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?

› Real-time, text-based communication

› Anyone with an internet connection can participate

› Allows for participants to see each other’s answers

› Option to use voice and/or video

› Participant polling tools
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synchronous</th>
<th>Asynchronous</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real time chat</td>
<td>Delayed bulletin board style posting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lasts 1-2 hours</td>
<td>Lasts as much as a week, 5-30 minutes per day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requires quick typing</td>
<td>Requires ongoing effort and attention</td>
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Tonights Seminar: Green travel

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
Which of these container shapes would you assign the 'Cleanaway Cleaning' product if you wanted to reinforce an environmentally responsible brand?
Advantages
Advantages
Advantages
Drawbacks
How we used online focus groups

› 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

› 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

✓ 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.
Follow-up

› Online follow-up survey sent to group participants

› Participants gave feedback and rated their satisfaction

› Generally, feedback was positive
Results

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