



LEO J. SHAPIRO & ASSOCIATES LLC

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## So You Decided To Do An Online Research Survey... Now What?

*by Jackie Lorch*

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Online research could be the right choice: it reduces field costs, allows you to do studies showing concepts, packaging, ads and more, and lets you reach people who may not be willing to take a phone survey. And there's evidence to show that people are less affected by the desire to please when taking surveys online, often providing rich open-end response.

But, before you plunge into the world of online research, here are 5 things to think about.

1. First, slow down! Some aspects of the online research process are faster than other modes, but you probably need to take even more time with the survey design. Online surveys are self-administered – there's no interviewer to get you out of trouble if your survey is confusing and instructions aren't clear. If your survey contains many large, daunting grid questions, a respondent may quit in the middle -- almost certainly resulting in a biased sample of completes. Time spent at the questionnaire design stage to keep people engaged and interested will pay a huge dividend later when you come to analyze your results.
2. Take your time in the field too. You can probably get all the responses you need for your online survey within a day, but should you? There's evidence that people who respond to a survey within the first 24 hours are different from those who respond later – more older people respond earlier, for example. Some people only check their survey on weekends, others during the week. Leave your survey in field for 7 days if you can.

3. Select a research provider with experience in all kinds of online research studies, who can provide a high-quality sample: for example the sample should have been recruited from multiple sources, not just a few, to ensure broader representation. And underlying sources of the sample should be consistent so your results can be reproduced in future studies. Ask lots of questions. Your research results will only be as good as your sample source.
4. Is your study multi-country? If so, make sure you're working with a research group that has locals on the ground in those countries. Cultural differences can be subtle and difficult to anticipate. If you ask respondents to tell you their bank account number in the Netherlands for example, people will be happy to respond, but don't try that in the US! It's illegal to ask someone's race in France and inappropriate to ask how many children are in the household in China.
5. When moving a tracking study from offline to online, run the study side-by-side for a while. There will almost certainly be differences in results due to mode effects, so you'll want to benchmark carefully before moving fully to online. Work with a research group that can provide phone and online samples so you can test easily.

**Key Takeaway**

*The online survey is a powerful new research tool. When managed correctly, its advantages can make an important contribution to your information needs.*

Over the next few weeks, we'll be focusing on some specific aspects of quality research online including: survey design tips; how to select representative samples online; professional respondents – how worried should you be?; respondent conditioning, and more.

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*For more information or to discuss a project,  
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