



International Center  
for Journalists  
Advancing Quality Journalism Worldwide

The Business of News

# Know Your Audience

Increasing Readership and Advertising Through Market Research

By Carrol Dadisman





International Center  
for Journalists

## About the Author

Carrol Dadisman has been a journalist for almost 50 years. He has worked as a reporter, editor and publisher in the southern United States and has consulted for newspapers in Eastern Europe and Russia. As a Knight International Press Fellow, he worked with four Russian newspapers, focusing on the benefits of conducting market research. During his fellowship he wrote a handbook for Russian newspaper managers on how to gain more readers and advertisers through market research. *Know Your Audience* grew out of that booklet. Recently, Dadisman has been a consultant and trainer for several Russian and Eastern European newspapers including *The St. Petersburg Times*.

## About the International Center for Journalists

The International Center for Journalists, a non-profit, professional organization, promotes quality journalism worldwide in the belief that independent, vigorous media are crucial in improving the human condition.

Since 1984, the International Center for Journalists has worked directly with more than 50,000 journalists from 176 countries. Aiming to raise the standards of journalism, ICFJ offers hands-on training, workshops, seminars, fellowships and international exchanges to reporters and media managers around the globe.

At ICFJ, we believe in the power of journalism to promote positive change.

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## Introduction

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Newspapers everywhere face increasing, intense competition for readers' attention and advertisers' business. Newspaper editors and managers must learn more about the needs and desires of both readers and advertisers if their papers are to survive and grow in the future. And the learning must be an ongoing process, because those needs and desires change frequently in a rapidly changing world.

For newspapers in emerging democracies, learning more about their readers and advertisers is especially important. Many of those newspapers have limited experience with advertising. And, historically, some have not had direct business relationships with their readers, who subscribe to newspapers through the postal service or buy them through independent merchants.

For newspaper officials anywhere to assume that they know how best to serve readers and advertisers, just because they have served them successfully in the past, is a formula for failure. Readers frequently find new sources of news. Advertisers are lured by new outlets for advertising messages. Readers' and advertisers' lives, interests and businesses also constantly change, bringing new demands to those who seek their patronage.

## Americans Had To Learn Too

As an American newspaper editor, I once thought—as many international editors do—that I knew what was best for my readers. I thought that my fellow journalists and I should decide what information readers needed and wanted. When we produced the newspaper and made it available, we thought, readers naturally would want to buy it. And the newspaper would be so popular with the potential customers that advertisers want their messages to reach, that the advertisers would have no choice but to place their ads in the newspaper.

But later in my years as editor, and then as a newspaper publisher, I learned the error of my ways. Our newspaper and other newspapers did not continue to attract readers as successfully as in the past. Reader habits changed, reader lifestyles changed and reader choices increased. When they did, newspaper circulations dropped and advertisers found other ways to reach them. Criticisms of newspapers grew—especially from readers who said you

are no longer important in my life, and from advertisers who said they didn't like the newspaper or didn't find it effective.

## Newspapers Turned to Research

So newspapers began to use market research—both quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative research most often is done in professional surveys. There also are less expensive, more informal ways to obtain representative responses from large groups. But market surveys done by professional researchers, using well-tested methods to obtain true samples of total opinion in the market, are the most reliable and most widely accepted.

Qualitative research is done through such methods as focus groups and others that permit probing and follow-up questions in order to obtain more extensive information.

Using the results of such research, editors and managers began to design new sections of newspapers, to add color and illustrations, to broaden news coverage to include more activities and issues that touch readers' lives. They found ways to listen to readers, and to respond to the public's real needs and desires.

Newspaper people also found that research could help attract and build more productive relationships with advertisers. We used market research to demonstrate the effectiveness of newspaper advertising and to gather

information advertisers need in their own businesses—which in turn made our newspapers more valuable to advertisers.

“Market research can enable a newspaper to identify the profile, needs and desires of its readers...”

—Achal Mehra

The newspaper where I was publisher in Tallahassee, Florida, used a combination of professional surveys, focus groups and meetings with readers (all methods that are described in this manual) to help define and design new sections to build reader interest. In a period of about 10 years, we added to the newspaper special weekly tabloid sections on business, health and fitness, entertainment and culture, sports and family interests.

We used research to help us redesign the newspaper into a much more colorful product with more illustrations, a new weather package, an expanded opinion and commentary section, a weekly environmental page and improved science coverage. These special sections helped us sell more single-copy newspapers, and letters from readers indicated they helped to retain subscribers who otherwise might have been lost.

## Increasing Appeal to Advertisers

We used written questionnaires, telephone surveys and meetings (See

Chapter X) to learn more about what advertisers and potential advertisers needed and expected from the newspaper. Their response indicated greater satisfaction, and advertising revenue for our newspaper grew every year.

We used professional market research to identify the buying habits and major purchase plans of our audience, information which helped to prove to advertisers that the newspaper reached the audience that was ready to buy its products. We also used professional research to measure store images in the public's mind—which stores had the best merchandise, the best prices, the best sales people, the most attractive places to shop, the best service. The newspaper surveys were the only access these retailers had to this information, and our sharing it with them helped to solidify our relationships with them, as well as to enable them to improve their own customer effectiveness.

## Market Research Used Around the World

Market research has been advocated and effectively employed by newspaper practitioners and consultants throughout the world.

Achal Mehra, an Asian journalism professor and consultant, edited and contributed to *Newspaper Management in the New Multimedia Age*, published by Asian Mass Communication in 1988. Mehra wrote:

*Market research can enable a newspaper to identify the profile,*

*needs and desires of its readers.....Market research companies routinely compile newspaper readership profiles, including distribution of readers by age, sex, income levels, occupation, education, race, household size, and consumption patterns. Using advanced statistical techniques, like factor analysis and demographic tables, it is now possible to locate and define clusters of customers. It is also possible to develop the psychographic profiles of readers. The information is critical to advertisers making decisions on placing ads for particular products in a newspaper. But the information is also a gold mine for editors as well to identify the interests of their readers."*

Mehra related the "rude discovery" made by the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, one of the most successful general interest magazines in that country:

*In the space of just four years its circulation slumped by nearly 56 percent, from 400,000 in 1976 to 175,000 in 1980. Market research revealed that the magazine had slumbered while its market was whittled away by snappy news magazines like Sunday, India Today and specialized publications like Sportsweek, Business India, Stardust, etc.*

*"The magazine concluded that it had to spruce itself up, improve its readability and broaden its coverage. The refurbished*

*magazine is a testament to editorial adjustment to the new media environment."*

In Asia, in the United States, around the world, newspaper editors and managers require the "commercial savvy" identified by Mehra.

"Before formulating their editorial, marketing and advertisement-boosting strategies, they must familiarize themselves with their media environment, including the region's population, literacy, educational level, number of households, topography, income levels, competition, etc."

Several reliable methods exist for acquiring this information and for staying in close touch with a newspaper's customers, both readers and advertisers. The compelling need for all of us is to use those techniques frequently in order to strengthen our businesses.

## Professional Market Research

When newspapers can afford it, professional market research is the most comprehensive, reliable means of taking the pulse of readers and advertisers.

Professional market research is relatively new in some regions of the world, but it can be made available almost anywhere. Professional market research, when properly done, provides the most accurate, most extensive reflection of public opinion, reader opinion or advertiser opinion on a variety of questions and issues.

In many markets around the world, syndicated surveys are done of circulation and/or readership of various publications, along with demographic data about these readers. The French company Media Mar and subsidiaries of America's Gallup organization conduct such studies in Europe. So do regional companies. In Asia, the Asian Businessman Readership Survey is conducted by Research Services Ltd. of the United Kingdom, in conjunction with Frank Small & Associates, one of the regional research companies that also offers separate surveys. Asia Pacific Marketing Services conducts Asian Profiles in conjunction with Survey Research Group, another regional company.

Newspapers that subscribe to the surveys of these businesses sometimes contract with them to ask additional questions, in the same surveys, exclusively for their information and use. The most complete package is the dedicated market research study. Research specifically designed and ordered for the newspaper yields a large quantity of useful information to help the newspaper improve its service to readers and advertisers. A carefully prepared study of several hundred (or more) representative individuals in its market can provide the newspaper with dozens of pieces of information on which to act over many months.

Such a study can be a major, vital part of a newspaper's strategy to increase its circulation and readership and to broaden its advertising base. It can be the cornerstone of a successful marketing plan.

## Lower-Cost Research Methods

Other effective methods also are available—at little or no cost—for newspapers to gain valuable information about readers and advertisers and to learn what could make newspapers more attractive to them. Newspapers are encouraged to use some or all of these methods to complement their periodic professional studies, or as a substitute when resources are not available for professional research.

Most of these alternate market research techniques can be conducted by the newspaper and its employees. Others can be conducted by part-time workers employed specifically for the research.

The results will not be as comprehensive and will not reflect responses of the total population as



precisely as professional market research. But they can provide samplings of information that:

1. Help the newspaper discover ways to better serve its customers, and,
2. Inform its executives and employees about opinions and preferences of readers and advertisers.

Both of these results will build a stronger, more successful newspaper.

These lower-cost research methods include:

- Focus Groups
- Meetings with Readers or Advertisers
- Telephone Surveys of Readers or Advertisers
- Mailed Questionnaires for Advertisers
- In-Paper Questionnaires for Readers
- Face-to-Face Interviews

The first sections of this guidebook discuss how newspapers can plan, organize, conduct and use these low-cost forms of research—and how some already have done so.

The final section discusses professional market research, how it should be planned and conducted and how it can be used to improve newspapers.



## Focus Group Research

Focus groups are very effective for conducting qualitative research, and they can be employed at little or no cost. They work well for certain kinds of newspaper research, including these:

- A newspaper considering a new publication, a new design, a new section or new features can “try out” a prototype on the focus group or groups.

This is a technique we used successfully in Tallahassee, and one many other newspapers have used prior to launching a new component. Reaction from focus groups frequently helps the newspaper fine-tune the addition—or sometimes make wholesale changes—before introducing it to the public.

The *Dallas Morning News*, as part of a comprehensive research effort to learn more about the growing Hispanic population in the Texas city, used focus

group discussions to test the prototype of a section targeted at Hispanics.

- A newspaper seeking to target a certain demographic audience can employ focus groups to learn more about the population segment and its preferences.

The newspaper may seek more young readers, or it may have experienced an unexplained readership decline among men, or it may have weak circulation in a certain geographic area. A focus group of the appropriate demographic segment can probe reasons for low readership or circulation—and ways of making the newspaper more desirable.

- A newspaper contemplating significant change in the way it deals with its customers—readers, advertisers or others—can use focus groups to gauge probable reaction.

Many businesses, including newspapers, incur the wrath of customers when they make changes in service, prices, billing, content, policy or other features of their relationship with customers. This problem can be overcome—or at least minimized—by testing the changes on focus group participants and listening to their reactions and recommendations.

- A newspaper seeking to learn more about its image—about advertisers' or readers' attitudes toward the newspaper—could gain in-depth knowledge with probing questions asked in a focus group.

Dee Carr, who has worked in England and southeast Asia as a newspaper market researcher, writes in *Newspaper Management in the Multimedia Age*:

*A qualitative study (focus group) can be undertaken among media buyers and marketing executives. Such a study would aim to establish attitudes toward a publication and try to identify key factors which inhibit them from recommending or using the publication...A study of this sort may well throw up new perspectives which may help to sell a publication more effectively.*

- A newspaper can combine qualitative (focus group) and quantitative (survey) research to gain more information and perspective.

The two forms of research can be conducted simultaneously with a similar set of questions (as in the Yekaterinburg example below). Another approach is to use focus group research to further explore and elaborate on information garnered in a survey.

## Elements of Focus Group Research

Focus groups are so-called because they *focus* on a few questions or points, and they explore those in detail. The groups are usually composed of six to 10 people who voice their reactions or respond to

questions and follow-up questions posed by a trained moderator.

Some professional researchers may tell you that focus groups must be led by professional researcher-moderators, preferably in a neutral setting where the sponsor (the newspaper) is not identified—and where newspaper representatives view the focus group only from behind a double-mirror (hiding their presence).

Whatever training he or she possesses, the focus group leader is a key to the success of the exercise.

Others, however, will reassure you that employees of the newspaper can be trained to moderate focus groups, and that they can be effectively conducted on the newspaper premises. David L. Morgan, author of *The Focus Group Guidebook*, encourages managers to take this approach—provided they have a basic understanding of focus groups and complete the preparation:

*At one level, focus groups seem simple indeed: You talk to people, and you report what they said. At another level, focus groups require a great many decisions: Whom will you talk to? How will you recruit them? What questions should you ask? How will you moderate the groups? How will you analyze the data?*

Morgan's book and others provide easily understandable guides to successful focus group

implementation. Universities and research companies also have access to helpful do-it-yourself materials.

My Tallahassee newspaper employed both kinds of focus groups—ones conducted away from newspaper premises by a professional researcher, and ones conducted by an astute newspaper manager with generalized training. We found them equally effective.

## Focus Group Leader

Whatever training he or she possesses, the focus group leader is a key to success of the exercise. He or she should be trained in the techniques of leading and provoking group discussion—planning, questioning, probing, soliciting responses, encouraging discussion and keeping the group focused on the research subjects.

The focus group leader should not try to *control* the group or its responses. Spontaneity, natural reactions and elaborations of the participants are keys to gaining the desired information from focus groups. Rather, the leader must elicit those responses and interactions, while taking care to keep the subject matter *focused* on the research questions.

The focus group leader/moderator can be—but does not have to be—a newspaper professional, or have special knowledge about newspapers. He or she just needs to understand the issues to be researched, and the choices faced by the newspaper.

Regardless of whether the moderator is a newspaper employee, he or she should remain neutral throughout the

session, not seeking to defend the newspaper or respond on its behalf.

A separate person should be present to take notes on the responses or to record the session on video or audio tape. The focus group leader must devote full attention to the group conversation.

## Focus Group Participants

Identification of focus group participants depends upon the information being sought. Newspapers conducting only one or a few focus groups but seeking information from a broad segment of the population should make certain that group participants include a demographic variety; i.e., a range of ages, occupations, incomes, interests, areas of residence, etc., as well as a mix of males and females.

On the other hand, if a new section or feature of the newspaper is directed primarily to one population segment, such as students, or senior citizens, or working women, obviously focus group participants should be selected from that segment.

To be successful, it must be a discussion, with participants free to speak to each other and engage in questions and answers with each other as well as the focus group leader.

The same guidelines apply in the case of a focus group for advertisers. Make up of the group or groups will depend

on the application to various advertiser groups of the new program or characteristic of the newspaper being researched through the focus group.

For all focus groups, willing, knowledgeable participants should be sought. If a prospective participant is hesitant or negative about participating, it probably is better to seek another who readily agrees and seems interested in the focus group discussion. Participants should be recruited more than a week prior to the focus group, then re-contacted on the day prior to the focus group to confirm their plan to attend.

## Preparation

The focus group leader should invite the participants and ask them to complete any preparation necessary before the discussion, such as reading a sample of what is to be discussed. The leader also should complete his or her own preparation, including familiarity with the subject to be discussed and phrasing of questions designed to elicit the kind of information the sponsor seeks.

## Conducting the Discussion

For the discussion itself, the focus group leader needs to make the participants feel comfortable. An informal, “small talk” discussion at the beginning—and a reassurance that all they are being asked for is their candid opinions—should help to put them at ease and facilitate the rest of the discussion.

After this opening, the group leader can begin with some of the prepared questions—but should also use impromptu, follow-up questions and

encourage discussion among group members. The focus group is not designed to reach a consensus, but neither is it simply a group interview, where each participant in turn records an answer to a set of questions prepared in advance.

To be successful, it must be a discussion, with participants free to speak to each other and engage in questions and answers with each other as well as with the focus group leader. But the leader must help to guide this discussion. He/she must ensure that the discussion includes responses that provide data being sought by the sponsor, and the rationale behind that data.

## Chelyabinsk and Vyborg Focus Groups

To demonstrate the technique to newspaper managers and editors, I conducted informal focus groups in Chelyabinsk, Russia, in August, 1998, and in Vyborg, Russia, in August, 1999—while on consulting missions to those newspapers.

Both groups focused on questions about sources of news, images of newspapers in those cities and the kinds of additional content that would be useful to readers and prospective readers.

In Chelyabinsk, a majority of the participants said they get most of their news and information from television, and newspaper reading in this particular group was more likely to be central newspapers than *Chelyabinski Rabochii* or *Vecherny Chelyabinsk*.

However, all participants were readers at times of the two local daily newspapers, and each of them said they find the two papers informative in several areas—local laws, regional events, cultural life, industry openings and closings and government activities. One praised the permanence and impact of newspapers, saying, “They leave a trail.” Another said newspapers are more reliable and complete than television.

The participants disagreed on whether the newspapers are better than before 1991, and they were not sure who owns the local newspapers and whether any government is involved in their ownership. (It is not, according to owners of *Rabochii* and *Evening Chelyabinsk*.)

Asked what additional content they would like to see in the two newspapers, one focus group participant said he would like to see more features on the history of the area and lakes in the region, as one of the newspapers formerly published. There was disagreement over whether content of the two papers should be broadened. Some participants said specialized publications exist for subjects like business, health, sports and others—and that the local newspapers should stick to what they do best.

In Vyborg, focus group participants were more likely to be readers of local newspapers, although television also was the major source of news—especially national news—for this group. The Vyborg residents easily recognized the “slant” of a newspaper owned by government and another owned by a local political operative.

They liked the newspaper with which I was consulting, *Vyborg Reports*, but preferred more frequent (than twice a week) publication. They also desired more investigative articles about government and other subjects.

Professional market research is relatively new in some regions of the world, but it can be made available almost anywhere.

Both focus groups were conducted for demonstration purposes. To be effective research vehicles for the newspapers, additional focus groups would need to be conducted—and the subjects of discussion would need to be narrowed to focus on how one newspaper could serve its readers better.

## Yekaterinburg Focus Group Research

When Ural INSO company conducted market research for *Podrobnosti* in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in June 1998, focus groups were one of the methods used to gather research.

The market survey was designed, in part, to gather information about what articles and features in the newspaper were most popular—both with readers of *Podrobnosti* and with readers of other newspapers. Both groups were given two issues of the newspaper to read, and researchers talked with them on a subsequent day.

The 300 participants in the survey also were asked a set of questions about what additional information they would like to see in *Podrobnosti*, what content is important and appropriate for newspapers and what frequency and price for newspapers is most convenient.

Some participants were questioned in individual interviews, but researchers also recorded responses to the questions from focus group participants. The focus groups added another dimension to the survey, permitting researchers to ask those participants follow-up questions that added to the data gathered for *Podrobnosti*.



## Meetings with Readers or Advertisers

Newspaper-organized meetings with readers and advertisers are designed for direct communication with members of these two groups. They differ from focus groups in several important ways. They are less structured, they can range over a larger number of topics, and they can include more participants than focus groups.

The readers and advertisers may be invited representatives of a particular group, or—in the case of readers—they may those who responded to an open invitation issued through an announcement in the newspaper.

Some newspapers hold such meetings on a semi-annual basis, or on special occasions such as a newspaper anniversary or the unveiling of a new feature or section for readers or a new program for advertisers. More frequent meetings, on a wider variety of topics, are recommended for newspapers to stay in closer

touch with reader and advertiser needs and expectations.

Whatever the frequency and attendance at these meetings, it is important for some of the top editors and managers of the newspaper to attend, and for others to receive verbal or written reports on what was said. It also is important for people in “front-line” jobs—such as journalists who write and edit and agents who sell and handle advertising—to attend—so that they hear first-hand from the readers and advertisers that their work is designed to serve. But newspaper attendees should be a limited cross section, so that they do not outnumber the visitors.

It also is important that newspaper representatives respond to specific questions asked by visitors, but that they do not become defensive or attempt to answer every criticism. Their primary roles in the meeting are to listen and learn.

## Reader Meetings

If specific readers or reader groups are to be invited to meetings, a written invitation should come from the top executive of the newspaper, with a response requested. The short invitation letter (preferably no more than one page) should indicate that the newspaper is attempting to improve its service to readers and needs the opinions of the invitee and others to plan and design those improvements.

In some cases, the improvements will be specific new initiatives planned by the newspaper, which can be

mentioned generally in the letter of invitation. In other cases, the meeting will be a kind of pulse-checking to see how this group of readers is reacting to the newspaper—and to get ideas on how the paper can better serve readers’ needs.

## Arrangements for the Meeting

Invitations can be extended to 25 to 30 persons, with the expectation that no more than 15 to 18, a workable number, will be able to attend. The meetings should be at a time of day or evening convenient to the particular group being invited. They can be held either at the newspaper or in another convenient location.

Persons to be invited could come from a list of the newspaper’s subscribers, from lists provided by a business or professional association, from lists provided by a club or association or from any source that might include a representative number of newspaper readers. The list could come from names of those who have written letters to the newspaper in recent months.

The invitation letter should indicate approximately how long the reader meeting will last. For groups of 15 to 18, usually about 90 minutes is optimum, with a limit of no more than two hours. For smaller groups, one hour should suffice.

## ‘Open Invitation’ Meetings

In the case of “open invitation” meetings, readers may be invited through an announcement or advertisement in the newspaper—or in other media outlets such as radio or television. The announcements should

Dear (reader's name):

We at (name of newspaper) want to do everything we can to make our newspaper more relevant and useful to you, our readers.

We are conducting a series of meetings with groups of readers to get your ideas and suggestions for how we can improve the (name of newspaper) for you.

We invite you to join us for one of these meetings on (time, date and place of the meeting).

Please join us and other readers for this meeting, which will last about 90 minutes. Bring your ideas about the things you like about your newspaper, the things you don't like, and the ways you think it could be improved. These ideas can include news and photo content, features, advertisements, method and time of delivery and anything about your association with the (name of newspaper).

We welcome your thoughts, and we look forward to seeing you. Please call (name and number) to let us know whether you will be able to attend, and to ask any questions you have about this invitation.

state a purpose for the meetings and make clear that opinions about the newspaper and its service are being sought.

Advantages of "open invitation" meetings include:

- They are publicized to the entire city or area, demonstrating widely the newspaper's desire to learn from readers and respond to them.

- They are open to all readers who are interested in expressing opinions.

- Readers who make the effort to attend are certain to be interested in the newspaper and how it serves them.

Disadvantages of "open invitation" meetings include:

- There is no way to predict the size of attendance. It could be

embarrassingly small or inconveniently large.

- Readers who attend may be extremists who feel particularly strong about one issue, rather than more representative readers who may avoid such meetings.
- With readers representing no particular group or interest, the meeting subjects are likely to range far and wide, with little focus.

Experiences of newspapers that have conducted both kinds of meetings indicate that a larger, broader cross section of readers with more useful suggestions can be obtained from inviting specific readers and representatives of specific groups in writing. But such meetings need to be held frequently, to ensure reaching a variety of readers and groups.

## Conducting the Meeting

A manager, editor or employee of the newspaper may preside over these meetings, or an outside person skilled in group dynamics may be used, if available. The presiding officer should follow a few basic rules:

- Thank visitors for attending, and invite them to identify themselves by name and occupation, or business/professional association. Introduce newspaper representatives who are present.
- Put the visitors at ease, and reassure them that the newspaper representatives genuinely want and need their thoughts and suggestions—and will use them.

- Listen intently to readers, and show interest in their opinions. Make certain that all visitors have opportunities to speak.
- Keep the discussion on track and on time, avoiding tangential issues or long speeches.
- Thank the readers and indicate, where appropriate, how their opinions and suggestions will be used. If you have examples of how ideas from previous sessions have been used, relate them.

My newspapers in Tallahassee and earlier in Columbus, Georgia, had success with a series of “reader forums”—meetings to which groups of readers are invited to talk about the newspaper and how it can serve them better. These forums were organized by invitations to members of specific groups—lawyers, teachers, doctors, homemakers, students, business managers, government officials and others. When they come in groups familiar with each other, readers tend to feel more comfortable and the discussion tends to flow better.

## Advertiser Meetings

Many of the guidelines for reader meetings also apply to advertiser meetings. Advertiser meetings almost always will be by written invitation from the newspaper’s chief executive or the advertising director.

Periodic meetings should be held with groups of advertisers—organized in groups by type of business, by geography, by advertising classification or in any other logical grouping. Even if no special program

or event is to be discussed, regular meetings with advertisers help to keep the newspaper in touch with their feelings and to produce ideas for serving them and helping their businesses to grow through newspaper advertising.

Special events around which newspapers have scheduled, or could schedule, advertiser meetings include:

- Introduction of a new discount program or frequent advertiser program, such as the “Gold Card” membership and special privileges that one Russian newspaper offers its most frequent advertisers.
- An anniversary of the newspaper.
- Introduction of a new feature or section of the newspaper, especially one that may have special appeal to a group of advertisers—such as a health/fitness section that may appeal to advertisers in the medical and pharmaceutical professions or retailers who sell sports and exercise equipment.
- Announcement of results of market research by the newspaper, with representatives of the market research firm or institute in attendance to present the findings. This is especially appropriate if the market research includes research into reader buying habits or buying plans.

readers and advertisers then must be compiled and shared with all appropriate managers and employees of the newspaper.

Reader and advertiser recommendations for the newspaper should be seriously considered, and the best ones should be implemented. It will be impossible and inadvisable to accept every suggestion, but those that win favor from the most readers and advertisers should be seriously considered—and the best ones should be accepted or adapted for the newspaper.

Just holding the meetings is good “public relations” for the newspaper. But the real gains come from responding to the needs and desires of readers and advertisers. Determining those needs and desires, and responding to them, is the primary reason for holding such meetings.

## Follow-up Is Critical

As with any research, holding the meeting or meetings is only the first stage. The data gathered from



## Telephone Surveys of Readers and Advertisers

The telephone is an effective and easy tool for newspapers to use in gathering some data from readers and advertisers.

Telephoned questions may be more useful than meetings in certain circumstances. Telephone surveys offer the opportunity to contact more readers or advertisers in a shorter period than meetings. But they cannot explore as many questions, or questions in the depth that is possible in a meeting. Many phone respondents will not take time for long surveys, unless they are asked in advance.

Telephone surveys, therefore, are ideal for asking a few specific questions of a larger audience. For example, if a newspaper has introduced a new design or a

new feature, and if it has a database of readers, a large sampling of readers could be contacted by phone to get their reactions.

If some change has been made in the newspaper's service to advertisers, such as a new way of gathering or processing advertising copy, or a new billing system, or a new discount program, the advertisers' reactions to the change could be checked in a telephone survey.

A group of part-time workers could be employed and trained to make the telephone calls. However, the newspaper could eliminate virtually all expense of such a survey by utilizing its own employees as time is available for them to make calls. For example, employees whose work is serving readers who call or come in—as in classified advertising or circulation—could use time available between visits to make the survey calls.

## Specific, Consistent Questions

As with professional surveys, it is vital that a specific set of questions be phrased and used consistently by each caller. It also is vital that responses be recorded in writing, tabulated and considered by newspaper decision-makers.

An example of a telephone survey of advertisers might be this one to determine interest in a new newspaper advertising opportunity:

### Question 1:

Are you familiar with the weekly television schedules that our newspaper publishes on Fridays?

### Question 2:

The newspaper is considering having each day's schedule sponsored by a different advertiser, whose advertisement would appear directly adjacent to the schedule. Would your business be interested in advertising in that manner?

*(If affirmative or possible)*

### Question 3:

Would you consider committing to a 12-week schedule for the sponsorship?

### Question 4:

May our representative call on you to talk further about this new advertising opportunity?

### Question 5:

When would be a convenient time for such a visit?

## Reader Reactions Can Be Checked

In the same manner, reader reactions to a new feature or a new newspaper design could be checked by telephone and reported to editors.

Telephone research should be planned and coordinated by one person at the newspaper, but employees in several departments can be trained to make calls and report results as their schedule permits throughout the day.



## Written Questionnaires for Advertisers

An effective way of gaining information from advertisers is the written questionnaire. This permits the advertiser to respond to the newspaper's questions at a time convenient to him or her, and to give more thought to responses.

The written questionnaire can either be sent and returned through the mail, or it can be hand-delivered by newspaper representatives. In either event, follow-up contact with the advertiser—in person or by phone—frequently is needed to remind the customer to complete and return the questionnaire.

With broad distribution of the questionnaire and with proper follow-up, a number of responses sufficient to constitute a valid and reliable sample usually can be obtained.

By inviting all advertisers or all frequent advertisers to complete the questionnaire, the newspaper also signals its interest in their opinions and its determination to provide better service to the advertisers.

It is very important that the questionnaire be no more than 2-3 pages, to encourage a large number of prompt responses. To provide further incentive for advertisers to complete the survey, a 5 to 10 percent discount may be offered on the next ad to all advertisers who respond by a certain date. And for mail responses, an envelope with postage attached should be included.

The questionnaire form should be accompanied by a cover letter, explaining the survey and asking for advertisers' cooperation in completing and returning it. The letter should come from the chief executive or the advertising director of the newspaper.

## Repeat Surveys

Written questionnaire surveys should be conducted at least once a year, to stay in close touch with advertisers' opinions about the newspaper and about advertising choices. Yearly or other periodic surveys also allow a newspaper to track its progress, or lack of progress, in meeting advertisers' needs.

Newspapers can learn from these surveys more about advertisers'

choices of media and the rationale behind those choices. They also can get ideas about how their services and attention to advertisers can be improved. If they act on the research, newspapers should then develop a better relationship with their advertisers and gain more of their business.

As with any method of collecting information, the most important step is using the data to make the appropriate changes and to make certain advertisers know their opinions and responses made a difference.

## Sample Advertisers' Questionnaire

Here is a questionnaire prepared for one Asian newspaper to use with its advertisers:

### 1. How often does your company advertise in: \_\_\_\_\_

	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
(Newspaper Conducting the Survey)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newspaper Competitor 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newspaper Competitor 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Free Tabloids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Newspapers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Magazines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Television	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Radio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 2. Why does your company advertise?

*(Please check all that apply)*

- ☐ To sell more products or services
- ☐ To introduce new products or services
- ☐ To keep up with competitors
- ☐ To improve the company's image and make its name more familiar
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. What would cause your company to advertise more in the future?

*(Please number all that apply—1, 2, 3, etc.—in order of importance)*

- ☐ More money available to advertise
- ☐ More products available to sell
- ☐ Evidence that advertising gets results
- ☐ Better service from media managers and representatives
- ☐ Better design and content of advertisements
- ☐ Better production and printing quality of advertisements
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. For those media in which your company advertises, please indicate your degree of satisfaction with the advertising and its results.**

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Unsatisfied	Not at All Satisfied	Don't Know
(Newspaper					
Conducting Research)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newspaper Competitor 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newspaper Competitor 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Free Tabloids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Newspapers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Magazines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Television	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Radio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**5. When you advertise, do you get results:**

- ☐ Usually in a day or two
- ☐ Within a week after the advertising appears
- ☐ In sales over the next few weeks
- ☐ Don't know

**6. What kind of advertising brings best results for you?**

*(Please check all that apply)*

- ☐ Advertisements offering new products and/or services
- ☐ Advertisements offering sales or discount prices
- ☐ Brand-name advertising—Advertising a company's name and image
- ☐ Advertising campaigns over several days or weeks
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**7. If you are unsatisfied with your newspaper advertisements, what are the reasons?**

*(Please check all that apply)*

- ☐ Little or no evidence that advertising increases sales
- ☐ Costs of advertising are too high
- ☐ Printing quality is poor
- ☐ Design and content of advertisements is unsatisfactory
- ☐ Service from newspaper representatives is unsatisfactory
- ☐ Placement of advertisements in the newspaper is unsatisfactory
- ☐ Newspaper is not read by my customers and potential customers
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**8. What can (name of newspaper) do to better serve your needs?**

*(Please number all that apply—1, 2, 3, etc.—in order of importance)*

- ☐ Create and suggest more effective designs for my advertisements
- ☐ Improve printing quality
- ☐ Learn enough about my business to become a kind of “partner” in recommending advertising strategy
- ☐ Have its representatives call on me more frequently
- ☐ Show me evidence that advertising gets results
- ☐ Improve placement of my ads in the newspaper
- ☐ Offer more discounts and combination rates
- ☐ Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



## In-Paper Questionnaires for Readers

An easy, inexpensive way to gather information from readers is through the in-paper questionnaire—questions published in the newspaper with a request that readers respond through the mail, e-mail or to a telephone answering machine.

This method is frequently used by newspapers and other media to test public reaction on issues of great public interest. They may ask readers to write or call, for example, to express opinions on the subject:

*Do you think the central government should print more money to pay back wages to workers, even at the risk of excessive inflation?*

or:

*Which do you think is more important for our city, a new public park or renovations to the Opera House?*

A newspaper seeking to improve its service to readers may use the same technique for issues involving the newspaper.

For example, reader opinions may be sought about a new feature the newspaper has added, or about a change it has instituted in presentation of news or information. If the newspaper has employed more than one format in presenting the weekly television schedule, it could ask readers to vote on which they prefer.

The newspaper could ask readers such questions as:

*Would you prefer that the weekly page on cultural life and entertainment in our city appear in the newspaper on Thursday or Friday?*

A more extensive in-paper survey could be published, listing all major features of the newspaper and asking readers whether they read the feature:

### ***Regularly, Occasionally or Never***

This could give newspaper editors an idea of which features are the most popular, and which have the lowest readership.

Questions in an in-paper survey generally should be either **(1)** “yes or no” questions, requiring short, decisive answers, or **(2)** multiple-choice questions requiring just one

answer—from a list of no more than four choices. The in-paper questionnaire is not the place for lengthy, involved questions or for questions that require lengthy answers or follow-up discussion.

Such questionnaires should be seen as ways to sample sentiment on high-visibility issues and issues of newspaper content and policy.

## **Responses May Not Be Representative**

However, all in-paper questionnaires are risky ways of gauging reader sentiment. There is no way to control or to determine whether respondents to such a questionnaire constitute a representative sampling of the newspaper’s readership.

For example, more older readers than younger readers may respond to the survey. Or many more women than men may respond. Or more people in higher income brackets may respond.

A minority of readers may have very strong opinions on the issue and respond to the question, while the majority may disagree but not feel strong enough to take the time to respond. Typically, such surveys will attract a very small percentage of the newspaper’s total readership.

## **Complement With Other Research**

When using in-paper questionnaires to test readership or the use of certain features, newspaper editors should remember that some features have a

relatively small but very intense following. For example, sports articles and sports pages almost always will attract a minority of a newspaper's readers. But many sports page readers are sports enthusiasts and may read the newspaper primarily for those articles.

The crossword puzzle may be a feature valued by only 20-30 percent, or fewer, of a newspaper's readers. But to those who work the puzzle, it is one of the newspaper's most important features—and a newspaper that eliminates it risks losing a significant portion of its readers.

The crossword puzzle may be a feature valued by only 20 to 30 percent, or fewer, of a newspaper's readers. But to those who work the puzzle, it is one of the newspaper's most important features.

So results of these questionnaire surveys, while interesting and possibly revealing, should be taken for what they are—samplings—and not necessarily as reliable measures of the newspaper's total readership.

They should be complemented by further research, using methods designed to reach broader, more representative segments of readers.



## Face-to-Face Interviews

Face-to-face interviews conducted by newspaper employees and executives represent one of the most versatile methods of gathering information from readers and advertisers.

Such interviews provide direct communication between the readers or advertisers and the newspaper representatives who need the information to better serve both groups. The communication is complete with all the nuances, body language and follow-up questions and discussion that only personal face-to-face conversation can provide.

Structured questions can be used, as in other research, to avoid “leading” the respondent and prejudicing the answers. Yet face-to-face interviews offer some of the flexibility of the focus group, in allowing probing beyond the answers to designed questions.

## On Balance, a Useful Technique

One disadvantage of face-to-face interviews conducted by newspaper representatives is that respondents may not be as completely truthful or forthcoming with their opinions about the newspaper when talking with its employees or executives.

Another disadvantage is that face-to-face interviews are time-consuming for busy newspaper people. Because of this, they usually yield data from a very limited number of readers and advertisers.

On balance, there are more positives than negatives. The face-to-face interview should be employed from time to time by every newspaper as a means of collecting data and of keeping its employees in close touch with readers and advertisers.

Here are three ways that newspapers have successfully employed face-to-face interviews:

### 1. Journalists' Contacts

Traditionally, in all countries, journalists spend most of their time in the company of news sources and other journalists. They have far too little contact with the mass of readers for whom their articles are written and edited.

Newspapers can help to provide that kind of contact, and gather useful information in the process, with this simple exercise:

Give each journalist a set of about five questions about how the newspaper

serves the reader. Ask each of them to ask the questions of a person they don't know well—a clerk in a store, a neighbor, their child's teacher, someone they encounter on the street, for example. The answers should be recorded or remembered and pooled with answers gathered by other journalists to form a kind of public opinion survey.

The questions could involve such subjects as:

- *How often do you read the newspaper?*
- *How much time do you spend reading the newspaper?*
- *What additional information and news could the newspaper provide that would make it more interesting and important to you?*
- *Do you think the local newspaper articles are fair, balanced and truthful?*
- *If not, where do you find them lacking?*

Answers to such questions may give journalists a better understanding of how their articles really are received by their newspaper's readers. And, when all answers are received and compiled, they may provide suggestions for changes the newspaper should make in its reporting and presentation of news.

Such reporter interviews also could be used for testing reader reaction to possible changes in newspaper content or design. Readers could be asked if they wanted more news about crime, more investigative reporting, a

weekly arts and entertainment section, more or less sports news, more or less national and international news in their newspaper.

Traditionally journalists spend most of their time in the company of other journalists. They have far too little contact with the mass of readers for whom their articles are written.

## 2. Single-Copy Buyers

A newspaper seeking to know more about its single-copy buyers could dispatch representatives to intercept buyers at single-copy sale points such as kiosks.

Most buyers will agree to a short interview that might ask such questions as:

- *How many times a week do you buy and read the newspaper?*
- *Have you considered subscribing to the newspaper?*
- *What could persuade you to become a subscriber?*
- *Do you usually buy the newspaper because you are attracted by a headline, or because of information and news that you know you will find in the paper?*
- *What sections of the newspaper are most appealing and useful to you?*

## 3. Advertiser Visits

Every newspaper executive, especially those whose responsibility includes advertising, should be making personal visits to advertisers and potential advertisers on a regular schedule. These visits are in addition to those of the newspaper's sales representatives.

On these visits, it will be useful to ask some standard questions, such as:

- *Is the newspaper an effective advertising vehicle for you?*
- *What can we do to make it more effective?*
- *What can we do to help you plan your advertising strategy and how to implement that strategy?*
- *How can we improve our service and relationship with you, in terms of your contact with our advertising agency?*
- *How can the newspaper improve its content or delivery to readers that will make it a more effective advertising medium for you and your company?*

Like the journalists' visits with readers, these visits can be both educational for the newspaper decision-makers and productive of information that can be used to improve newspaper services—and advertising lineage.



## Professional Market Research

For reliable, quantitative measurements of a large audience, newspapers need a market survey by professional researchers.

Whether it is expanding, planning a new publication, designing changes, seeking to identify a problem or just solidifying its relationship with existing readers and advertisers, every newspaper will find periodic market surveys helpful to its business.

The International Newspaper Marketing Association (INMA), in its booklet *Best Practices in Newspaper Research*, opens with this truism from Steve Shaw,

director of marketing research at Media General in Richmond, Virginia, USA:

*Research takes many forms (and should), depending on the resources available, the problems/opportunities at hand, and the time frame within which to complete the particular research project. But it should always be a part of the decision process.*

In most markets around the world today, a number of vendors are available—national research firms, regional research companies, firms specializing in media research and commercial arms of universities and institutes who train students in market research. Before selecting a research partner, newspapers should do sufficient research of their own to determine the vendor with the best credentials, the best methodology and the best price for its particular mission.

Periodic professional market research is extremely important to all newspapers for these purposes, among others:

- To establish readership of the publication, which is a different measurement than circulation. Total readership, and the demographic characteristics of readers, are extremely important for editors and newspaper managers to know. These measurements also are critical to media buyers, and thus to the sale of advertising.
- To measure readership of individual features and sections of the newspaper.

- To identify reader complaints or problems with the newspaper, and to gauge its image with both readers and non-readers.
- To help editors improve the newspaper in ways that may make it more appealing to non-readers.
- To establish trends, through regular research conducted every year or two.
- To gather information helpful to newspaper advertisers, such as consumer buying habits, buying plans and store images.

“Market research is used by newspaper publishers for two primary purposes, namely internal editorial guidance and as an advertising sales tool,” wrote Dee Carr in *Newspaper Management in the New Multimedia Age*. “The overall objective of all publishers is to increase sales, and research can help them increase copy sales, readership, advertising and product sales.”

## Demand Is Widespread for Market Research

In Russia, in a time of an extremely poor economy and transition from state control, one independent advertising agency manager in Chelyabinsk said, “Yes, there’s a great need for market research. A client, a bank, is one example of a business that wanted market research, but it was not available.”

An executive of a separate advertising agency said, “Advertisers here need

to be educated, and market research would help.”

Advertising managers and sales agents at several Russian regional newspapers said more research data would help them sell additional advertising.

In Canada, *The Montreal Gazette* has compiled a readership research and marketing book, which arms advertising sales representatives with information that will:

- Promote the value of advertising in the *Gazette* by detailing the newspaper's readership, advertising market share, circulation, editorial strengths and alternative advertising opportunities.
- Present the vitality of the Montreal market to advertising agencies and advertisers.

In Rotterdam, the Netherlands, a readership survey was conducted to determine if daily newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*'s layout was clear enough to its readers. As reported in INMA's *Best Practices in Newspaper Research*:

*The research staff at this leading Dutch evening newspaper went high-tech for its research, with results that shocked editors.*

*‘Together with research agency Motivaction, we filmed 20 or so readers as they read the paper at home,’ NRC manager Mark Zwijnenburg explained. ‘Yep, this was often at the same time as the kids got home from school or during the evening TV*

*news. We showed these videos to our editors and it was extremely confrontational for some of them. Later, the same readers were filmed looking at the new front page as Motivaction’s offices.’*

*The new-look front page of NRC Handelsblad recently launched is the result of a systematic readership survey, of which the video was a part. The research showed readers seem to have a clear preference for a fixed contents panel. Therefore, a horizontal box containing the newspaper’s three main items placed under the masthead has now replaced the vertical contents column that used to move around the page.*

“The overall objective of all publishers is to increase sales, and research can help them increase copy sales, readership, advertising and product sales.”

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the daily *O Dia* undertook a professional study of its market in 2000 (See results on page **XXXXXX** with the following goals, among others:

- Estimate the size of its market
- Identify buyers of *O Dia*, buyers of competing newspapers, ex-buyers of *O Dia*, and those who don't buy any newspaper at all.

- Evaluate the public's image of the four major dailies in Rio de Janeiro, especially among *O Dia*'s target market.
- Evaluate the level of satisfaction with the newspaper, its strong and weak points, and what was needed for it to improve its level of satisfaction.
- Find out why ex-readers left the newspaper, and why non-readers chose not to buy a newspaper.
- Evaluate the newspaper's price.
- Measure the importance of the front page on newsstand purchases.
- Determine which promotions were most effective among readers in the target market.
- Determine how much interest the public had in subscribing to *O Dia* (in a country where most readers buy their newspapers on the street).

As a result of its market research, *O Dia* was able to identify its strengths (a high level of reader satisfaction and the success of a new sports section, *Ataque*, for example) as well as its weaknesses (even though *O Dia* had a higher circulation, competitor *O Globo* had a higher prestige level). *O Dia* was also able to use the market research to identify opportunities. For example, it found great interest in services for readers. As a result, the newspaper developed "O Dia Does It For You" in which reporters worked to resolve reader's problems with businesses or government.

## Understand Customers' Changing Needs

South Florida is one of the few markets in the United States that resembles many newspaper markets around the world in terms of intense competition. Newspapers in Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Palm Beach, Hollywood, Boca Raton and others compete for readers and advertisers in one of the nation's hottest markets.

In this situation, the *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* finds market research increasingly important to help it "understand and anticipate the changing needs of the customer base," according to Dana Franke, the *Sun-Sentinel* research services manager, reported in INMA's *Best Practices*.

One of the newspaper's most important projects is localizing information from one of the nationally based segmentation systems by appending readership and media usage information from primary research studies and subscriber behavior from the newspaper's own database.

"Research has been extremely valuable in helping us to change with the market and understand opportunities to reach all segments of our market through print as well as other media," Franke says.

## Market Research in Market Economies

In Moscow, where research is more readily available, several newspapers use market research studies to

# Image Perception

This chart shows the results of a marketing survey by *O Dia* newspaper in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2000. The newspaper asked respondents to compare *O Dia* and its competitors on a number of characteristics. The survey breaks the responses into five categories – all respondents, regular readers of *O Dia*, and regular readers of each of the newspaper’s three main competitors. This enabled the newspaper to learn how it was perceived among all readers, among its own readers and among readers who bought another newspaper.

Courtesy *O Dia* marketing department.

Which newspaper do you most identify as....		All Respondents (%)	
The Market Leader	1st	O Globo	41.6
	2nd	O Dia	36.2
Most Impartial	1st	O Globo	21.7
	2nd	O Dia	20.9
Highest Quality Printing	1st	O Globo	47.4
	2nd	O Dia	27.4
Up-To-Date Information	1st	O Globo	42.5
	2nd	O Dia	28.2
Best Promotions	1st	O Dia	41.1
	2nd	Extra	29.9
Easiest to Read	1st	O Dia	38.8
	2nd	Extra	29.4
Fastest to Read	1st	O Dia	38.0
	2nd	Extra	34.4
Best Front Page/ Headlines	1st	O Globo	34.3
	2nd	O Dia	33.2
Most Attractive Photos	1st	O Globo	34.8
	2nd	O Dia	32.6
Most Modern	1st	O Globo	41.7
	2nd	O Dia	25.1
Most Complete News/ Information	1st	O Globo	44.1
	2nd	O Dia	26.9

Readers of O Dia (%)		Readers of Extra (%)		Readers of O Globo (%)		Readers of Jornal do Brasil (%)	
O Dia	56.1	O Globo	32.3	O Globo	63.7	O Globo	51.8
O Globo	27.9	O Dia	32.0	O Dia	22.6	O Dia	27.0
O Dia	30.3	O Dia	19.3	O Globo	27.6	JB	52.7
O Globo	16.9	O Globo	17.3	JB	20.8	O Dia	11.0
		Extra	17.3				
O Dia	49.7	O Globo	34.3	O Globo	75.6	JB	49.2
O Globo	33.7	Extra	29.7	O Dia	10.1	O Globo	37.1
O Dia	53.1	Extra	33.3	O Globo	72.6	JB	61.0
O Globo	26.9	O Globo	28.1	JB	10.4	O Globo	24.1
O Dia	66.0	Extra	57.429	O Globo	36.9	O Dia	30.8
Extra	20.1	O Dia	.2	O Dia	29.1	O Globo	19.2
O Dia	68.4	Extra	61.2	O Globo	48.3	JB	40.0
Extra	18.2	O Dia	26.8	O Dia	25.3	O Dia	26.7
O Dia	66.5	Extra	68.0	O Globo	40.5	JB	36.1
Extra	23.5	O Dia	22.0	O Dia	26.8	O Dia	26.4
O Dia	59.4	Extra	46.9	O Globo	64.4	JB	34.1
O Globo	19.0	O Dia	27.2	O Dia	16.6	O Globo	25.2
O Dia	59.3	Extra	46.9	O Globo	64.9	JB	32.5
O Globo	18.3	O Dia	25.0	O Dia	16.3	O Globo	27.3
O Dia	46.7	Extra	40.8	O Globo	68.4	JB	52.6
O Globo	26.4	O Globo	26.6	O Dia	10.6	O Globo	28.8
O Dia	50.2	Extra	33.9	O Globo	74.3	JB	63.0
O Globo	30.6	O Globo	29.5	JB	9.3	O Globo	23.7

improve their newspapers and to provide needed information for advertisers.

In Western nations, where market economies and market research have existed for much longer, most daily newspapers now routinely use market research for a variety of business-building purposes.

Many international firms are accustomed to the media in which they advertise having market research available. Newspapers and other media organizations that provide such data will have the advantage over their competitors.

## Overcoming Obstacles

At any newspaper, three possible obstacles to market research must be overcome:

### 1. Cost.

Many newspapers are reluctant or unable to contract for professional research, especially in a struggling economy. However, research must be viewed as an investment that—properly used—can return its cost to the newspaper, usually several times over, in new circulation and advertising revenue.

### 2. Attitudes Within the Newspaper.

“We know our readers better than the sociologists,” one regional Russian editor declared. “We keep our fingers on the pulse of our city.”

His attitude is typical of many editors, who have little or no experience with market research and believe that journalists already know what is best for their readers. It is an attitude once

shared by many Western editors who came slowly, and reluctantly, to realize that market research could tell them much more precisely than their own instincts what their readers are thinking.

Some of the first uses of market research surveys actually were made by journalists in the United States—measuring public opinion on various issues for newspaper and magazine articles, and measuring voter preferences in the weeks leading up to elections.

It was later, though, after polling techniques became more reliable, that newspaper editors and other journalists came to realize that professional surveying could be a valuable and profitable aid in their own businesses. Readership surveys became widely used and accepted measures of a newspaper’s reach and audience, as well as ways to determine preferences of readers on a wide variety of newspaper choices.

In Moscow several newspapers use market research studies to improve their newspapers and to provide needed information for advertisers.

Still later, newspaper advertising and business managers began to use market research not only to define their audiences for potential advertisers, but to gather data of direct help to advertisers and significant indirect help to the newspapers. These data include

reader buying habits and buying plans, as well as public opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the businesses that advertise in the newspaper.

### 3. Reliability.

Justifiably or unjustifiably, many business people in emerging market countries distrust the professional market research available to them. The strongest suspicion appears to be that market research results are misrepresented, or exaggerated, in favor of the firm paying for the research.

As these managers learn more about market research, they can check reliability of individual studies by determining how they were conducted. A reliable, accurate market study will include several basic features discussed in the following sections of this document.

Newspapers seeking professional market researchers should investigate several companies, institutes and universities—interviewing the directors of these agencies, asking questions about their research methods as well as their cost, talking to former clients of the agencies and studying their reports. From this research, the newspapers can determine which offers the best service at the best price for their particular needs—and which will be considered the most reliable by those with whom research results will be used.

## Setting Goals and Objectives

The newspaper's objectives in deciding to invest in a market research survey will determine exactly what data to seek.

A general, overall objective of the survey may have been determined. Perhaps the survey is designed to gain public reaction to potential changes in the newspaper—a change in the days of publication, a change in design, a change in some of the newspaper's standard features such as the television schedule or any other change.

The primary objective may be to determine more about the audience's newspaper habits—which newspapers they read, how long they spend with newspapers, what sections of the newspaper they like, what they object to, etc.

The primary objective may be to serve advertisers, to provide more information that will be helpful to them and thereby strengthen the relationship between the newspaper and its advertisers. Such information could be about readership of advertisements in the newspaper, reactions to the advertising, opinions about businesses that advertise, the readers' buying habits and their plans for major purchases over the next few months.

But a market research survey usually will not be limited to a single objective. Several of these and other goals can be achieved in a single survey, if great care is given to designing the survey and wording the questions.

The person or persons at the newspaper in charge of planning the survey should consider requests from all newspaper managers who desire to gather data from the market research. A list of all potential objectives then can be carefully reviewed, discussed and shaped to final survey goals that will fit into the budget of time and money available.

One Russian newspaper's market research survey in 1997 defined these objectives:

**General:** Determine the identity and demographic characteristics of the reader. This approach proves useful both for marketing and advertising purposes, since it gives a clear understanding of reader groups and valuable information for advertisers.

**Marketing:** Understand the market position of the newspaper and the strength of the competition.

**Editorial:** Understand whether the newspaper meets readers' needs and expectations. Determine what changes in the paper would make it more attractive and useful to readers.

**Distribution:** Receive updated information on circulation and availability of the paper. Determine the quality of delivery.

**Advertising:** Determine exact figures and numbers in order to show existing and potential advertisers the buying preferences of the readership and the results of advertising in the newspaper.

## The Population To Be Researched

The nature of the information being sought from the survey will help to determine the population to be researched. Usually, a cross section of the total population of the area in which the newspaper circulates is the desired sample.

If the data are going to be used to compare all media in the market, or to represent the views of the general public, a cross section of the total population must be used for the results to be valid.

However, for certain surveys, the newspaper may want to gather data primarily or exclusively from its own readers. When one Asian newspaper designed a survey in 1998, the newspaper desired to gather information from a mix of its readers (2/3) and readers of other competing newspapers (1/3). So 200 names of respondents were drawn from a database of the newspaper's subscribers, and 100 names were drawn from databases that the research company had of other newspaper subscribers.

The newspaper may want to limit the geographical area to be covered to something less than the total area in which it circulates. A regional newspaper with a large majority of its readers within the city may have the research done only within the city to avoid the expense of interviews in the outlying areas. Results are not likely to change significantly.

On the other hand, a newspaper seeking to build a larger circulation in

the region may want to concentrate its responses primarily outside the city.

If a newspaper is considering a new product of special appeal to one demographic group such as students, retirees, business executives or housewives, naturally it will want to survey only persons in that group.

## Designing the Questions

Once the newspaper and research firm define the data they are seeking and the audience to be surveyed, they must design the specific questions to be asked. This is a critical step that sometimes does not get enough attention, resulting in poorly worded questions and inadequate survey results.

One advantage of working with a professional market research provider is that its managers and employees should be experienced in asking precisely the right questions to gather the information being sought. But the newspaper also must take some responsibility for seeing that the data being sought—and the questions to get it—are clearly defined.

For example, a question about newspaper readership might be phrased:

*How many times in the last week have you read a newspaper?*

There are several problems with that question. First, how is a newspaper defined? Are you really interested in knowing about all newspapers, from any source, by any person's

definition? About weekly tabloids? About central newspapers?

Second, what constitutes "reading" a newspaper? Is glancing over it at a newsstand sufficient? Borrowing one from a friend to read one article?

Third, the person may have difficulty remembering exactly how many times he or she has read a newspaper in the past seven days.

Better questions might be:

*I am going to ask about your readership of local newspapers. As I read the list of newspapers, please tell me whether you did or did not spend time with the newspaper yesterday.*

*Now tell me, from the same list, how many times you recall picking up the paper and going through it in the past week.*

## Seek Decisive Responses

Questions generally should be worded so they can be answered "yes" or "no" or by selecting a choice from a list provided by the questioner.

### Example 1.

Please tell me whether you have used the classified section of one of these newspapers to purchase or sell something in the past 30 days.

<b>Newspaper 1</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Newspaper 2</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Newspaper 3</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

### Example 2.

What is your primary source of information about what is on television?

1. **Newspaper 1 TV schedule**
2. **Newspaper 2 TV schedule**
3. **Schedule in Free Tabloid**
4. **Information Distributed by Television Stations**
5. **Other (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_**

When asking questions such as the one above, the interviewer should ask the question, then read the list of possible answers. To ensure against prejudicing the respondent, questioners should rotate the order in which they read the possible responses.

For example, one Russian newspaper asked readers about the potential of articles and question/answer features in the newspaper from professional consultants in several fields.

The question read:

*With which specialists would you like to have consultations?*

The questioner then read from a list that included lawyers, doctors, psychologists, cosmetologists, teachers, financiers, officials and others (specify).

For such questions, the order of the list should be rotated so that some names are not always mentioned first and others always last.

Open questions (for which the questioner reads no list of potential responses) are not ruled out completely. Occasionally, such questions may be asked because:

- They may yield some unexpected answers.
- Respondents like to be able to elaborate on some opinions.
- Some questions do not lend themselves to listing only a few acceptable responses.

For example:

*What do you consider to be the most important problem facing our city today?*

*What single thing could (the newspaper) do that would make it more appealing to you?*

However, no more than a few such questions should be included in a survey because:

- The respondent can more reliably answer the questions when alternate responses are given.
- The researcher can more easily and more reliably interpret the meaning of responses when alternatives are given. Compiling a multitude of answers and combining the similar ones is a time-consuming and money-consuming task.
- The newspaper can more easily analyze and use data when it is specific and fits into a limited number of categories.

## 'Agree-Disagree' Questions

Agree-disagree questions are common and useful in survey research, and sometimes a simple choice between "agree" and "disagree" is all that needs to be offered:

*Now I would like to ask you to think about the appearance of lottery results in the newspaper. Do you agree or disagree that the newspaper should publish such results?*

However, for many such questions, a wider range of choices should be provided. Many respondents will not want to make a simple agree-disagree choice on more complex questions. Moreover, the newspaper may find it useful to get information about the strength of the respondent's feeling. So many survey questions will offer this kind of option:

*Now I would like for you to think about whether (the newspaper) is an important source of the information you need in your daily life. Do you:*

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

*that the newspaper is such a source?*

Another form of question that may frequently be useful in newspaper surveys is the "regularly/occasionally/rarely/never" kind of inquiry:

*Do you read the newspaper's letters from readers?*

- ☐ Regularly
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

## Consider Use of the Information

It cannot be stressed too strongly that every potential question should be examined and reexamined—prior to conducting the survey—to make certain it is worded most effectively to yield the desired information from respondents. The newspaper also should carefully consider what it is going to do with the information once it is obtained.

For example, if the question above about readers' letters is included in the survey, it may be interesting to learn how widespread and frequent is their readership. However, if the editors know in advance that they are not going to change anything about the practice of publishing reader letters, of what real use is the information in improving the newspaper?

Editors may want to use market research to determine readership of various categories of articles—political, social, crime, government, cultural, etc.—in their newspapers. But if the editors are not prepared to change the way they choose and place articles in the paper, or if they think relative popularity of articles should not necessarily determine their

length and placement in the newspaper, seeking and paying for that information in a professional survey is a waste of time and money.

Once the questionnaire is designed, it should be tested on several individuals. This exercise will give interviewers some practice in using the questionnaire, and it also will help to identify any problems with the way questions are worded.

It also is a good idea to time these tests. Generally, research survey interviews should not take more than 20-25 minutes.

## Conducting the Survey

The market research company or institute will be experienced in conducting surveys and usually will determine how the information is gathered. Some choices may be offered to the newspaper, as the methodology used can affect the cost of the survey.

A common research method is the face-to-face interview. Telephone surveys are the most common vehicle for market research in America and some other countries. But unless telephones are available in a large majority of homes, research conducted strictly by telephone will not be representative of a cross section of the population; it will represent only that population that has home telephones.

The face-to-face interview can be administered in several ways. Most research firms have a core of experienced interviewers and a database of potential respondents, or

respondents who may have been contacted in previous unrelated surveys. The interviewers go to the homes of these respondents to ask the questions and record responses, or they may employ written questionnaires for respondents to complete.

Sometimes, group interviews may be conducted, to save time. However, one-on-one interviews are preferable, to avoid having respondents influence each other in group situations.

In addition to contacting respondents at their residences, interviewers may find them in places where people gather, such as shopping areas, transportation centers, cultural facilities, sports arenas, etc. Longer surveys, however, may not be appropriate for these encounters.

Mail surveys may be used, but this technique risks a low response rate.

For certain kinds of research, the research firm and newspaper may agree that focus group research (discussed elsewhere in this document) is the appropriate technique.

Frequently, a combination of several methods will be used.

## Demographically Correct Samples

Ensuring that the survey sample is approximately correct, demographically, is another consideration that should be explored with the research provider.

Many governments have offices of statistics that should be able to provide information on the percentages of men and women, various age groups, ethnic groups, professional and income groups, etc. in the population base. Random sampling techniques employed by the research provider in all sections of the city usually will yield a sample that approximately corresponds to the demographics of the total population.

A few basic demographic questions should be included in every survey. The percentages obtained from those questions then can be compared with demographics of the total population to determine how well they match—and to be considered in evaluating survey results.

The demographic profile of a newspaper's readers also can be very important in demonstrating to advertisers that they have the income, education, age or other characteristics that constitute a prime audience for the advertisers' message.

## 6. Using Survey Results

In selecting the organization to conduct the survey, a newspaper will want to consider its computer resources and its ability to compute and report data in a convenient form. It also will want to consider the organization's analytical resources and experience—and how much cost is associated with analysis and follow-up work with the newspaper.

Experience in interpreting results of such surveys, especially in the media field, is an important consideration.

Survey results have many potential applications for the newspaper seeking to improve content and design, seeking to attract more readers and seeking to build stronger advertising lineage (will foreign readers know what this means?) and relationships with advertisers.

Some of the most likely applications follow.

### 1. Designing new and improved content.

To attract more readers and more frequent readership, the newspaper may be considering altering its mix of articles and sections—or adding new features, areas of coverage or weekly sections to the newspaper.

When survey questions are asked about the public's relative interest in a variety of subjects—health, business, culture, entertainment, food preparation, recreation, sports and others—the newspaper can receive strong guidance on which would be most successful in attracting new interest and new readership.

Likewise, readership and popularity of existing features can be checked and results utilized—*if* the newspaper is willing to change the newspaper in response to its readers.

### 2. Testing readership and readership trends, especially in a competitive environment.

The newspaper knows what its circulation is. However, it may not know its readership, which is a different measurement. And it may not know readership of its competitors in the market.

Properly constructed survey questions can yield valuable information about readership of both the newspaper and its competitors, along with the approximate time readers spend with each and the value they place on each.

When asked repeatedly at yearly or other periodic intervals, such questions and their answers can establish trends. They can tell the newspaper when it is becoming more important to readers, and they can raise warning signs when it is losing relevance to readers, or losing attention to competitors—even before these trends will show up in circulation numbers.

### **3. Testing the newspaper's relationship with its audience.**

Through a survey of its subscribers and single-copy buyers, a newspaper can determine much about its convenience and affordability to readers.

Are its days of publication convenient to readers? Is the time of day it is delivered to subscribers or available to single-copy buyers convenient?

Is the price affordable? A better value, or lesser value, than its competitors?

Would a combination subscription with another publication of the same company be appealing? Convenient? Affordable?

Is it more convenient for subscribers to pay every six months, or every month, or on some other schedule?

The latter question may be inappropriate if the subscriber subscribes through the postal service and the newspaper cannot influence length of subscriptions.

### **4. Checking buying habits and buying plans of the newspaper's readers.**

Questions about the buying habits and buying plans of the surveyed audience—especially the habits and plans of the newspaper's readers—can be extremely important for the newspaper's advertisers and potential advertisers.

A survey may indicate, for example, that 30 percent of the newspaper's readers plan to buy a major electrical appliance in the next year, or that 20 percent expect to buy a new vehicle. This information not only would be very interesting to businesses that sell these goods, but should make them much more interested in advertising in a newspaper that reaches such a prime potential audience.

*Dagens Nyheter*, a leading newspaper in Stockholm, Sweden, uses its market research to provide major advertisers with information on the entire advertising market.

"Often we know more about their customers and their opinions than the advertisers themselves," says Leif Widman, the newspaper's director of marketing research. "We make presentations in which we explain the awareness and attitude of the public.... These presentations are popular with advertisers. We often tell them something about themselves that they didn't know!"

The *Standaard Group*, publisher of the *Standaard* and two other newspapers in Brussels, Belgium, took a different approach. With market research, the group developed a database containing information about the region's labor market and related topics, which is provided to personnel advertisers—but primarily to smaller advertisers.

"We often do this on our own initiative, particularly for smaller companies, and for free," said Marianne Verwimp, who is responsible for the newspaper group's research department. "The bigger advertisers have their own expertise or work with a selection of agencies. But for smaller firms, our advice can be very welcome. We can, for example, explain that their offer to applicants is insufficiently underpinned or that they've not said enough about themselves."

Another newspaper that uses its market research to serve advertisers—in this case, one large advertiser—is *The Spokesman-Review* of Spokane, Washington, USA. The newspaper conducted research, and created a

special "market book," to provide the Nordstrom department store chain with information it sought on the demographics and economic outlook for Spokane—an act that also provided an opportunity to reacquaint Nordstrom with the newspaper's products and services.

## Be Prepared To Act

Whatever the objective or objectives of the survey, the newspaper's editors and managers must be prepared to act on information they obtain. Following the survey, a newspaper team should work with the researchers to analyze the data, considering demographic cross sections as well as pure results, and then to map a strategy.

Using the data to inform newspaper employees and advertisers, and to change the newspaper's content and policies, represents the ultimate purposes of making this investment. To be successful, a commitment to make changes based on the information gathered must accompany any kind of newspaper market





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*The Focus Group Guidebook*. Morgan, David L. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.

*Newspaper Management in the New Multimedia Age*. Mehra, Achal ed. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, 1988.

## Additional Resources

### American Press Institute (API):

**[www.americanpressinstitute.org](http://www.americanpressinstitute.org)**

11690 Sunrise Valley Drive

Reston, Virginia 20191-1498 USA

Tel: (703) 620-3611; Fax: (703) 620-5814;

E-mail: [info@americanpressinstitute.org](mailto:info@americanpressinstitute.org)

API conducts seminars for journalists, sales, marketing and management professionals in print, broadcast, cable and digital media companies. API programs cover advertising, circulation, editorial, general management, marketing and weekly newspapers. The site offers articles, essays, news, schedules of classes and publications for sale

### International Newspaper Marketing Association (INMA):

**[www.inma.org](http://www.inma.org)**

10300 North Central Expressway

Suite 467

Dallas, Texas 75231 USA

Tel.: (214) 373-9111; Fax: (214) 373-9112;

E-mail: [inma@inma.org](mailto:inma@inma.org)

A nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting advanced marketing principles within the newspaper industry. INMA focuses on delivering case studies and ideas to marketing executives and advocating the benefits of marketing to newspaper publishers.

### Newspaper Association of America (NAA):

**[www.naa.org](http://www.naa.org)**

The NAA is a nonprofit organization representing the \$55 billion U.S. newspaper industry. NAA has many Canadian and international members. The site offers news and tools for all aspects of running a newspaper, including advertising and marketing.

### The Newspaper Industry:

**[www.newspaper-industry.org](http://www.newspaper-industry.org)**

“A portal to the business of newspapers,” this website for newspaper executives compiles the latest industry news and trends. Published INMA.



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