Take steps to prevent problematic fieldwork

By TONY SICILIANO

With American companies becoming more global, many market researchers will be working in foreign countries for the first time. Having been involved in international research for a quarter of a century (most notably eight years working for European companies), I believe I have some insights that may be helpful to foreign research neophytes.

Fieldwork is particularly problematic, and as a preamble to this discussion, I’d like to cite the case history of “the thief of Plimpton Green,” (an Englishman I’d been using to coordinate fieldwork throughout Europe). I was somewhat leery of him and had an ideal situation to test his honesty. A company wanted me to set up an extensive pretest screening program throughout Europe. This project would have been too time-consuming—so I offered it to the English coordinator with the understanding that I’d get a pre-established commission fee. He agreed, and I purposely did not get our remuneration agreement in writing. When it came time to pay up, the thief of Plimpton Green said he had no recollection of our verbal agreement.

This illustrates my degree of concern for foreign interviewing veracity. I was willing to forgo significant earnings to test the honesty of this individual.

When with a French market research agency, I was stunned to see what little emphasis there was on validation. Of course, interviewers are aware of this—and cheating can be rampant. I have two clients who had to discard foreign studies when follow-up research among the same respondents revealed that most of the initial interviews never took place.

Many overseas research suppliers have an ingenious ploy to resolve this cheating problem. If there is a request to have a separate service conduct validations, the client will be told that the country laws forbid revealing respondents’ identities. This is a lie. There are restrictions for turning over respondent names to marketing companies commissioning the research (the same as we have in the United States), however, there are no restrictions in accessing the identities solely for validation. I have done considerably more than 200 foreign studies, and in every case, questionnaires were turned over to me with complete respondent identifications.

Whenever requesting proposals from foreign research suppliers, be sure to mention up front that respondent identities have to be made available for validations. If you hear the “country laws forbid this” routine, cross the supplier off your list. When finding an agency that agrees to this provision, be sure to participate in setting up and coordinating the validation process. There is no substitute for personal involvement to ensure honest fieldwork in foreign countries.

Another helpful hint is to pay suppliers quickly. Foreign clients are notoriously late in paying for market research. I saw this as a window of opportunity and so I pay invoices within 30 days. This has resulted in high-quality fieldwork without delays. Another advantage is that I get better prices because suppliers would rather I get projects than slow-paying clients.

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NATION

Rapper cries foul over car ad spot

Rapper 50 Cent is suing a car dealer over advertisements that he says used his trademarked name without permission.

The rapper—born Curtis James Jackson III—describes himself in the lawsuit as “a hugely popular and extremely successful hip-hop music artist... known for his good looks, ‘gangsta’ image and hard knocks success story.”

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in late August, seeks more than $1 million from Gary Barbera Enterprises, which used the slogan “Just Like 50 Says!” and the 29-year-old artist’s picture in a print advertisement for a Dodge Magnum.

Barbera Enterprises marketing director Eric Gerstein told Philadelphia newspapers that 50 Cent had recorded a radio station spot promoting the station’s giveaway of a Barbera Magnum.

The print ad paraphrased the radio spot, Gerstein says. The dealership explained its position in a call with 50 Cent representatives in May and believed the matter was closed, he says.

—The Associated Press