



Writing market research briefs: don't be a research vampire

"In my business great ideas are killed every day by market researchers. I call them the research vampires," Kevin Roberts, worldwide CEO of advertising giant Saatchi and Saatchi.

Want to avoid being a research vampire? Gathering data from the market can actually transform the effectiveness of your sales and marketing efforts, but it needs to be done in the right way to avoid the wrong information for the wrong purpose.

These are the key considerations when writing a research brief:

1. What decisions do you want to make?

Using research effectively starts at the end point. You need a very clear understanding of what decisions you actually want to make with the research information.

Are you trying to change your pricing approach? Or deciding on the best channel to market? Or confirming the positioning of your product against competitors? Unless you have specific decisions in mind asking the right questions of your customers is difficult.

Unless you are prepared to act on the information, forgot doing the research. Finding out from the market that you are perceived as providing poor customer support doesn't mean you should mount an advertising campaign saying how good your customer support is, it means actually trying to fix the problem.

2. Therefore what information do we need?

If you have a clear understanding of the decisions you want to make, you can work out what sort of information will be needed to support those decisions. For example, you may want to decide what promotional strategy to use, so the information you need is how your customers typically gather information, what kind of channels they prefer, what style suits them etc. The value of your research hangs on knowing the right questions to ask.

3. How can we gather this information?

There are many different ways of gathering data from customers – the method doesn't have to be formal, expensive market research. It can be as simple as ringing up a dozen customers. Telephone or online surveys, mystery shopper reviews, interviewing your own customer service staff, internet research, even talking to people in the bar on a Friday night – they're all valid options. The key is being focused on what decisions you want to make.

4. Who should you talk to?

The last step is working out exactly who you should be researching. Map out the different audiences in your value chain – who uses your product, who buys it, who supports it, who is your channel partner, who is the end customer. All will have a distinct perspective on your products and they need to be seen in context.

Project name
Timetable
Business assumptions
What business decisions are we going to make as a result of gathering this information?
What information is needed?
Using what sort of research methods?
From what kind of people?

“Most people, sometime in their lives, stumble across truth. And most jump up, brush themselves off, and hurry on about their business as if nothing had happened.”

Sir Winston Churchill
