

# Using Online Focus Groups with Difficult-to-Access Populations



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Research Into Action  
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**“While qualitative research is undeniable in its power and immediacy, the traditional in-person focus group, conducted in a sterile boardroom environment, is an endangered species.”**

*Source: Greenbook, Five Things That Will Become Obsolete in Market Research Sooner Than You Think, July 9, 2013*

# Is it like a chat room?

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- › Real-time, text-based communication
- › Anyone with an internet connection can participate
- › Allows for participants to see each others' answers
- › Option to use voice and/or video
- › Participant polling tools

## Synchronous

## Asynchronous

Real time chat

Delayed bulletin board style posting

Lasts 1-2 hours

Lasts as much as a week, 5-30 minutes per day

Requires quick typing

Requires ongoing effort and attention

## Whiteboard

Hide Whiteboard

Tonights Seminar: Green travel

Load File

Save

Print

Color:

Line:

Font:

24 px **B** **I** **U**

x: 494 y: 1 100%

Handraise mode is disabled.

Raise Your Hand

Participant List:

Joe Swanson  
Geraint Evans (Ins)

Total participants: 2

## Chat

Hide Chat

Geraint Evans (Ins) >> has entered the room.

Joe Swanson > Hello Geraint

Geraint Evans (Ins) > Hello Joe, ready for tonights chat?

Joe Swanson > Yes, what time does the seminar finish?

Geraint Evans (Ins) > About half-past seven. i'm just going to sign out a moment i'll be back in time for the start, hopefully everyone else will be here by then. see you in a bit.

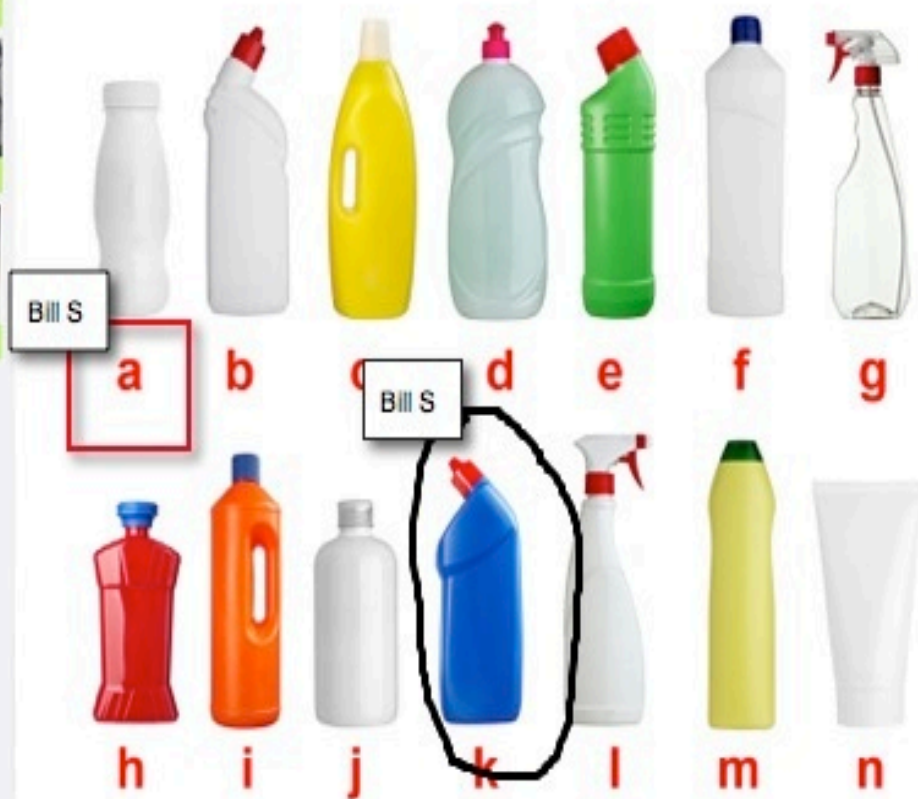
Geraint Evans (Ins) >> has left the room.

Geraint Evans (Ins) >> has entered the room.

Geraint Evans (Ins) > hello, i'm back - we'll wait for everyone else and then we'll begin

Send

Which of these container shapes would you assign the 'Cleanaway Cleaning' product if you wanted to reinforce an environmentally responsible brand?"



Group Chat

Anna G : perhaps a ball and chain, or military? only joking

Steven M : ok last one guys

Steven M : This is a basic design of how the layout would be

Cheryl A : I was wondering if the last option which seemed to be a generic home loan product choice was needed when you have the options that a home owner is presented with

Steven M : do you have any comments?

Patrice S : I don't understand sorry

Jordan M : the link text is too similar to the main body text

Jordan M : needs to be darker

Steven M : what are your first impressions of the layout?Patrice S :

Jordan M : none of the headings should be in green, better all black and just let all the sizing do the work

Steven M : No things are positioned

discussion topic: "Did anyone use the footer at the bottom of the website to navigate around the website?"

Cheryl A : Maybe the top heading is green and then in black.

Patrice S : I find the green writing on the LHS either too hard to read or maybe too small a font

Jordan M : overall I find the layout to be great

Jeff H : I think the layout is good, maintains links on the side, up top, clear delineation between headings, and someone likes just terrible albums

Jordan M : very well spaced and easy to read

Jeff H : light green text is perhaps too light

Cheryl A : I looked at it when searching for corporate

Type your message here...

Send

Members

Select a chat prompt...

# Advantages

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# Advantages

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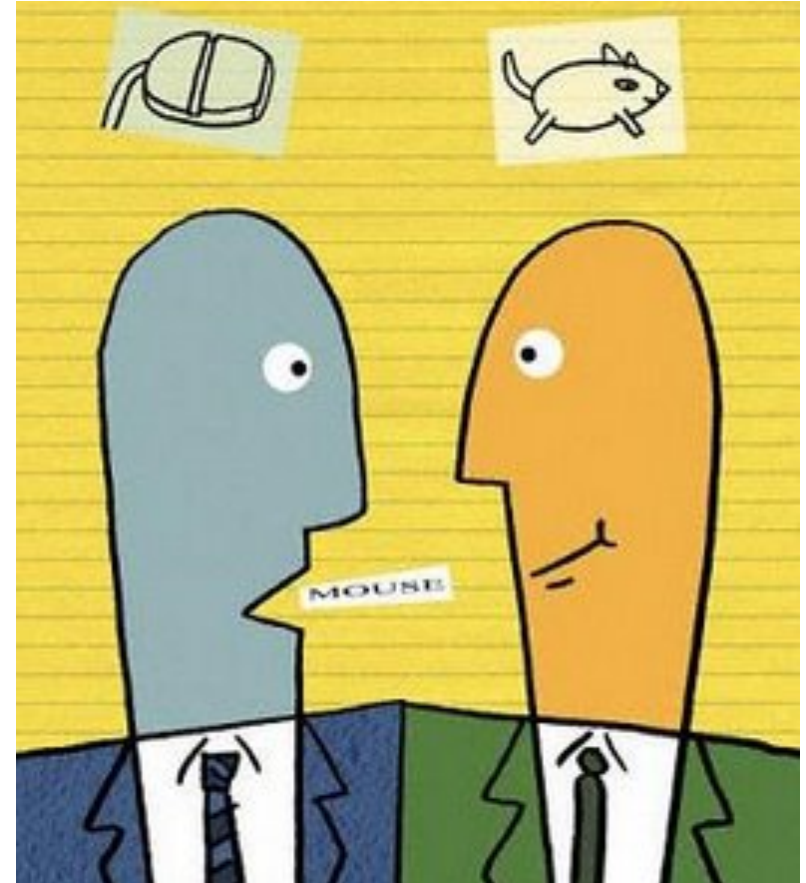


# Advantages

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# Drawbacks



# How we used online focus groups

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- › Three groups of 8-10 participants (recruited 12)
- › Real-time
- › No phone or audio component
- › Utility contacts over a wide geographical area
- › Groups lasted 1 to 1.5 hours

# Who and Why

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- › Testing language, messaging, concepts for programs
- › Gathering feedback (esp. on online services)
- › For users of online services, business customers, geographically dispersed stakeholders

# Tips for online focus group moderation

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- ✓ Set expectations
- ✓ Over-communicate
- ✓ Consider your audience
- ✓ Communicate again
- ✓ Plan for more material than a traditional focus group

We're more than half-way done.  
Thanks for hanging in there.



E2 404

CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION

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CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION



# Follow-up

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- › Online follow-up survey sent to group participants
- › Participants gave feedback and rated their satisfaction
- › Generally, feedback was positive



# Results

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- › Instant transcripts
- › Satisfaction from participants
- › Quotes and a story for the report



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# Questions?