



## The Watertight Way

### Five steps to invaluable market research

Every marketer wants to make the most of their market research – using it to both create compelling content and to generate insights which propel their business forward. Neither of these is a simple task, so how can you ensure your research achieves what you need? It's all in the planning.

To prevent sleepless nights when your research is in the field and make sure you get what you need when you come to analyse your data, this guide outlines our strategic approach to developing questionnaires. Made up of five achievable steps, The Watertight Way is based on lessons learnt while designing more than 2,700 marketing questionnaires over the last two decades.

#### Step 1. Whitespace exploration (SEED approach)

Before starting any research, you need to know exactly which area you want to explore. Unless you're developing cutting-edge technology or receive warning of a new regulation, the chances are that your area of interest has been researched before. Finding a golden, untapped, emerging business trend that you can own feels like a daunting task.

Good news – you don't have to. It's a common misconception that you must identify The Next Big Thing to research.

Most people ask: "What *hasn't* been researched before?". But this is an almost impossible question to answer. Instead, we ask: "What *has* been researched before? How can it be improved and taken to the next level?". This shift in mindset ensures you create research that is relevant, differentiated and taps into current trends – rather than wasting time trying to invent a new trend.

To find the idea to fuel your research, we use what we call the SEED approach:

- **Seek** the views and opinions of subject experts, journalists and business leaders. What are they interested in? What are the big topics that people are just starting to discuss?
- **Exploit** your internal knowledge assets. Create a diverse internal project team with different views on your customers and business. When you have a topic in mind, interview them to get their insights. What unexpected nuggets do they reveal?

- **Explore** potential research themes, hypotheses and indicative questions. Research what is already out there – what models, data sets or news milestones can you use, build on or incorporate into questions?
- **Develop** two or three story angles and hypotheses that build on existing research and the thoughts you have collated so far. Share example questions with the most insightful and interested internal stakeholders.

## **Step 2. Align content and research**

Before developing the full questionnaire, decide what content you need to produce as part of your marketing campaign.

- What types of marketing collateral will you create – a report? Infographics?
- What story will each piece of marketing tell? How many data points will that require?
- If you could write the PR headlines for your campaign, what would they be? What would an ideal report structure look like?
- Do you want to segment the results to produce a leader vs. laggard story, a league table or an index?  
Do you need to look at sectors, cities or regions?

Ensuring your research aligns with your content leads to better results and fewer questionnaire revisions because you know exactly what outputs you want.

## **Step 3. Weigh up quant vs qual**

There's an inherent assumption in the marketing world that quantitative research is more credible than qualitative. In some cases, it is, for instance when a project requires statistical comparisons between job functions, markets, regions or segments. In other cases, it's not the most appropriate approach, can be limited to a list of options and lacks depth.

When deciding between qualitative or quantitative research, think about the content the research is going to fuel and work backwards as it may in fact be a far better solution to combine the two.

- Do you need to know qualitatively the reason behind why a trend is occurring?
- Do you need to start with qualitative research to reveal unexpected insights into the topic?
- Do you then need to use quantitative research to add statistical meaning?
- Will your content benefit from quotes and insights directly from executives?

Combining quantitative findings with qualitative interviews is not only robust but helps your campaign stand out from the competition.

#### **Step 4. Choose the right audience**

Who will have the most relevant view on the topic you are researching? Your customer base is not always the best option. Consider:

- Who is best placed to talk to about this topic? Whose views will be of most interest/authority to your customers?
- Is there more than one set of respondents you should be speaking to (for example, leaders and employees)? Can you compare gaps between the two? And do you need different questions for each?
- How senior should respondents be? C-suite executives or manager level?
- What would be a nationally or internationally representative sample size?
- How many respondents do you need if you are to segment the data by sectors, cities, regions or business size?

Knowing this will ensure you collect meaningful data, ask the questions relevant to each group and reduce the dropout rate.

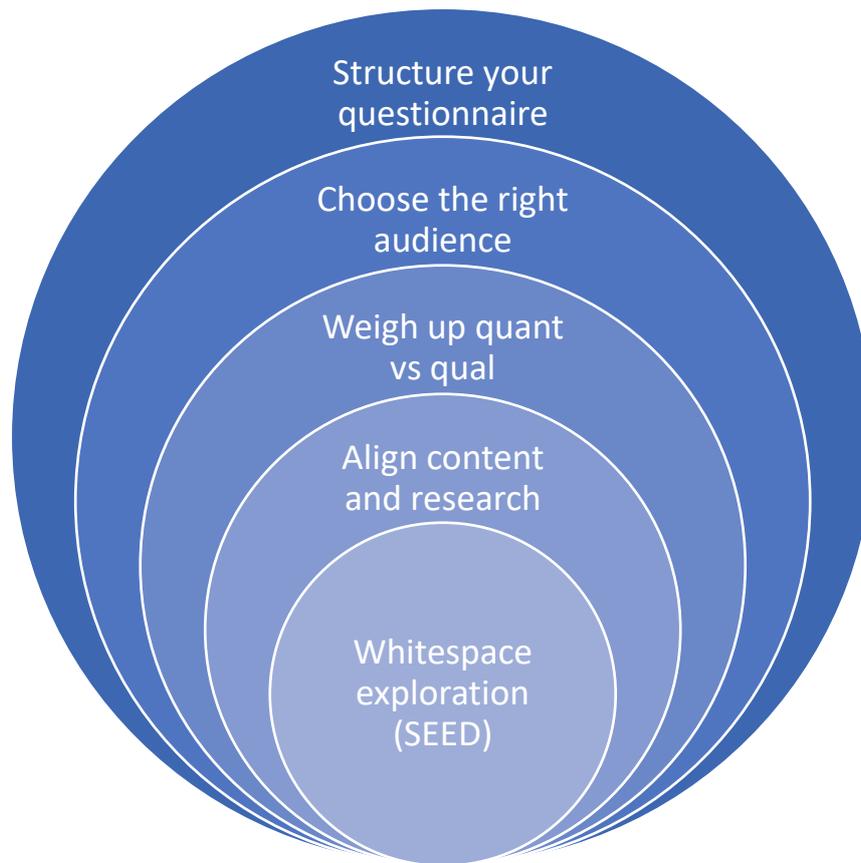
#### **Step 5. Structure your questionnaire**

It is only now that you have all the information you need to start structuring your questionnaire.

- Create a framework for your questionnaire based on your hypothesis and content plan.
- Develop an initial long-list of research questions. Identify the 'must haves'.
- Keep questions short so that answers are unambiguous.
- Think about how you would write a sentence based on the data point that would come out of each question. If it is complex or uninteresting, rewrite or delete the question.
- Check your questions will deliver the data you need to develop the content you have planned.
- From the viewpoint of your customers, constantly ask "so what?" – why would they care enough to read the results?
- Put yourself in the respondent's shoes. Would you be willing to spend the time answering the questions? Are they engaging? Overly sensitive? Use appropriate language for your target audience.

Following these five steps is a watertight approach to maximising your research investment, ensuring your results reveal credible insights well worth the time of busy executives.

## The Watertight Research Framework



We hope you find this guide useful as you plan your upcoming campaigns leaving nothing to chance. If it has raised any questions or you need help creating actionable research, get in touch.

Best,  
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