

Online Research Communities

BLOG

INSIGHT

JOE STANLEY 17 MAY 2017

Online Research Communities

What are they? – “Snapshot”

Here at MediaCom North, the Real World Insight team love running Online Research Communities. We see them as an exciting and innovative way to get under the skin of consumers – delving into the intricacies of their relationships with brands. Essentially a Community is an online portal that brings the benefits of focus groups to a larger scale project on a continually evolving and interactive digital platform. Through discussion and task based interaction, Communities allow qualitative research to be conducted at a much deeper level – whilst also bringing together different audiences from across the UK. They can run from one or two weeks or up to a year or longer. The flexible nature of Communities means we can gather real-time reactions to events and situations that may occur during this period – this might be a new creative idea or campaign.

What do they entail?

1. **Recruitment** – Community members are recruited to fit a defined audience make up. This could be as simple as “upmarket women” or it could hone in on their interests e.g. people who are looking to decorate their home. Respondents are incentivised – usually ranging from £4 to £40 per person, per task (though amounts do, of course, vary between projects).
2. **Set-up** – Alongside recruitment, the RWI team will be working hard behind the scenes to develop a series of daily tasks for respondents. These tasks look at the objective of the research, who we’re talking to, the wording and which tool will be most relevant. A list of tools is provided later.
3. **Going Live** – Once the set-up is complete and we have recruited the desired amount of respondents (usually around 100), they’re invited to join the Community via an email link and the Community goes live. The invitation-only, private nature of the Community tackles the issue of company information being shared openly and also means we can better control the numbers and quality of the project.
4. **Fieldwork** – Tasks are launched for Community members to get involved with and trained moderators will be on hand to ask for more detail where required and hone output. Analysis of responses will help moderators ascertain the direction of further activities, taking advantage of the dynamic nature of these Communities.
5. **Analysis** – Whilst this takes place throughout the fieldwork, the overall and more rounded analysis can only take place once all activities are complete. Moderators work with project leads to develop an insightful and useful report to be presented face to face to the stakeholders.
6. **Implementation** – The beauty of running the Communities in-house is that the results can be discussed with planners and

fed straight back into the planning process.

One of the reasons that we love an online research community is the **range of tools** we have at our disposal to help pull out the insights most relevant to our client and their objective. Here's what we have:



Blog – Allow respondents to express and project themselves creatively. Captures photos, videos, words on a blank canvas



Discussion – Facilitate a lively (open or focussed) discussion where members of the community can interact with each other



Poll – To deliver a quick lens on the community's sentiment – deliver instant feedback



MarkUp – Show visuals and ask



respondents to drop pins in areas of interest. They can provide text-based responses and emoticons to tell you how the stimulus makes them feel.



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So, when and why would you use one?

Due to the ability to mould the platform to specific requirements and objectives, we believe an Online Community brings with it many benefits. Primarily, they allow us to explore a range of issues within a topic – answering several objectives with one project.

Online communities could be considered for the following reasons:

- **Getting to the “why”** – The real specialism of online communities is getting to understand *why* people think the way they do, are making the decisions they're making or behaving in a certain way.
- **You need to talk to a larger number of people than a focus group allows** – Communities allow us to talk to people in numbers of up to 100+ respondents from across the entire country, if necessary.
- **The subject is potentially sensitive** – The anonymity of a computer screen often means that respondents will engage more thoroughly and honestly than they might in a focus group setting.
- **The brief is complex with numerous objectives and questions to answer** – Communities can be set over a lengthy period, meaning that we can set various tasks and tackle several objectives. It also allows clients to observe and influence the

discussion as it happens.

- **You don't know exactly what you should be asking** – As the community unfolds we can often uncover things we may not have thought to ask. A respondent lead community can also lead to truer and more insightful findings.
- **You want to know what consumers think of your creative or creative concepts.**

To date, we've had some brilliant results from online communities and have uncovered some real nuggets of insight for our clients. With online content constantly evolving, we expect (and hope!) that online communities will move with it and continue to be a vital tool for client research projects.

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