

How To Buy Online Qualitative Research and Assess Providers

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OVERVIEW

The last thing any business wants to do is make the wrong decision. Thanks to the new, nimble technology for qualitative research, organizations can learn from and iterate with their target customers more often, leading to more effective products and marketing programs.

“The big market research trend for 2017 and beyond will be qualitative market research, where we can uncover new needs, new insights, new opportunities that will guide innovation,” explains Pam Danziger, writer and researcher at Unity Marketing¹. “Big data answers the who, what, where, and when, but only qualitative market research can answer the why—why people shop and why people buy—and that is where the future lies for market research.”

In the pages that follow, you’ll learn what you have to consider before selecting an online qualitative research tool for your organization. At the highest level, the process falls into three steps:



1. Defining your objective. You’ll first need to narrow in on what you’re aiming to accomplish with your qualitative efforts.

2. Choosing your method. Next, you’ll want to choose which type of online qualitative makes the most sense for your range of needs.

3. Assessing research providers. Finally, you’ll need to do your due diligence to find the provider that is best positioned to meet your needs.

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INTRODUCTION: A NEW APPROACH TO QUALITATIVE

In the past, when companies wanted to collect qualitative data, they either had to outsource the operation completely or conduct in-person interviews and focus groups. In either instance, they could expect to spend a lot of time and money gathering the data they needed to help influence their product development and marketing choices.

Thanks to the evolution of technology, however, a number of new online qualitative research tools have emerged. Unlike the older methodologies, these platforms enable research to be conducted quickly and inexpensively. They also enable companies to engage in ongoing conversations with their target consumers. Instead of research representing a snapshot in time, these new platforms provide companies with higher-quality data that is more accurate and iterative. As a result, organizations that integrate the right online qualitative tools are better positioned to create successful products.



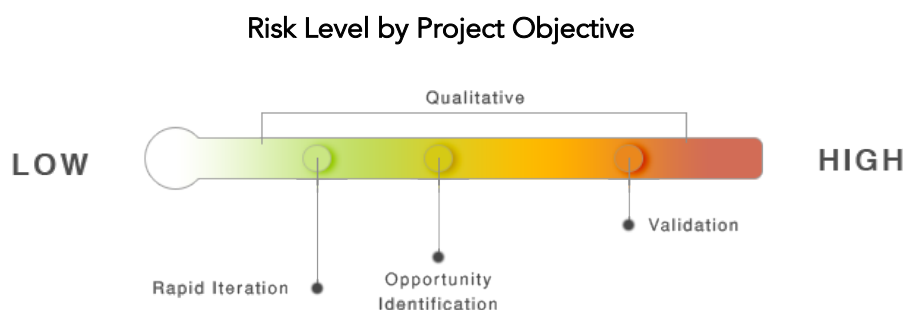
Up-to-date
higher-quality data

DEFINING YOUR OBJECTIVES: IT'S ALL ABOUT RISKS AND REWARDS

Online qualitative research can build the intuition of your team, guide interim decisions, and inspire confidence that you are moving in the right direction. But ultimately, like all market research, qualitative approaches are designed to reduce the risk of associated with business decisions.

The chart below illustrates the link between your objectives and level of risk involved in a decision. The most risk in a project typically occurs very early when deciding which opportunities to pursue, and very late when determining which solution to invest in launching.

Today, companies are using more agile online qualitative research approaches to expand their capabilities throughout the development process and address questions at a lower project risk level. This approach enables fast, iterative research while products or marketing programs are in development. Consider selecting online qualitative tools that can flex to fit your risk profile:



Rapid Iteration

One of the challenges of many market research approaches is that they are static. If you forget a question, make a wrong assumption, or learn something unexpected, the research results might just tell you that you need to conduct additional research—thereby increasing project costs and slowing down the process. By clarifying needs and iterating with consumers as you build and optimize ideas, you can shorten development cycles while increasing the likelihood of making well-informed decisions.

Opportunity Identification

If you have existing data that tells you there is a problem or opportunity in the marketplace, there is often more contextual data you need in order to formulate a solution. By observing and understanding the context of customers' shopping or usage experiences, companies can identify key pain points they could solve through products or marketing programs. Also you can dig deeper into consumers hopes and dreams, to go beyond the functional benefits to emotional drivers.

Validation

As you build and optimize ideas, sometimes you don't have the time or budget to conduct both qualitative research and surveys to validate your findings. Companies can strike a balance between sample size and depth of learning by scaling their qualitative research to between 50-100 participants.









CHOOSING YOUR METHOD:

FIVE OPTIONS FOR ONLINE QUALITATIVE

Most online tools offer both an increase in quality and a reduction in costs relative to in-person research. Overall, they make it easier than ever before to find a sample across geographies and recruit subjects quickly. They typically require lower incentives as participant travel is not required. And, because of the anonymity associated with digital communication, companies can expect the results of their research to be more helpful, as consumers are more comfortable sharing their opinions online than they are in person.²

However, not all online approaches will fit with your objectives. And cost and speed can vary significantly.

Online Qualitative Options

	Type	Best For	Cost	Speed	Objective
1	Video Interviews/Ethnography	In-context learning	\$\$\$	Slow	
2	Online Focus Groups	Group sharing	\$\$	Slow	
3	Qualitative within Surveys	Structured questions	\$	Fast	
4	Iterative Insight Communities	Group sharing, in-context learning and fast iteration	\$	Fast	  
5	Branded Communities	Long-term customer engagement	\$\$\$\$	Varies	 



Rapid Iteration



Opportunity Identification



Validation

CHOOSING YOUR METHOD: FIVE OPTIONS FOR ONLINE QUALITATIVE

- 1 Video Interviews/Ethnography.** Newer online apps allow you to record videos of events or screens as subjects perform tasks on their mobile devices. These discussions allow participants to share private information, give unbiased responses, and in some cases show and tell their experiences. However, they tend to be time-consuming to analyze relative to other approaches.
- 2 Online Focus Groups.** Online focus groups allow participants to share their experiences and build off each other's ideas. However, because participants still need to be in the same place at the same time, there typically isn't a cost or time savings vs. traditional in-person research.
- 3 Qualitative Within Surveys.** There are a growing number of tools that focus on injecting open-ended questions into large surveys. These are typically designed to add a bit more in-depth learning to structured surveys. While this method enables researchers to get more qualitative insights in their surveys, it doesn't allow for group interactions, iteration, or context.
- 4 Iterative Insight Communities.** This approach leverages a group of consumers who take part in one-on-one and/or group activities often on a "wall" similar to social media sites. Generally speaking, this approach offers the most flexibility for observation and group interactions. It also works across all devices and platforms, scaling from very small, affordable projects to more complex studies. On the downside, this method is typically not well suited for real-time interviews or long videos.
- 5 Branded Communities.** Usually consists of hundreds of customers that have opted into a private branded social media-style forum. This approach encourages participants to respond to surveys or engage in group discussions about various topics—often for little or no incentive. While communities enable companies to quickly get insights or feedback so they can iterate as they learn, they require a high volume of research among a single audience. And over time, brand evangelists begin dominate the group, making it difficult to explore areas of dissatisfaction.

ASSESSING RESEARCH PROVIDERS: FIND THE FIT FOR YOUR COMPANY

Great—you've evaluated your objectives and you know which method makes the most sense for your specific situations.

Now, it's time to look at the factors to select the which vendor is most appropriate. Below are the five key areas for consideration when selecting a specific online qualitative provider, along with some recommended questions to evaluate their fit.

1. Sample Quality The foundation of good qualitative research consists of qualified and articulate participants. Online qualitative often has better success than its in-person counterpart in driving engagement and honest responses. However, it is important to understand how your provider insures quality participation:



Sample Quality

- How are participants recruited and verified?
- What type of targeting and screening are available?
- What level of participants engagement should you expect?

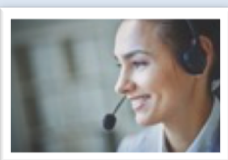
2. Actionable Insights When selecting a provider, you will want to evaluate the depth of insights you will receive. You will also want to consider how much opportunity you have to adjust and iterate with participants as you learn:



Actionable Insights

- How many touch-points with participants can you have?
- How much time will participants spend during each interaction?
- What tools do you have to engage and learn from participants?

3. Service Level One of the concerns about buying online qualitative is the amount of work it takes. The right provider will save your team time through great self-service features, automation and expert support and services:

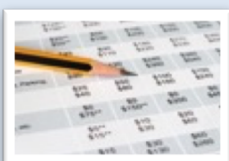


Service Level

- What services are available to insure I'm successful?
- Are activity templates available to make design and setup easier?
- What types of automation are used for moderation and reporting?

ASSESSING RESEARCH PROVIDERS: FIND THE FIT FOR YOUR COMPANY

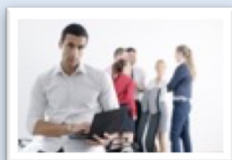
4. Budget. Online qualitative can significantly stretch your research budget, helping your teams make more informed decisions everyday. While in-person research often costs \$500–\$1,000 per person, you can often budget half that for online qualitative. Research providers often sell longer-term subscriptions that save you time and money by streamlining your research approach.



Budget

- What is the total cost per participant?
- How are participants rewarded?
- Are there subscriptions available and what are the benefits?

5. Speed/agility. Are tight timelines preventing you from doing qualitative when you need it? Newer online approaches can get you results fast, along with the ability to adjust your question's and iterate ideas as you learn.



Speed/Agility

- How fast can they launch and recruit participants?
- Can you adjust your activities as you learn on-the-fly?
- What types of instant reporting are available?

Finding the right online qualitative approach can have a big impact on the speed and impact of your marketing research. Partner with a qualitative research provider that meets your specific needs. That way, you'll get the data you need to make better decisions quickly—at a price you can afford.

CONCLUSION

When research was needed in the past, marketers had few choices. For the most part, they had to choose between focus groups and in-person interviews.

Now, thanks to advanced technological solutions which seamlessly connect researchers with qualified study participants, that's all changing. There are more options than ever before. But, if you're looking to validate your ideas—in a fast and inexpensive way—iterative insight communities may be your best option.

Companies that opt to leverage online qualitative stand to benefit tremendously:

- **They save time and money.** Instead of having to assemble groups of research participants on your own and figure out how to interview them, you gain access to a pre-qualified group of willing participants ready to start talking. Teams that choose agile iterative insight communities can adjust to research insights faster, improving their speed to market while avoiding rework.
- **They can iterate quickly.** Instead of speaking to research participants once and using that data to inform every decision, marketers can engage in conversations over days or weeks. This enables teams to iterate quickly, bringing better products to market faster.
- **They make the right decisions.** Online participants are more likely to tell researchers the truth. They won't be nervous or shy. With the right qualitative tool, they'll speak their minds—giving marketers the precise data they need to launch successful products and campaigns.

Still not sure which research provider makes the most sense for your business? Fill out the worksheet on the next page to compare vendors and narrow down your options further.

By partnering with the right vendor, your customers will be happier and your bottom line will be healthier. Good luck!

Provider Assessment Worksheet

This worksheet brings together the concepts discussed throughout this whitepaper. Use it to compare Qualitative Research vendors and start your assessment.

	Provider A	Provider B	Provider C
Sample Quality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are participants recruited and verified? • What type of targeting and screening are available? • What level of participants engagement should you expect? 			
Actionable Insights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many interactions with participants can you have? • How much time will participants spend during each interaction? • What tools do you have to engage and learn from participants? 			
Service Level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What services are available to insure I'm successful? • Are activity templates available to make design and setup easier? • What types of automation are used for moderation and reporting? 			
Budget: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the total cost per participant? • How are participants rewarded? • Are there subscriptions available and what are the benefits? 			
Speed/Agility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How fast can they launch and recruit participants? • Can you just your activities as you learn on-the-fly? • What types of instant reporting are available? 			

ABOUT DIGSITE

Digsite's insight community platform launched in 2014 to meet the changing needs of marketing research that resulted from the proliferation of the internet, social media, and mobile technology. Thanks to the power of Iterative Insights™ and Digsite Sprints, marketers can get the high-quality, actionable data they need from a group of targeted consumers in as little as one day. This enables companies to make faster, more informed decisions and respond to rapidly changing market conditions.



We Can Do the Hard Work For You

The Digsite platform can quickly identify a group of your target consumers and build a research community with expert-designed activities specific to your objective.



You Get High Quality Insights

You receive meaningful insights to better understand customer needs. Interact with your participants in a social media-style community. Ask follow-up questions and iterate ideas as you learn.



Start To Finish in as Little as 1 Day

With 1-Day Sprints you can set up and launch your community the same day, and get results in 24 hours! Multi-Day Sprints can last up to 7 days for more complex research.

Thanks to Digsite, companies can bring products and marketing programs to market in a faster, more efficient way. To learn more about how your organization can benefit from Digsite's proprietary technology, please visit www.Digsite.com. You can also reach Digsite Co-founder and Chief Customer Officer Jane Boutelle at Jane@Digsite.com.

ENDNOTES

¹ Schmidt, Sarah. "Predicted Market Research Trends for 2017." *Our-blog*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Apr. 2017. <<http://blog.marketresearch.com/predicted-market-research-trends-for-2017>>.

² Stanger, Melissa. "People Are Actually More Honest Online Than In Person." *Business Insider*. Business Insider, 28 Dec. 2012. Web. 14 Apr. 2017. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/people-are-more-honest-online-2012-12>>.

³ Schmidt, Sarah. "Predicted Market Research Trends for 2017." *Our-blog*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Apr. 2017. <<http://blog.marketresearch.com/predicted-market-research-trends-for-2017>>.

⁴ Welcome to the Home of the GreenBook Research Industry Trends (GRIT) Report." *GreenBook Research Industry Trends Report* | *Greenbook.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Apr. 2017. <<https://www.greenbook.org/grit>>.