions a year, looking to make your day-to-day operations a little bit easier. A small business running in bootstrap mode. A mid-sized business-to-business service provider with a large sales force and a small marketing team. Or a marketer within a large company looking to learn more about running your own study. Whatever led you to this guide, welcome.

There are many ways to use customer research to guide your business – segmenting your target audience, testing marketing messages, delving into consumer psychology, etc. The pages that follow will focus on a broadly applicable type of research (customer satisfaction study) that can be conducted by anyone who knows their way around a spreadsheet and has a mailing list of customers.

<u>A note for large organizations:</u>

The typical research process in a large organization involves outsourcing market research programs to specialized agencies. This has its pros and cons: it gives you the ability to focus on other priorities, it's a resource you can tap as needed, and it allows you to access expertise you may not have on staff. At the same time, working with agencies can be extremely expensive, and your agency partner is unlikely to know your organization's issues as well as you do. Agencies will typically claim to be able to do anything your heart desires to close a sale. When choosing agency partners, look for the ones that understand what the data means for your business, will put experienced people on your project, own their mistakes and limitations, and are relentlessly curious.

A note for small organizations:

If you are an owner-operator or work within a small organization, you likely have more priorities than you can handle in any given day. Customer research is important but not urgent. It may be hard to find the time, but even something as simple as getting into the habit of conducting regular one-on-one interviews with clients can yield very worthwhile results. If this is more your speed, skip to the section on writing a qualitative discussion guide.

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Customer research overview

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"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."
—Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*

(If you are familiar with market research or want to go straight to developing your study, skip ahead to Scoping Your Project.)

What is market research, anyway? Customer research, market research, and consumer insights are overlapping terms that are sometimes used interchangeably but mean slightly different things.

Market research is any study conducted about a business arena. It can be as broad as looking at the entire landscape of competitors or be as specific as testing an advertising message for a single product.

Consumer insights, as opposed to market research, is often described as delving deeper into the psychographics of your target audience - why they behave in a certain way or hold certain attitudes. It's a distinction without much of a difference; consumer insights as a discipline is a subset of market research. In some organizations, the focus of consumer insights leans more towards database analysis (such as transaction, website, or email list behavior) or other secondary research, such as syndicated studies.

Customer research is a type of market research conducted with your current, past, or prospective customers. It's another branch of the market research tree.

In a large organization, responsibility for research and insights typically belongs to the marketing team, though it may fall under sales or operations depending on the needs of the business. The organization may have a dedicated team of researchers, or it may outsource the research function to a specialized agency.

For small to mid-sized businesses, customer research may fall to someone to figure out whether or not they have a background in this type of work, an outside consultant may be engaged, or the business may not do this type of research at all.

The overall market research discipline has become increasingly sophisticated, with greater use of complex statistical models, machine learning algorithms, and database mining. Some businesses are abandoning traditional customer research methods for more automated options. But there's great value to be had in asking customers for feedback directly on a regular basis. The type of study outlined in the guide is one of the most accessible and cost-effective tools an organization can have in their marketing toolkit.

There are limitations to what research can do. If your business is being held back by operational issues, such as internal organizational dysfunction, supply chain issues, or poor product design, your resources will be better spent addressing those problems directly. Customer research also loses efficacy if you're only open to the answers you want to hear or try to cover too much ground in one project.

Customer research provides structure to decision-making and illuminates strategy.

What customer research can do is provide structure to your decision-making and illuminate strategy that will help you reach your business goals. In this guide we'll explore how.

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Scoping your project

"Begin with the end in mind."
—Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

You likely have too much to do in your day as it is; it can be hard to carve time away from ongoing operational demands of your business or pressing deadlines in your workload. Once you've decided to invest the time in customer research, it's important to create boundaries for your project that will keep it – and you – on track.

Scope your project carefully and avoid unnecessary extras to keep it on time and within budget.

In planning and executing a customer research project, there is often a temptation to add in more and more questions about things you're curious about – let's call it "Kitchen Sink Syndrome." Be clear about your goals for the study and the impact you want to drive for your business. This will help you identify what's important to keep in and what can be left out. A few examples of research goals include:

- Getting to know your target audience's behaviors (hobbies, media habits, etc.) so you can better target your advertising
- Getting to know their motivations, attitudes, or buying triggers so you can better target your messaging
- Tracking awareness of and sentiment towards your brand so you can gauge the success of sales and marketing initiatives
- Assessing customer satisfaction with your product, service, or company
- Testing marketing messages before investing in an expensive ad placement
- Testing product ideas before investing further in research and development

This guide will walk through how to develop a customer satisfaction research project in detail. Customer satisfaction studies are versatile, broadly useful, and easy to self-administer if you have a customer list and are comfortable working with numbers.

An ongoing customer satisfaction research program enables a business to track satisfaction levels, determine what creates a highly satisfied customer, and use that knowledge to drive overall business outcomes such as increased revenue, wider margins, greater visit frequency, or larger average sales.

Now that we've established a research goal (to measure customer satisfaction), we'll want to determine how to execute the project.

Let's imagine the business in question is a local jewelry brand (we'll call it LoCal Jewelry) that sells handcrafted items online, at events like craft fairs, and via retail stores. The company is owner-operated and has two full-time employees. Sales volume is roughly $1 million annually. Let's also stipulate that the company wants to grow faster, and greater revenue is the ultimate impact we are seeking to drive for the business.

We'll need to make a couple of important decisions about the research method. First, will we conduct primary or secondary research?

Primary research asks participants questions directly.

Secondary research uses information sourced from a third party.

Primary research asks participants questions directly. Examples include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and ethnography.

Secondary research is use of information produced by a third party. Examples include syndicated studies such as Nielsen ratings for media consumption, reports by research companies such as IDC and Gartner; and analysis of expert reports, news articles, or social media sentiment.

In our LoCal Jewelry example (and in most customer satisfaction research) our business owner wants to hear from customers directly, so she will choose to conduct a primary research study. Secondary research is less relevant in this situation, but can provide useful context (for example, overlaying an expert forecast on the jewelry market over customer satisfaction results).

The second important decision is whether the research will be quantitative or qualitative in nature.

Quantitative research yields numeric output.

Qualitative research yields text-based output.

Quantitative research provides numeric results for statistical analysis, typically through the administration of a survey. The survey can be conducted online, by phone, or in person. Qualitative research provides text-based results, such as transcripts or quotes, for a more subjective and abstract analysis and is typically conducted through interviews and focus groups (moderated group interviews).

Depending on the size, scope, and needs of your business, you may want to conduct your customer satisfaction study using a mix of methods.

If your budget and schedule allow, consider conducting a quantitative online survey followed by a small number of qualitative one-on-one interviews. This offers the best of both worlds – analyzable data and the ability to ask more in-depth questions. The is the approach our LoCal Jewelry example will follow.

Research method examples:

	Primary	Secondary
Qualitative	In-depth interviews Focus groups Ethnography	Expert reports
Quantitative	Surveys	Syndicated studies

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Sample planning: whom to invite and how

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"We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts."
—Jeff Bezos, CEO, Amazon

Figuring out whom to invite to participate in your study, how many participants to include, and how you will reach them are all part of creating a sample plan. Sample is another way of referring to the subset of your target population that will participate in your study.

<u>Whom to invite:</u>

Sample plan criteria are tailored to the needs of each individual business and project. You want to invite participants who represent your target audience. You may want to also compare important audience groups. Every variable you add increases the complexity of fielding the study, so it may not be possible to include every characteristic you would ideally like. Some common sample variables include:

- Purchasers vs. non-purchasers
- Purchase channel (online vs. in-person retail, etc.)
- Demographic differences (age, gender, region, etc.)
- Role, industry, or size of company (in a business-to-business context)

Some sample plan variables are included to keep non-qualifying participants from completing your survey. In our LoCal Jewelry example, the business doesn't market to teens and those who haven't made a purchase yet won't be able to provide the insight needed in this study, so we will include the following screening criteria:

- Participants must be adults (18+ years of age)
- Participants must have purchased a LoCal Jewelry item within the past 12 months

Your sample plan will also be influenced by your study goals. In our LoCal Jewelry example, the business owner's goal is to assess customer satisfaction, and she wants to understand if the sales channel makes a difference. We'll include a quota (minimum or maximum amount) from each of her three main channels: e-commerce, craft fairs, and retail.

- One-third of participants must have purchased via retail
- One-third of participants must have purchased via e-commerce
- One-third of participants must have purchased via craft fairs

And because our business owner knows from her personal interactions with customers that her buyers tend to be young women, we'll require a quota to reflect that demographic.

- One-half of participants must be female and 18-34 years of age

When conducting a qualitative follow-up to a quantitative survey, you may want to consider tightening the screening criteria due to the small number of interviews or focus groups. Every interview matters. In our LoCal Jewelry example, we'll include participants who have made a recent purchase for themselves only, since they are more likely to have spent time using the item compared to someone who made a gift purchase.

Based on our screening criteria, we know we'll need to include the following screening questions in our survey:

- Recent purchase
- Purchase channel
- Age
- Gender

For our qualitative screening, we'll have an additional question:

- Purchased for self or gift

A note about screening questions: include them upfront in your survey. Some poorly crafted surveys make participants slog through a dozen questions before being disqualified. It is just plain rude, and it diminishes the likelihood of getting input in the future. For the same reason, keep the screening portion as long as necessary but as short as possible – this leaves more room for your substantive questions.

How many people to include:

Here's a rule of thumb, for every group you want to compare against another group (for example, e-commerce vs. retail purchasers), aim for a minimum of 30 participants. You'll have a sizable margin of error but it will still be possible to see trends. Groups of 100 or more will give you more reliable results. These groups are also called cells.

Your sample plan will help you balance the number of participants required to have confidence in your results with the efficiency needed to complete your project in a timely and cost-effective manner. In our LoCal Jewelry example, instead of requiring 30 participants from each purchase channel, plus 50 participants in our female 18-34 demographic, we will layer our requirements for a more efficient outcome.

LoCal Jewelry Sample Plan:

	e-Commerce	Craft fair	Retail store	Total
Female 18-34	20	20	20	60
Male 18-34	5	5	5	15
Female 35+	5	5	5	15
Male 35+	5	5	5	15
Total	35	35	35	105

Estimating your margin of error:

Once you have figured out how to organize your sample plan, confirm that the margin of error will be acceptable to you. Margin of error is a calculation that tells you how far your results may be from the true values in the total population you are studying. In other words, it tells you how sure you can be of your results.

There are other ways to predict the level of confidence in research results, but margin of error is the easiest to use in a do-it-yourself context. Estimating your margin of error prior to embarking on your study will prevent surprises at the end; make sure the sample plan you develop supports a margin of error you can live with.

Free margin of error calculators are available online. You'll need the following information: population size (how many people are in the entire universe of your target audience), sample size (how many people will participate in your study), and confidence level (the default is 95%).

If your business caters to a specific target audience, such as the 11,000 doctors in Missouri, or 20.4 million yoga practitioners in the United States, use that as your overall population estimate.

In our LoCal Jewelry example, the business owner knows that she sells items primarily in her state, and therefore will use the number of adults in her state (approximately 2 million) as her overall population estimate.

Given 105 total participants, the study's overall margin of error will be 10%. When comparing participants by purchase channel, with 35 participants in each cell, the margin of error for those comparisons will be 17%.

At the end of the study, if 50% of website purchasers found the purchase process easy compared to 70% of retail purchasers, our business owner will know that there is a significant difference outside of the margin of error. This should lead her to further investigate what's going on with her website purchase process.

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Recruiting potential participants:

The wonderful thing about conducting customer research is you likely have the perfect way to reach them already. Using your customer email list is the most cost-effective way to invite potential participants to give you their feedback.

If using your email list isn't feasible, or if you are conducting a project that requires input from a broader population that may or may not be aware of your company, there are services that will recruit potential participants on your behalf (often called sample providers or panel providers). For a small, informal study, it may also be possible to recruit participants from your extended social and professional networks.

Sample providers may offer standalone services or you may find recruiting offered as an optional add-on within a survey tool. If you've ever been invited by one of your airlines, or credit cards to participate in a survey panel, now you know what happens if you sign up. The panel providers maintain databases of participants who complete surveys for points, with they can redeem for rewards.

Using a sample or panel provider will add to your project cost. Providers typically charge only for completed surveys, and the cost per interview (also known as CPI) can range anywhere from a few dollars to over $100 depending on the project's complexity. Not all panel providers are equally scrupulous about weeding out low quality input, such as responses from those who speed through a survey without reading it, so ask about their data integrity protocols and expect to spend some time on quality control when going this route.

<u>Offering an incentive:</u>

If you utilize a sample or panel provider, participant incentives are typically included in the overall cost. When conducting research with your own email list, some customers will be happy to help you because they care about your brand or have an experience they want to share. However, you run the risk of only attracting the participation of customers with strong positive or negative feelings. Offering an incentive will draw a wider variety of opinions and better reflect your target audience. Typical incentives include:

- Coupon codes for a significant discount on a future purchase
- Gift cards issued by the business conducting the research. This has to be for a usable amount: a $10 gift card to a high-end store won't be much of a draw.
- Entry into a drawing sponsored by the business conducting the research (check the regulations in your state around this)
- Gift cards to a broadly available business, such as Amazon, Starbucks, Target. These are typically for a relatively small amount, between $5-25
- Donations to a charitable cause. These are less effective but easier to administer. Typically, a choice of charitable organizations with general appeal will be offered to the participant (Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, Habitat for Humanity, etc.). You can check Charity Navigator to vet any non-profits you are interested in including. Provide some kind of accountability after the study so that participants know the contribution was made.

Time-consuming studies and those with complex recruiting criteria may need more enticing incentives. There is a point of diminishing returns, however. If you're having a hard time attracting participants even with a healthy incentive, it may become necessary to relax your recruiting criteria.

Questionnaire development

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"If you dump garbage in, garbage will come out."
—Zig Ziglar, *See You at the Top*

Writing a quantitative survey:

Spending the time to craft a good questionnaire is one of the best ways you can ensure you will get useful, relevant output from your study. There are three steps to keep in mind:

- Put yourself in the mind of the participant.
- Don't lead the witness.
- Include all the questions you need, and nothing you don't.

1. Put yourself in the mind of the participant.

In our LoCal Jewelry example, we want to put ourselves in the mind of the customer. What are the typical steps in the buying process for a LoCal Jewelry customer? What are the important aspects of their interaction with the brand that might contribute or detract from their satisfaction? What would indicate that they are an ideal customer for the brand? This thought exercise gives us a few topic areas we can consider including in our questionnaire:

- Satisfaction with the purchase process
- Satisfaction with the product
- Design appeal
- Uniqueness of the product
- Returns policy or process
- Ease of using the website (for online customers)
- Ease of purchase process for in-person customers
- Price point
- Etc.

When working on a customer satisfaction study for a client, it is helpful to go emulate the customer experience yourself to better understand the dynamics at play. If you are embarking on this type of study for your own business, try to make an inquiry or purchase the same way a customer would, if feasible. You could also ask someone in your extended network of friends or peers to allow you to shadow them as they make a purchase or go through the process of inquiring after your services.

If you run an online store, make a dummy account and go through the purchase process. If you run a retail operation with multiple locations, go to one you haven't visited recently and buy something without being recognized as the boss if possible. If you are a product manufacturer, think through the experience of researching, purchasing, using, and disposing or recycling your product from your customer's point of view. If you are a services operation, think through the process of finding, engaging and collaborating with someone like you from your client's point of view. Owner-operators may not be able to get enough distance to experience their own brand as a customer; in that case it can be helpful to attempt purchases or inquiries from your top competitors.

2. Don't lead the witness.

The questions you include in your survey need to be clear-cut and unbiased to yield useful data.

Avoid questions that convey an assumption: "How much do you love LoCal Jewelry?" insinuates the participant loves the brand. Instead, ask "How would you rate LoCal Jewelry?" "Do you agree that design is a strength of LoCal Jewelry?" shows bias – ask instead something like, "How important is design to your overall perception of LoCal Jewelry?"

Avoid questions that ask too much at once. "How do you feel about our winter and spring jewelry collections?" assumes that the respondent can't have different opinions about two different collections of products. This is called a double-barreled or compound question. Break these types of questions up to ask about a single idea at a time.

Don't ask two things in one question.

Create clear response choice lists with comprehensive, mutually exclusive options (also known as MECE – mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive). Don't give participants options that overlap. And don't put participants in a situation where no choice accurately reflects their experience. In our LoCal

Jewelry example, let's assume the business sells items with suggested retail prices that range between $50 and $300 and we want to include a question about purchase price in the survey. We need to reflect the entire range of possible prices, with clear delineation between response choices.

Question: Approximately how much did you spend on your LoCal Jewelry purchase?

Wrong: Not comprehensive	Wrong: Not mutually exclusive	Correct
• $50-99 • $100-$199 • $200-$299	• Up to $50 • $50-$100 • $100-$200 • $200-$300 • $300+	• Under $50 • $50-$99 • $100-$199 • $200-$299 • $300+

Here are some common response choice lists used in customer research (also called Likert Scales). Keeping these scales in mind can help you construct balanced questions.

List type	Frequency	Quality	Agreement	Familiarity	Satisfaction
Sample question	When shopping for jewelry online, how often do you check the LoCal Jewelry website?	How would you rate the quality of the LoCal Jewelry item you purchased?	To what extent do you agree with the following statement? "LoCal Jewelry is my style"	How familiar are you with the LoCal Jewelry brand?	How satisfied are you with your LoCal Jewelry purchase overall?
Response choices	• Always • Often • Sometimes • Rarely • Never	• Excellent • Good • Ok • Somewhat poor • Very poor	• Strongly agree • Somewhat agree • Neither agree nor disagree • Somewhat disagree • Strongly disagree	• Very familiar • Moderately familiar • Somewhat familiar • Slightly familiar • Not at all familiar	• Highly satisfied • Somewhat satisfied • Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied • Somewhat dissatisfied • Very dissatisfied

3. Include all the questions you need, and nothing you don't.

Keep it short. If this is your first study, keep it to less than 30 questions. Edit assiduously to avoid Kitchen Sink Syndrome. You're better served to have several short studies on different topics than to try to get a too-wide range of questions into one survey.

If you feel you have extra room in your survey, consider including an open-ended question (one in which the participant can type a longer answer into a text box). These can be used to gain greater context around a response, especially in a project that does not include a qualitative component. Open-ended questions can be as simple as asking "Why?" as a follow-up to a rating scale or asking the participant if they have any advice for the business.

In our LoCal Jewelry example, we've identified the demographic questions we need. Keeping in mind the business owner wants to gauge customer satisfaction and ultimately drive sales, we'll add questions about the product, purchase process, satisfaction, and loyalty. She also thinks it may be beneficial to promote the fact that her business is woman-owned and makes handmade items. So, we'll include a couple of questions to address these hypotheses. Once she finds out the results, another survey could be developed to delve more deeply into the advertising messages she is thinking about using.

LoCal Jewelry Questionnaire

#	Question	Response Choices	Notes
	Thank you for taking the time to give us your input today!		Introduction.
1	What is your age?	• Under 18 (terminate) • 18-24 • 25-34 • 35-44 • 45-54 • 55-64 • 65-74 • 75+	Demographics. Qualifying criteria. Terminate "Under 18." If you need input from minors, check regulations in your area.
2	What is your gender?	• Male • Female • Other	Demographics.
3	When was the last time you purchased a LoCal Jewelry item?	• Within 3 months • 3-6 months ago • 6-12 months ago • More than 12 months ago • Never purchased	Qualifying criteria. Terminate: "More than 12 months ago" and "Never purchased" Instead of asking whether a participant has purchased within the last year, we include more answer choices to get more detailed information and not tip the participant off to the response criteria.
4	Where did you purchase your LoCal Jewelry item?	• In a retail store • On the LoCal Jewelry website	Qualifying criteria. Terminate: "Other/Don't remember"

		• At a craft fair • Other/don't remember	It's possible customers purchased through other channels or don't remember, we want to capture that information rather force them into an incorrect response. They don't fulfill the criteria in that case, however, so they are disqualified from proceeding.
	Now, we'd like to ask you a few questions about your perceptions of the LoCal Jewelry brand.		Descriptive text. A line of explanatory text helps prepare your participants for a change in topic.
5	Were you aware of LoCal Jewelry before making your purchase?	• Yes • No	Awareness
6	How would you rate the visual appeal of LoCal Jewelry?	• Excellent • Good • Ok • Somewhat poor • Very poor	Product features: Design
7	How would you rate the craftsmanship of LoCal Jewelry?	• Excellent • Good • Ok • Somewhat poor • Very poor	Product features: Craftsmanship
8	How would you rate the uniqueness of LoCal Jewelry?	• Excellent • Good • Ok • Somewhat poor • Very poor	Product features: Uniqueness
9	How would you rate the quality of the materials used in LoCal Jewelry?	• Excellent • Good • Ok • Somewhat poor • Very poor	Product features: Quality
10	Did you know LoCal Jewelry is handmade?	• Yes • No	Testing hypothesis: the owner thinks she may want to advertise that her product is handmade.
11	[ASK ONLY IF YES TO PRIOR QUESTION] How important was it to your purchase decision that LoCal Jewelry is handmade?	• Very important • Somewhat important • Neither important nor unimportant • Somewhat unimportant • Not at all important	•
12	Did you know LoCal Jewelry is a woman-owned business?	• Yes • No	Testing hypothesis: the owner thinks she may want to advertise that her business is woman-owned.
13	How important was it to your purchase decision that LoCal Jewelry is a woman-owned business?	• Very important • Somewhat important • Neither important nor unimportant • Somewhat unimportant • Not at all important	•

14	How would you rate LoCal Jewelry pricing vs. the competition?	• Higher than competitors • On par with competitors • Lower than competitors	Pricing perceptions. Absolute price vs. the competition.
15	How would you rate the value for money you received from LoCal Jewelry	• Excellent • Good • Ok • Somewhat poor • Very poor	Pricing perceptions. Perception of the value received for the money spent.
	Now we'd like to ask about how you purchased your LoCal Jewelry item.		Descriptive text. Moving into a section of questions about the purchase process.
16	How would you rate the overall purchase experience for your LoCal Jewelry item?	• Very easy • Somewhat easy • Ok • Somewhat difficult • Very difficult	
17	[ASK THOSE WHO PURCHASED VIA ECOMMERCE ONLY] How would you rate the ease of using the LoCal Jewelry website?	• Excellent • Good • Ok • Somewhat poor • Very poor	For an e-commerce focused survey, a series of questions regarding website appeal and usability would be included.
18	Was your LoCal Jewelry item purchase....?	• For myself • For a gift • Other	Purchase type.
19	[IF PURCHASED FOR SELF] What led you to purchase a LoCal Jewelry item for yourself? (Select all that apply)	• Impulse purchase • Reward/treat myself • Had already planned to purchase this item • Liked the design • Liked how it looked on me • To go with an outfit • To wear to an event • Holiday or special event • Not sure/Don't know • Other (specify) ______	Purchase driver. Multiple responses accepted. Participants can write in their own response.
20	[IF PURCHASED FOR GIFT] Which of the following best describe the person you purchased a LoCal jewelry gift for?	• Significant other • Friend • Child • Sibling • Colleague • Other (specify) ______	Purchase driver.
21	[IF PURCHASED FOR GIFT] Is the recipient of your gift…?	• Male • Female • Other • Prefer not to say	Purchase driver. If inquiring about potentially sensitive information such as gender, income, marital status, etc. that isn't screening criteria, offer a way to opt out, such as a "Prefer not to say" response choice.

22	[IF PURCHASED FOR GIFT] What occasion led you to purchase a LoCal Jewelry item for a gift? (Select all that apply)	• Birthday • Graduation • Shower (wedding shower, baby shower, etc.) • Just because • Anniversary • Christmas • Other holiday (specify): __________ • Other (specify): _____	Purchase driver.
23	About how much did you spend on your LoCal Jewelry purchase?	• $________	Spend. Can also present a list of response choices with number ranges, this reduces risk of user error (adding an extra 0, etc.)
24	About how much do you spend on jewelry overall each year?	• $________	Share of wallet.
25	How satisfied are you overall with your LoCal Jewelry purchase?	• Highly satisfied • Somewhat satisfied • Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied • Somewhat dissatisfied • Highly dissatisfied	Overall satisfaction. This question must be in the survey.
26	How likely are you to purchase again from LoCal Jewelry?	• Highly likely • Somewhat likely • Neither likely nor unlikely • Somewhat unlikely • Highly unlikely	Loyalty measure.
27	How likely are you to recommend LoCal Jewelry to others?	• Highly likely • Somewhat likely • Neither likely nor unlikely • Somewhat unlikely • Highly unlikely	Loyalty measure.
28	How would you rate LoCal Jewelry compared to other handmade local jewelry brands overall?	• Much better • Somewhat better • About the same • Somewhat worse • Much worse	Competitive measure.
	Thank you, those are all the questions we have. Please confirm the email address you would like your coupon code to be sent to. This will not be used for any purpose other than to deliver the thank-you coupon code. We appreciate your input!	• _______@_______	Capture or verify information needed to process incentive if necessary. Check security and privacy regulations in your area as needed regarding email or phone number capture. Thank and conclude.

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Writing a discussion guide:

The questionnaire for a qualitative project is also called a discussion guide. It utilizes many of the same principles as survey development but allows for a more in-depth and free discussion. The guide is tailored to the length of your interview and is designed to get answers to key questions while giving the interviewer room to explore any lines of questioning that arise spontaneously.

Qualitative interviews give you an opportunity to delve into the same questions you may have in your survey in a different way, eliciting more detail from your participant. For example, if survey data shows our LoCal Jewelry business owner that her retail customers tend to be less happy with the purchase process than her website customers, qualitative interviews give her a chance to ask retail customers all about their purchase experience and understand what drives that lower rating. Or if the survey data tells her that the most highly rated brand attribute for LoCal Jewelry is its craftsmanship, qualitative interviews give her a chance to ask customers what signifies good craftsmanship. What does it look like? What does it feel like? How do they recognize it when they see it?

If your resource constraints don't allow for customer research at all, conducting a few informal one-on-one interviews on a regular basis is a good way to keep some regular detailed customer input flowing your way.

For our LoCal Jewelry example, our business owner will develop a discussion guide that complements the quantitative survey. She'll also revisit the discussion guide again once the quantitative results are available to see if there are any changes or additions that should be made based on what the data reveals.

LoCal Jewelry Discussion Guide

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time out to speak to me today about LoCal Jewelry. This call will take about 30 minutes, and we'll be sending you a $40 gift card for the LoCal Jewelry website in appreciation for your time. I'll be writing notes as we're talking. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Questions:

- You purchased an item from LoCal Jewelry for yourself within the past year, is that correct?

- Tell me about it. What type of item is it?
- What drew you to it? What are your favorite things about it? (ask about the design, craftsmanship, any other appealing factors)
- Was there a specific reason you chose to buy this item that day? (ask about special occasion and other purchase drivers)
- Let me ask you about the purchase process. Where did you buy this item? (ask about e-commerce, craft fair, retail process)

    [If e-commerce customer]

    - How easy or difficult was it to complete the purchase on the website?
    - What do you like or dislike about the website?
    - How do you feel about the design of the website?

    [If craft fair customer]

    - Which craft fair did you attend? How was your experience?
    - How easy or difficult was it to purchase this item at the fair?
    - Do you think LoCal Jewelry fits with the other offerings at this fair?
    - What other items did you purchase or consider purchasing at this event?
    - Do you regularly attend craft fairs? Which are your favorite? Which do you frequent the most?

    [If retail customer]

    - Which retail store did you purchase from?
    - How easy or difficult was it to purchase this item from the store?
    - Do you think LoCal Jewelry fits with the other offerings at this store?
    - Are there other retailers you'd like to see offering LoCal Jewelry?
- [Ask all] What would improve the purchase experience?
- How often do you wear your LoCal Jewelry item?
- What prompts you to wear it? (ask about occasions, outfits, mood, etc.)
- How do you feel when you wear it?
- Do you mind sharing how much you spent on this item?
- How much do you typically spend on jewelry overall in an average year?
- How do you feel about LoCal Jewelry's pricing? Is it high, low, or about right?
- How satisfied are you with your purchase?
- Would you purchase from LoCal again?
- Would you recommend this item or LoCal Jewelry to others?
- How important is it to you that LoCal is a woman-owned business?
- How important is it to you that LoCal handmakes their items?
- How do you feel about LoCal Jewelry overall?
- Do you have any advice for the owner of LoCal Jewelry?

Conclusion:
Thank you again for your input, it was very helpful. We'll be sending the gift card to [confirm contact information]. Have a great day.

Programming and fieldwork: executing the study

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"Measure seven times, cut once."
—Russian proverb

Once the survey is written and the sample plan is complete, it's time to move on to programming, testing, and launching your study. Make sure to give yourself time in this phase as it can be unpredictable.

<u>Programming and testing your survey:</u>

Several free or low-cost services are available that make it fairly easy to build and field your own survey. Current examples include SurveyMonkey.com, Zoho Survey, SurveyGizmo, etc. Many of these tools allow you to customize the look and feel of the survey or access advanced analytical capabilities for a fee.

> *Have someone help you test your survey – a second set of eyes catches things you might miss.*

Once you've signed up for an account and input your survey, test it to make sure everything works as expected. In particular, check that your recruiting criteria, termination points, and answer choices are functioning correctly. Have someone else check the survey for you. It's almost inevitable at this phase to discover something that could work better, flow better, be phrased better. Adjust and re-test as necessary.

<u>Launching and fielding your survey:</u>

Once you're satisfied with the survey as programmed, it's time to launch it into the field. Fieldwork is the period of time in which participants are completing your survey. If you're using a customer email list, this may be as simple as sending out an email blast to ask subscribers for their feedback. If you're using a sample or panel provider, they'll typically need the link to your survey and will take care of sending potential participants to it.

Start slowly. Aim for no more than 10% of surveys completed on the first day. This will give you a chance to make sure everything in the survey is working correctly once live before you use up too many invitations. If someone visits your survey and encounters a technical problem, for example, it's unlikely they'll come back once you've cleared it up, so don't invite everyone at once.

You'll also want to avoid the potential for seasonality or current events to impact your results. For example, you may want to avoid the holiday season or the week after a relevant earnings report comes out. In our LoCal Jewelry example, the business owner may be better served to field her study in March, after the Christmas and Valentine's Day rush.

While the study is in field, you'll want to monitor its progress and keep an eye out for any abnormalities. Are you having a hard time recruiting a certain type of participant? If so, you may need to relax your quotas. Are a lot of people dropping off mid-survey? If so, and the survey is taking longer than anticipated, you may consider cutting some questions.

Qualitative fieldwork:

If you're including a qualitative component to your study, it will have a different fieldwork process. This consists of recruiting your participants, setting the appointment, and completing the interview or focus group. Recruitment can be conducted as part of your survey, or a separate exercise. Given tightening data security requirements and privacy concerns, the best way to recruit from within a survey may be to use an appointment setting tool (current examples include Calendly, Doodle, Acuity Scheduling) which allows the participant to schedule an interview at their convenience. Let participants know upfront if you will be taking notes, using their quotes, or would like permission to record. Typically, all qualitative input is kept confidential. If you get a fantastic customer quote in an interview, for example, don't turn around and post it on your website or use it in an advertisement unless you have explicit permission.

Maintain neutrality when conducting interviews. Ask permission upfront if you plan to record the session.

It's beneficial, when possible, to have a neutral party conduct the interview or moderate the focus groups. There are professionals who can be hired to do this, or there may be someone on your team or in your peer network who is well-suited to the task. The goal of the interview is to collect the customer’s input, never to defend or explain yourself or even have a dialogue. Allow the customer to do most of the talking. Accept feedback neutrally and ask for more detail where needed.

Cleaning the data:

Once you have the expected number of completed surveys or interviews, check through the data to make sure the answers are valid. We have to take both the positive and negative input we receive with equanimity, but we don’t have to accept useless information. If you’ve included open-ended questions in your survey, these can provide an extra quality control checkpoint. Gibberish responses to text based questions (e.g., “asdfa”) or straight-line responses to a series of numerical questions (every response is a 3 throughout the survey) are a sign your participant may have sped through the entire survey without paying much attention to the questions. If a completed survey is nonsensical, it can be deleted and replaced with a legitimate participant.

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Analysis: finding meaning in the data

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"Great entrepreneurs are often great listeners
and they can spot patterns and pick up on small details in customer stories."
—Alexander Osterwalder, Consultant

The output from a study will vary based on the project parameters. For a quantitative survey, the result is typically a spreadsheet containing raw data. The data file will have a column for each question and a row for each participant, with each data cell representing a response to a question. In our LoCal Jewelry example, an excerpt of the raw data file would look something like this:

Participant ID	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7
Participant 1	1	2	4	5
Participant 2	2	2	5	5
Participant 3	3	1	5	4
Participant 4	2	1	5	5
Participant 5	2	1	4	5
Participant 6	3	2	4	4
Participant 7	4	1	3	4
Participant 8	1	1	4	5
Participant 9	2	2	5	4
Participant 10	1	1	2	3

The easiest way to analyze this kind of raw data is by turning it into a cross-tabulated file (also known as cross-tabs). A cross-tab will summarize the data in a way that allows you to make comparisons across groups. If you're using a survey tool, it will likely have options for setting up a cross-tabulated output file. If not, these can be created in a spreadsheet tool such as Excel using pivot tables.

Cross-tabs typically display the groups that you want to analyze as the columns, and the questions in your survey as the rows. In our LoCal Jewelry example, our business owner knows she wants to view the results in total and compare results across her three main purchase channels. Using Questions 4-7 from the table above, a cross-tabulated file would look like this:

Question	Total	E-commerce	Craft Fair	Retail
Q4. Where purchased?				
Retail	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
e-Commerce	33.3%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Craft Fair	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Don't remember	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Q5. Aware of LoCal prior to purchase?				
Yes	65.7%	91.4%	60.0%	45.7%
No	34.3%	8.6%	40.0%	54.3%
Q6. Visual Appeal				
Excellent	64.8%	68.6%	65.7%	60.0%
Good	29.5%	28.6%	28.6%	31.4%
Ok	2.9%	0.0%	2.9%	5.7%
Somewhat Poor	1.9%	0.0%	2.9%	2.9%
Very Poor	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%
Q7. Craftsmanship				
Excellent	62.9%	71.4%	85.7%	34.3%
Good	26.7%	22.9%	11.4%	45.7%
Ok	5.7%	2.9%	0.0%	14.3%
Somewhat Poor	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%
Very Poor	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	5.7%

Looking at this table, we see that LoCal Jewelry has a potential problem with its retail channel: awareness of the brand prior to purchase and perceptions of craftsmanship are significantly weaker, even taking the margin of error into consideration, compared to online or craft fair purchasers.

It helps to look at the data in many different ways. In the LoCal Jewelry example, the business owner will want to pay close attention to the following areas, which have an impact on her ultimate goal of increasing revenue:

- Are there differences between the target audience (young females) and other customers?
- Are there differences by purchase channel?
- Are there differences between those who indicate "handmade" or "woman-owned" is important to their purchase and those who don't?
- Are there differences between those who purchased for themselves vs. gifts?
- What are the top occasions that drive purchases?
- What do highly satisfied or loyal customers have in common (do they, for example, tend to rate the craftsmanship more highly?)

- What do those who spend the most have in common?

Some of the columns our business owner may want to have her cross-tab would therefore include:

- Target audience (female 18-34)
- Non target audience (not female 18-34)
- Purchase channel: e-commerce
- Purchase channel: craft fair
- Purchase channel: retail
- Handmade - somewhat/very important
- Woman-owned - somewhat/very important
- Highly satisfied
- Highly likely to repurchase
- Highly likely to recommend
- Spend: $200+

She's going to look for trends in the data that help her understand her best customers and how her business can better serve them. Let's assume she finds the following:

- There are no major differences in perceptions or behavior between her target audience and other customers
- There are different occasions that spur purchases for one's self vs. a gift
- "Woman-owned" isn't very impactful, but "handmade" is
- Her best customers – highly satisfied, spend the most, likely to recommend – rate the visual appeal and craftsmanship of the brand highly
- Satisfaction within the retail channel is lagging, and fewer retail customers are aware that LoCal Jewelry is handmade

Each of these findings has a business implication:

- LoCal Jewelry can appeal to a general audience with the same products and messages they use for their target of women 18-34
- LoCal Jewelry may want to develop marketing messages around the top purchase occasions
- LoCal Jewelry may want to promote its handmade quality more prominently
- LoCal Jewelry must stay on top of visual design and craftsmanship - this is the foundation of the brand's appeal
- LoCal Jewelry must address the retail channel, perhaps with updated packaging that highlights the brand story or sales training for retail partners

Comb through the cross-tabs and log your findings. Not all of them will be equally important. Some may surprise you, and spark new ideas. Some may point to business implications that aren't practical. It's up to the business owner or analyst to determine what information to highlight, and what to keep in the background.

Qualitative output (typically transcripts, audio files, or video recordings) is analyzed in a more subjective manner. Recurring themes will often become clear in the process of conducting interviews or focus groups. In our LoCal Jewelry example, the business owner sees that there's an issue with retail sales. In her qualitative interviews, she may want to spend added time with participants who purchased through a retail store to better understand what is driving this. When she concludes her interviews and thinks about them in total, she may find a trend, such as minimal retail packaging which doesn't explain enough about the brand. As important themes emerge in the analysis process, it can be helpful to bookmark participant quotes, create relevant word clouds, or identify audio snippets from any recordings made that substantiate those insights.

It is important to put the appropriate weight on negative feedback. Your least satisfied customers may illuminate a worrying trend to be addressed (for example, in a restaurant chain where most of the criticism is about one specific location) or they may be customers that just aren't right for your business. It is often more effective to neutralize negative feedback via a refund or other accommodation and move on rather than keep working at turning a dissatisfied customer into an advocate. The goal of customer satisfaction research isn't to identify complaints, it's to identify what delights your customers so you can do more of it or communicate it more effectively.

Reporting: what does the big picture look like?

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"Ye can not see the wood for trees."
—English proverb

Results can be presented in a variety of ways. Sometimes in a memo outlining the key findings of the study. Often in a slide presentation full of charts and data. A report can also be as simple as a spreadsheet that tracks important statistics. Whatever the method, it needs to convey the study's most relevant findings in an easily digestible format.

There is often a lot of data available at the end of a project and a tendency to want to include every bit of information in the report. Let's call it the return of Kitchen Sink Syndrome. While all the data needs to be thoroughly reviewed in the analysis phase to understand what the important findings are, it can be counterproductive to include every minute detail in a report.

If you will be sharing your report with executives or investors, consider putting the key findings into an executive summary and relegating supporting information, charts, and tables into an appendix. If you'll be using the information internally or more informally, consider putting together a dashboard in a spreadsheet that will allow you to easily absorb, share, and track the most important data, with more detailed information in other tabs as necessary.

With research that will stay internal to your organization, it may be helpful to include relevant business information such as revenue, margin, or number of transactions in your reporting. For projects that include quantitative and qualitative portions, it may be helpful to illustrate the key point on a chart-heavy page with a customer quote from your interview transcripts.

To identify what to include in your executive summary or dashboard, start with your initial goals and hypotheses. What have you discovered? What have you found that you may not have been expecting? When adding this all together with what you know about your organization and wider industry, what are the most important ideas to take away from this project? What recommendations arise for the business as a result?

In our LoCal Jewelry example, our business owner has discovered that customer satisfaction and perception of value is lower among customers who purchased via retail channels. She found that her products are highly rated for their design and craftsmanship, and their handmade quality is a purchase influencer. She also knows now that retail customers are less likely to realize these items are handmade. This has implications for her retail packaging.

The key findings and recommendations for LoCal Jewelry might look something like this:

Key findings:

- Design and craftsmanship are top rated brand attributes
- Handmade quality is important in purchase decisions
- Customer satisfaction is lower via retail channels, where packaging or merchandising does not convey brand attributes

Recommendations:

- Update retail packaging to highlight design, craftsmanship, and handmade qualities
- Consider offering training for retail sales partners on LoCal Jewelry brand attributes

Because our LoCal Jewelry business owner conducted her study for her own use, she may opt for a simple report in a spreadsheet that includes a summary dashboard followed by the most relevant information from the survey.

The dashboard for LoCal Jewelry might include the following key performance indicators:

- Customer satisfaction in total and by purchase channel
- Likelihood to recommend in total and by purchase channel
- Average transaction amount in total and by purchase channel
- Revenue in total and by purchase channel

The detailed information that follows might include added measures of loyalty, awareness, product features, purchase drivers, etc.

LoCal Jewelry Sample Report

Q1 2020 Customer Satisfaction Study	Total	E-commerce	Craft Fair	Retail
	N=105	N=35	N=35	N=35
Customer Satisfaction - % Highly Satisfied	68%	75%	80%	50%
Customer Loyalty - % Highly Likely to Recommend	60%	70%	70%	40%
Average Spend	$74	$78	$54	$89
Revenue	$1.1m	$480k	$295	$325k
Awareness of LoCal prior to purchase	66%	91%	60%	46%
Perception of LoCal vs. competition - % Much better	32%	40%	34%	23%
Likelihood to repurchase - % Highly Likely	79%	86%	83%	69%
Visual appeal – Good/Excellent	94%	97%	94%	91%
Craftsmanship – Good/Excellent	90%	94%	97%	80%
Uniqueness – Good/Excellent	89%	89%	91%	86%
Quality of materials – Good/Excellent	78%	83%	77%	74%
Purchased for self	68%	71%	69%	63%
Top 3 purchase reasons	Design Treat Impulse	Design Special Event Planned	Design Treat Impulse	Treat Impulse Design
Purchased for gift	32%	29%	31%	37%
Top 3 purchase reasons	Birthday Just because Anniversary	Birthday Anniversary Christmas	Just because Christmas Birthday	Just because Birthday Anniversary
Aware of handmade	73%	83%	94%	43%
Importance of handmade – Very/Somewhat Important	71%	77%	86%	51%
Aware of woman-owned	62%	69%	83%	34%
Importance of woman-owned – Very/Somewhat Important	45%	40%	66%	29%
Pricing vs. competition – High	17%	11%	17%	23%
Pricing vs. competition – On par	71%	74%	71%	69%
Pricing vs. competition – Low	11%	14%	11%	9%
Value for money – Excellent/Good	81%	86%	83%	74%
Overall purchase – Very/Somewhat Easy	92%	97%	86%	94%

If you're looking to create a more visually compelling report, services such as State of the Art Presentations (soappresentations.com) and Canva (canva.com) offer free and fee-based resources to help anyone create an engaging slide-based presentation.

Creating an ongoing research program

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"Amazing things will happen when you listen to the consumer."
—Jonathan Mildenhall, former CMO of Airbnb

I hope the steps and examples outlined in this guide were useful to you in developing your own customer research study. Once you've completed your project, what's next? Some types of studies are useful to repeat regularly. Large companies with formal research programs will typically run customer satisfaction and brand awareness tracking studies every three or six months. For a smaller organization, every six or twelve months may be a more suitable schedule.

Once you've decided on a cadence that works for you, decide who you want to participate going forward. Maybe you learned something about your target audience in your study that leads you to reconsider how you think about your customers. Maybe you want to compare groups you hadn't considered before. Maybe your audience demographics aren't what you expected, or they've changed over time.

Review your sample plan every year or two and update as needed. Ongoing research requires striking a balance between stability and adaptation; you don't want to change your target audience definition with every round of research (also called a wave) but if your target audience shifts as your business evolves, you want your research to reflect reality.

When developing an ongoing program, it's also important to decide which questions you will include every time and which you are open to changing in each wave of research. In our LoCal Jewelry example, questions that are relevant to audience targeting (purchased within 12 months, channel, demographics) and Key Performance Indicators (satisfaction, amount spent, frequency of purchase) should be included in every wave of research in order to track progress. Questions that refer to specific products or events may need to be updated or swapped out (for example, rating current design options).

If you've set up a report or dashboard in your initial study, determine which metrics you want to track and report on over time. Typically, these are metrics related to your research goals and your key performance indicators. In our LoCal Jewelry example, our business owner will use her dashboard to track customer satisfaction and revenue goals.

	Total	E-commerce	Craft Fair	Retail
Q1 2020	N=105	N=35	N=35	N=35
Customer Satisfaction - % Highly Satisfied	68%	75%	80%	50%
Customer Loyalty - % Highly Likely to Recommend	60%	70%	70%	40%
Average Spend	$74	$78	$54	$89
Revenue	$1.1m	$480k	$295k	$325k

Q3 2020				
Customer Satisfaction - % Highly Satisfied				
Customer Loyalty - % Highly Likely to Recommend				
Average Spend				
Revenue				

With each subsequent wave of research, she can track whether the changes she has made are improving customer satisfaction, particularly within the retail channel, and creating a positive impact for her business.

The first wave of research is the hardest. Once your program is set up on an ongoing basis, it becomes easier to both administer and analyze the results.

And that, friends, is a quick primer on customer research. A checklist for developing your own study is included at the end of this ebook. For more detailed information on the mechanics of market research, look into the textbooks written by Professor Naresh K. Malhotra, or industry resources such as GreenBook.org and Quirks.com.

Checklist

LoCal Jewelry Project Checklist	
Research goal	Assess customer satisfaction
Business impact	Drive higher revenue
Study type	Customer satisfaction study
Method	Online quantitative survey and one-on-one interviews
Participant sourcing	Customer email list
Sample size	100 survey participants, 6 interview participants
Quotas	Participants must have made a purchase within the last 12 months Additional requirements for survey: Minimum 30 online shoppers Minimum 30 craft fair shoppers Minimum 30 retail shoppers Minimum 50% of participants are female age 18-35
Fieldwork channel	Online survey tool, phone
Fieldwork schedule	Survey: Month/Date-Month/Date Interviews: Month/Date-Month/Date
Analysis and reporting schedule	Month/Date-Month/Date
Report type	Dashboard / spreadsheet
Ongoing cadence	Every 12 months

Your Project Checklist:	
Research goal	
Business impact	
Study type	
Method	
Participant sourcing	
Sample size	
Quotas	
Fieldwork channel	
Fieldwork schedule	
Analysis and reporting schedule	
Report type	
Ongoing cadence	

Glossary

Common types of market research studies and what they're used for:

Brand awareness - used to evaluate brand strength in the market. Typical questions include awareness, consideration, and purchase interest.

Customer satisfaction and loyalty - used to identify key characteristics of a business' brand advocates. Once these traits are identified, the business can try to amplify them. Typical questions include overall satisfaction, likelihood to repurchase, likelihood to recommend, average purchase price, and share of wallet. This is the type of study outlined in this guide.

Market segmentation - used to identify the different types of customers that make up your target audience (typically, by examining their attitudes, behaviors, and values). These studies often utilize a specific statistical formula called cluster analysis.

Message testing - used to assess reactions to marketing or advertising prior to launch. This can be extremely valuable when an expensive ad buy is under consideration. Typical questions include favorability, uniqueness, memorability, and purchase impact.

Product testing - used to gauge reactions to a new, proposed, or evolving product. Taste testing is a type of product testing.

Pricing studies - used to assess and refine pricing strategy. These studies often utilize more advanced statistics such as conjoint analysis or discrete-choice modeling.

Purchase process studies - used to better understand the process customers go through from becoming aware of a product through the moment of purchase.

Common research methods:

Primary research - input gathered directly from participants through surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.

Secondary research - input gathered from one or more third parties (syndicated research, firms like Gartner and IDC, news, experts, social media scraping tools, etc.).

Quantitative research - research that gathers numerical data for statistical analysis. Surveys are the classic example. These can be conducted in person (when indoor malls were popular, researchers used to stand with clipboards, asking passers-by to participate in studies), by phone (think of the pollsters that call around election time), or online (the primary method used today).

Qualitative research - research that gathers text, transcripts, or recordings for subjective critical analysis. These can include in-depth interviews (conversations of up to 90 minutes with target audience members), ethnographic research (shadowing a participant as they use your product or go shopping, for example), focus groups (bringing a number of participants together for a moderated group discussion), etc.

Terms related to study execution:

Cell - a group of study participants in a sample plan that share certain characteristics or recruiting criteria

Complete - a participant who has completed the survey ("We have 100 completes")

Disqualified - a participant who has been terminated from a survey (also known as DQ)

Partial - a participant who abandoned the survey prior to completion

MECE - mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive; a principle developed by Barbara Minto at McKinsey & Company. Useful in creating single-select response choices for survey questions.

Quota - a minimum or maximum requirement for participants with a given characteristic or recruiting criteria. Quotas may be set as absolute numbers or proportions of the sample.

Sample - study participants (a sample of your total target audience); may also be used to refer to those invited to participate

Sample size - the number of participants in your study

Sample plan - a way of organizing the approach to recruiting participants in order to ensure large enough groups for the required analysis

Terminate - the unfortunate term used for response choices in a survey which disqualify potential participants from progressing further (this could be understood more accurately as a termination point)

Terms related to market research analysis:

Key performance indicators - statistics an organization tracks in order to measure business goals. Examples include revenue, gross margin, number of transactions. The business may have a goal for improving these or a threshold it doesn't want to fall under.

Margin of error - a calculation that gives you an idea of how far off your survey results may be from the true values in the total population you are studying. For example, if you are surveying 100 of the 6,600 dentists practicing in Ohio, you can be 95% sure that your results are within 10 percentage points of the true value among the total population.

Statistical significance - a designation used in hypothesis testing, when results are probable beyond a certain threshold, they are deemed statistically significant. When it's not possible to assess statistical significance due to the sample size or other factors, one can look for directional trends in the data.

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