Marketing Research Tools

The following tips will be useful as you design the research tools you will use in conducting your marketing research.

Building your databases
In doing your research for this venture and in any previous work experience, you probably have come across lots of databases. They are used to store, analyze and retrieve all kinds of information. Now you will need to build your own – probably several. Databases not only ensure timely retrieval of information, but they can give strength to your decisions.

What kinds of databases will you need? Good starting points would be one for all contacts in your business that could be used for mailings and one to gather appropriate names for seeking further information down the line, etc. Some database programs will allow you to put all information about any and every contact you make (or should make) in a listing that also describes the type of contact it is, what potential it has for your business, times you have used it, characteristics about it, and so on. These typically are called relational databases.

Other database systems are less complicated and less intuitive. It might be wise to establish the general all-purpose list, then set up separate databases for customers, suppliers and other vendors, subcontractors, etc.

Any contact you have made at any point should be on a database. Any contact that you think you should make should be on a database. File drawers and folders, computerized address listings, have worked for projects, committees and family information purposes. Now that you have a business to run, you need to step up to the database level.

The type of database program you purchase and use is up to you. There are advantages and disadvantages to the various programs on the market. Some things to keep in mind, however, are typical questions applying to any computer software program:

- How well will a program integrate with the other computer programs you use?
- How much of various types of capacity in your computer will it take to run the program efficiently? Do you have it in your system?
- Will it allow you to store all of the information you think you might need?
- Will it perform quick sorting and retrieval of information in ways that help you?
- Is it something you can learn to operate quickly and not just keep unused on the shelf?

At times it is necessary to develop market research tools beyond the use of databases. You may need to conduct surveys to determine more about your clients or you will have in-depth questions that need answers. There are several tools that you can use to help steer your research to meet your objectives. Two such helpful tools are using qualitative research methodology, such as focus groups and quantitative techniques, such as surveys.

Hints for a good focus group
- Assemble 6-10 people who you think would buy your product.
- Gather in an informal, relaxed setting.
- Use someone who is an excellent interviewer/moderator with good listening skills.
- Initiate open-ended questions.
- Listen as participants share ideas, respond to one another and stimulate one another’s thinking.
- Gently guide the discussion for no more than one hour.
- Take notes during the session and also audio tape it for accuracy.

Creating a print survey
- Keep questions short, simple and to the point.
• Make it very easy for the respondent to complete. Have someone who is not familiar with the survey give you a critique.
• Use questions that involve a ranging scale of 1-4 (1= strongly disagree, 4= strongly agree). Choose an even number so respondents will give you an indication of preference.
• Surveys should take no longer than 5-10 minutes to complete.
• Be careful not to bias the answers with your question construction.
• Offer respondents some reward for completing the survey (money, discounts, prizes, etc.).
• Say, “Thank you.”

**Conducting a producer survey**

If you are involving others to be your supplier, you may need to focus on the supply side. If your business is based on taking a new product to the market place or taking your products to the market place in a different manner, are you acting alone or are you pulling together a group of producers to manage this business activity?

Will you be able to meet demand? Or are you going to need to increase the amount of product in your venture? What is the interest level among other producers in working with you – now or down the road (a need that should be indicated in your research)?

You might be wise to survey other producers about these things. Considering such factors as how wide a geographic area you reasonably can work within and what types/sizes of producers work into your plan. Secure a mailing list of all who fit the description. The questions that follow would typically be included in your survey. As you do this, keep in mind that you are announcing – or promoting – your plans to others. Your survey questionnaire should be accompanied by a letter from you indicating your need for the information and what you plan to do with it (in limited fashion).

**Sample survey questions**

**Are you interested in producing for a private, local venture?**

- Yes
- No

**If yes, what quantity are you willing to supply?**

**Are you interested in alternate methods of production; for example, organic, natural, attribute based?**

- Yes
- No

**Do you already serve any specialty markets?**

- Yes
- No

**If so, what are they?**

**Are you willing to maintain specific product identification?**

- Yes
- No

Please add additional comments.

Thank you!

**Old, new tricks**

- Enclose pre-stamped envelopes with mail surveys.
- Tap into the knowledge of the reference librarian at the library.
- Talk with other business people in the area. Benefit from their experiences.
- Get on-line and use browsers.
- Read advertising and marketing industry periodicals.
- If you have created your own email database or have a reliable resource for one, consider using an online survey. An Internet search under keywords “online survey software” will start you on the path of locating just the right program for your needs. The most popular ones are available at office supply or computer stores. Be aware that there are regulations about use of mass emails.

*Resource Adapted from Marketing, Research and Analysis; NxLevel Training* U.S. West Corporation.
*Reprinted with permission Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, Iowa State University.*