RESEARCH • You should say that again

Opt-in can’t be stressed enough online

By STEVE JARVIS Staff Writer

A s privacy concerns over online market- ing research mount, along with publicity about the issue, the industry’s online and offline portions continue to develop separate systems for recruiting respondents. While the additional privacy protection afforded by online researchers have their advantages, they typically are too expensive for offline researchers to adopt. And researchers acknowledge that the need to maintain parallel systems is costing their companies.

“(It) definitely adds to costs and organizational complexity,” says Jennifer Park, vice president of the interactive analytical group at NFO Worldwide (formerly NFO Worldwide Inc.), based in Greenwich, Conn., which operates two separate groups.

Online marketing research is in its adolescence, and the concerns that the Web-using public has over providing credit card numbers for e-commerce transactions has spilled over to this growing industry. Online researchers have found it necessary to use a double opt-in procedure for recruiting participants for online surveys, obtaining, then verifying, permission to send questionnaires via e-mail before doing so. The firms communicate with prospective respondents by e-mail or via a Web site.

The double opt-in policy has been credited with higher average response rates for online research projects; online researchers say that after opting in, participation averages about 30% to 30%. Meanwhile, research professionals say that random-dialed telephone surveys are now often achieving response rates of only about 15%.

“It takes more work to get a respondent for online research, but you see better response rates and more engaged respondents, as opposed to telephone respondents getting a cold call,” says Ed Erickson, vice president for Modals Research Technologies Inc., an online marketing research firm based in San Francisco.

Dick Wydra, vice president and managing director of Market Facts Interactive, the online division of Arlight Heights, Ill.-based research firm Market Facts Inc., says the focus on privacy protection during recruitment helps her firm get online respondents to reveal more sensitive, personal information than in traditional offline surveys.

“Definitely, the qualitative answers are much richer and more truthful for online research projects, because they (respondents) feel that their information is appreciated and that they really have a voice,” she says.

In offline research, opting out requires consumers to write letters and make phone calls to opt out of surveys and contact information from certain firms. Practically speaking, traditional offline researchers don’t have the option of using an opt-in or double opt-in recruitment policy.

Convenient, one-click, opt-out features are already offered with some recruiting e-mails (at least those sent by reputable research companies), and a new bill gaining strong support in Congress may require all unsolicited e-mail to provide an easy opt-out method. By comparison, offline research practices, such as random-dialed telephone surveys, usually have no procedure for obliterating people’s approval before calling. (Once the data are collected, however, both online and offline researchers must respect firms’ strict privacy policies regarding how personal information and data are used and protected.)

Bill MacInity, president of the New York- based Internet Marketing research Organiza- tion (IMRO) and also president of Modals Research Technologies in San Francisco, says the relationship with online respondents often becomes more fruitful simply because a double opt-in policy makes respondents feel they have chosen to establish the relationship.

“Offline researchers suffer the consequences of not building a relationship. Respondents (in offline surveys) don’t cooperate as much, and are less forthcoming with information,” MacInity contends.

Researchers say having professionals on- staff trained in the specifics of online research—including the more stringent double opt-in privacy policies—is necessary for many major research firms. However, the need to promote a firm’s online research proficiency by maintaining a separate online division increases overhead, often without a corresponding increase in total revenue. Research pros say the cost of two separate departments (for online and offline research) can be significant because it often requires a bigger payroll.

“Two separate departments means adding new staff for both the collection methods that are not necessarily increasing your overall business,” says Wally Belden, director of Internet research at St. Louis-based Marx Internet Marketing Research Inc. Belden notes that many online research clients are not new customers for a research firm, but rather established clients switching to the Internet for faster response times.

Despite the costs, marketing research industry sources say the trend in research sys- tems are expected to remain the status quo for the time being.

“Clients still want to know that the company has expertise in online research and the nuances involved,” Wydra says.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MW HEADLINE TAKEN TO TASK

I appreciate the prominence you gave my article (April 23, page 39), with the designation of Special Report, “so I hope you will take my comments in the way intended. As a marketing professional who specializes in Asian markets, a point that I always give my clients is to understand your market.” To us in Chakrin, this means taking the time to understand cultural nuances when studying ethnic markets. Because each ethnicity varies drastically from others, it is important to understand these differences and not make generalizations. This is true for both Hispanic and Asian markets.

By retitling my article “Chinese Checkers,” you may inadvertently have chosen a stigmatized and potentially offensive (sub- stitute). Although the title was eye-catching, I believe you may have alienated some of your readers. With the tensions surrounding U.S.-Chinese relationships, it seems particularly insensitive to use such a stereotypical name.

I have taken an informal poll in our offices and find that both Asians and Hispanics are somewhat put off by the title. I’m sure this was an unintentional result … and I don’t believe there was any ill intent. But this is the point that I make in the article: (that) unless you take the time to understand your market, you run the risk of not reaching out, (in the worst case) offending, some segments. In this case, I believe your attempt to find a clever and catchy title may have diluted the message in the article.

Nancy K. Shimamoto Manager, Asian Business Strategy Chakrin Research Inc.

Redwood Shores, Calif.

Imagine,
Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

The Rapid Response Research System allows you to quantitatively evaluate concepts and qualitatively diagnose, analyze and fine-tune them...all in one research stop.

In this multiple concept testing system, respondents answer a series of closed end questions using handheld electronic keypads that allow you to view results in real-time. A group discussion follows, allowing more in-depth probing of respondents' quantitative answers.

Please call, email or visit our website for more information on combining quantitative and qualitative research.

T: 201.599.8539
Email: info@hauserandassociates.com
www.hauserandassociates.com

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!

Imagine, Your Quantitative and Qualitative Needs Satisfied in One Project!