

New Demands on Recruiting Drive the Ingenuity Barometer Sharply Higher

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A recruiter's view of the emerging trends

There's much talk these days of emerging trends in qualitative research, and from the perspective of a recruiting agency, anticipating these trends requires constant vigilance. There are changes in the mix of clientele, the types of respondents sought (and how they are being recruited), the product categories being researched, and the circumstances in which the research is actually being conducted. It's exciting and hard work.

Being pragmatists, recruiters tend to downplay the significance of all this vibrance and volatility, even though we are truly on the front lines. From this position we are the first to encounter this new wave. So rather than announcing that recruiting has been profoundly and permanently changed by emerging trends in marketing research (although this is probably true), allow me merely to point out some of the interesting changes recruiters have encountered recently.

From our perspective, specifications for respondents have become much more demanding. (Marketers would probably use words such as precise or targeted.) There was a time when most respondents would be defined simply through the use of one or two demographic criteria plus a product usage requirement. More and more these days, lifestyle characteristics are being added. For instance, certain identifiable markets, such as the gay community, are being sought out by marketers.

As well, precise distinctions are being drawn between sub-groups within a lifestyle group. For instance, groups of affluent consumers are no longer being defined by one or two demographic characteristics, such as household income and composition. The ways in which they use and reflect their wealth are also being taken into account.

Related to this, product usage criteria are also being made to work harder. No longer is mere ownership of the target product sufficient in all cases. For some research, patterns of ownership are taken into account as well. It's not enough that you own a luxury auto; it's also important what you owned before, and that your next intended purchase be a luxury auto.

We are being asked to recruit in the language of the consumer, and to meet that need, some firms have developed a staff of bilingual recruiters who recruit in languages such as Cantonese.

This type of change has had an interesting impact on recruiters. Being practical people, recruiters normally cite factors such as cost and length of time required to complete the assignment when asked to describe the foremost impact areas. But far beyond this, these changes force a rethinking of the methods traditionally employed to recruit focus group respondents. If you're faced with accurately identifying a person who matches a fairly precise pattern of behaviour, there is the question of how to detect the behaviour in the first place, and then there is the question of how to approach the person in a sufficiently professional way which avoids arousing concern that you have violated privacy.

Gone are the days when a recruiter might conceivably survive as an order-taker who merely goes through the motions using the same procedures that were always used. The Ingenuity Barometer has been forced sharply higher.

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