

Area 7 Audience Research Techniques	<p>Here's an overview of audience research with learning points on different techniques and tips for trying them out. Research can be expensive and arts organisations find it difficult to set aside sums from their marketing budgets to do it. Enthusiasm and a feeling of 'we've only got one stab at this' can result in huge and unwieldy briefs. Reports that sit on the shelf don't offer value for money. Your research findings need to be a working document. Time spent on planning your research is time well spent.</p>
What is market research? What is it used for? People you could research Information you could collect	<p><i>"the study of consumers' needs and preferences"</i> (Oxford English Dictionary)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an opportunity to collect information that you need • a mechanism for counting or measuring • a way of testing people's response to something • a structured way of assessing attitudes and opinions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to gather information to inform decision making (might stop you making mistakes!) • keeps you in touch with your audience; enables you to know more about them • tells you what they think about products /services /image • to get information about who buys your product and why • to prove (or disprove) gut feeling • for comparison purposes eg to compare your findings to a national average <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • existing customers • potential customers • general public/population at large • stakeholders • funders • individuals or groups identified by pre-determined characteristics eg local community groups; families with children under 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • statistical snapshots eg an overall profile of current attenders; an analysis of early and late booking patterns • feedback about the effectiveness of your printed communications eg pick-up rates, customer response to, coverage of catchment area • opinions of your service – good and bad points, areas for improvement • information about why people support your organisation (Friends, donors, volunteers) • evidence for your funders about the people you reach; information to demonstrate the need for what you provide

<p>Planning Research</p>	<p>Five essential questions to ask yourself:</p> <p>WHAT do you want to find out?</p> <p>WHY do you want to do it?</p> <p>WHAT will you do with it?</p> <p>WHO needs to see it?</p> <p><i>and</i></p> <p>can you get this information any other way?</p> <p>Hints to help you plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like decorating, preparation is everything. There are some bits you can't control – like how many customers complete a questionnaire – so control the bits you can: clearly defined objectives and good, clean data. • If your organisation has a business plan or marketing strategy, does it identify things you need to know about your audience? • Select methods to give you the best results – if you can only survey a small sample, will assisted-completion mean more completed questionnaires? • Don't forget the analysis – who is going to do it and how? • Bite-sized chunks might be more useful than a massive research exercise. • Data Protection Act – ensure your use of any data is legal and think about how you store or destroy it afterwards • Equality and access –take care that your chosen methodology doesn't exclude anyone • Any research means contact with your customers – don't forget, it's a PR opportunity too • If you can, tell your customers about the results and the actions you took – shows you've taken them seriously. 	<p>A Research Brief: Suggested Headings</p> <p>OBJECTIVES What do you need to achieve?</p> <p>METHODOLOGIES The best way to get the info. Are you looking for an overall picture, a specific measurement of something, in-depth exploration of one or two issues?</p> <p>SAMPLE Who is it you want to research? How will you identify them? Will they give you the information you need?</p> <p>ACTION PLAN Include tasks, timeline, deadlines. Remember to allow time for sourcing data, completed questionnaires to filter back to you, recruitment of focus group participants.</p> <p>BUDGET Cost all items in advance – it would be disastrous to run out of money half way through! Get accurate quotes if you are using external consultants and agencies. Don't forget questionnaire printing, postage, reply-paid envelopes or freepost, data analysis (number crunching), moderators' fees, room hire, incentives for participants.</p> <p>REPORT FORMAT How do you want the results reported? The marketing team may want full statistical tables and transcripts, but the Board may prefer a 10 minute presentation with colourful graphs and an executive summary.</p>
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Research Types	<p>Research falls into two broad types: Primary Data: purpose designed; information or data you collect or commission someone else to collect on your behalf and for a specific reason Secondary Data: information or data that already exists, for example, in trade journals, government statistics and publications, research carried out by other organisations, publicly available survey results eg MORI and BRMB, information in libraries and on the internet. Both have their uses and their drawbacks</p>		
	<p>Primary Data <i>the pros</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bespoke research • specific to your needs • you control it • up-to-date <p><i>and the cons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually expensive • takes time to plan and reap results • needs analysis and interpretation – by you or someone you pay 	<p>Secondary Data <i>the pros</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inexpensive or free • may be easily available • use to test your initial theories and refine your research needs <p><i>and the cons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not specific to your needs • may not be reported in a way that's useful to you • could be old • reliability of methodologies and sample may not be assured 	<p>Tip Even if you're planning to gather primary data, some desk research can be useful and there's no better place to start than your own organisation. You might have really useful information within data you already own:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • box office data: sales reports, financial reports, postcode analysis, frequency analysis • business plan • funding applications • annual reports • board reports <p>or maybe a similar organisation to you has done a similar study and will share their findings</p>

<p>Methodologies and Techniques</p>	<p>Usually divided into quantitative and qualitative techniques.</p> <p>Quantitative: counts things, measures with numbers or percentages; results often presented as statistics eg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% of customers who attended our cinema in the past 12 months have bought popcorn • 75% of attenders think our events brochure is easy to use • half of those surveyed agreed with the statement that Anytown benefits from an arts centre • 60% of attenders live within 5 miles of the theatre <p>Qualitative: is about assessing opinions, attitudes and preferences; allows you to probe topics in more depth, gain detailed feedback; can be used to test opinion about something specific, eg sample designs for a new events brochure or customer response to a proposed series of workshops.</p>		
	<p>Quantitative Research</p> <p>Some pros ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be cheaper • might be easier to identify participants • can survey a large number of people • can be done in-house • good for providing succinct snapshot of a range of issues or an overview <p>Some cons ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need a lot of contacts – at least 3 times the response you are aiming for • needs number crunching – may need to use external facility • risk of poor return • needs care to ensure questions will produce information required • information gathered is limited 	<p>Qualitative Research</p> <p>Some pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allows you to explore specific issues (that might be difficult to pin down in questionnaire) • enables a deeper insight into customer attitudes • may throw up additional information • valuable opportunity to speak directly to audience <p>Some cons ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually more expensive • best done by an independent researcher, so not possible in-house • focus groups need trained moderator – added costs • recruitment of participants can be tricky 	<p>Tip</p> <p>Some research briefs benefit from a mix of quantitative and qualitative research.</p> <p>An initial questionnaire can provide an overview of your audience but also identify issues that need exploring in more depth. If your survey reveals that 65% weren't satisfied with the welcome at the venue, you could commission qualitative research about attitudes to customer care.</p> <p><i>or, looked at the other way</i></p> <p>Holding focus groups or customer circles may help to establish which topics customers think are most important – you can then explore these with a bigger sample in a survey.</p>

Samples

The issue of samples can be quite complicated. Trained researchers talk about '*population of interest*' (the subjects of your research), *random sampling*, *quota sampling* to name a few. However, you don't need a degree in research sciences to undertake your own projects, but do bear in mind the following guidelines:

Sample size – depends on your research project, but try for at least 300 completed questionnaires. If you are a community-based arts company with a small core group of participants, that might not be possible, so aim for 50-60% of the total group of people you are interested in.

Data – you'll need at least 3 times more data forms or 'collection attempts' than the required response rate. If you need 300 completed questionnaires, distribute at least 1,000.

Choosing your sample – think about the balance you need to achieve: if you want an overview of **all** attenders, you need to make sure it's not just the loyal regulars that fill in the questionnaires.

Applying criteria to a sample – need to home in on a very specific group of people? You could select 'everyone who comes to the annual pantomime but nothing else' through interrogating your box office.

Filtering research subjects: a telephone survey could begin with a (polite!) question to filter out the people you don't want: 'Have you seen any opera at the Anytown Playhouse in the last year?' If the answer is 'yes' and you want lapsed opera attenders, you simply say, 'we are particularly talking to people who haven't been this year – thank you for helping with our research'.

Random sampling – if you don't want to mail your whole database, select people by choosing random numbers. When handing out questionnaires on the door, you could do every 3rd and every 5th person alternately. It's good not to give questionnaires to both halves of a couple – likely to share beliefs and values, though they may protest otherwise!

Specific samples – if you want to reach a particular group, you might access them through other partners or agencies. For instance, if you want to talk to families in the area, you could do it through family drop-in centres, a local Sure Start group, parent-teacher groups.

<p>Questionnaires</p> <p>Most quantitative research uses a questionnaire or pro-forma survey</p>	<p>Printed Questionnaire Often the preferred choice of organisations surveying a large number of customers, eg all current and lapsed attenders on our database, a sample of visitors to a Festival.</p> <p>Can be distributed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by post to named contacts • by email to named contacts • door-to-door in selected areas/streets • by field worker on the street (usually assisted completion) • handed direct to attender at venue/event • left on seat at venue/event • for casual pick-up at selected outlets <p>Questionnaires can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-completion • assisted completion (interviewer guides participant through questions) <p>Also worth considering:</p> <p>mini questionnaires – ask one or two questions about something specific, perhaps to check out an idea before you action it - do it in postcard format</p> <p>postcode surveys – fieldworkers capture postcodes from the audience as they arrive, very useful for Festivals with lots of free events who can't get this information from box office records</p> <p>vox pops – fieldworkers (or your friendly front-of-house staff) gather quick responses from visitors and record them on tape or a pro-forma response sheet</p> <p>web survey – a questionnaire posted on your website for customers to complete when they visit the site</p>	<p>Ten Tips for questionnaires</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct is best. Don't use 20 words if 10 say it better. 2. Save all those surveys you get in 'junk' mail. Copy the good ones and see how not to do it! 3. Test your questions on someone else. Do they interpret them as you intended? 4. Group questions in a logical order. Start with personal and demographic data, then ask quick and easy questions. Tackle more complex or sensitive issues further down. 5. Layout is as important as content. If it looks cluttered or uninviting, only survey junkies will fill it in. 6. Stick to a maximum of 4 sides or 12 to 15 questions. Less can be more. People get bored. 7. If you need to ask for sensitive data (eg household income), present the answers in ranges (□£5,000 to £10,000). 8. It can be helpful to explain why you are asking for sensitive information (eg 'we are asking about household income because it helps us to make our services available to everyone'). 9. Sounds obvious, but signpost people through the question with 'PTO' and 'continue at question 7'. It's amazing how many questionnaires come back with reverse sides left blank. 10. Incentives will increase the response. Generic rewards (eg M& S vouchers) have more credibility than free tickets to your theatre.
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	<p>Telephone Survey Like everything else, telephone surveys have pluses and minuses:</p> <p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talk directly to your customers/sample • opportunity to explain and clarify questions • can be quantitative or qualitative • process can be very quick • can be done in house <p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 – 6 questions maximum; 10 – 15 mins per phone call • limited information gained • dependent on good quality data for contacts • more costly if done externally • people hostile to telemarketing (but usually happy if they're an existing customer) 	<p>Hints for Telephone Surveys</p> <p>Use a professional company or train your own staff – first impressions count!</p> <p>Begin by introducing the organisation, the purpose of the call and ask if it is convenient to be calling</p> <p>Record basic details to define your sample: male/female; age group; postcode</p> <p>Use a standardised form for responses – aids analysis. Limit 'open' questions – telephone researchers won't have time to document</p> <p>Professional companies use software programmes which allow the responses to be recorded as the call takes place – more expensive but facilitates easy analysis</p> <p>Have a clear procedure for recording 'call-backs' when someone is out or unavailable – multiple calls from different researchers will irritate</p> <p>Include a prize draw as a 'thank you'</p>
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<p>Quantitative Techniques</p>	<p>Focus Groups Probably the most popular form of qualitative research. It's easiest to recruit from existing attendees; people who don't attend are less likely to want to commit the time. Can be quite costly (moderator, room hire, refreshments, payments to participants, tape transcription and analysis costs), but it is a wonderful opportunity to dig deep into your customers' motivations, attitudes and opinions about your organisation. It's first-hand knowledge and can be powerful.</p> <p>Also worth considering:</p> <p>One-to-one in-depth interviews - exactly what it says on the packet. A personal interview (usually face-to-face) that allows you to discuss issues in considerable detail. You can use a structured plan to guide the discussion or be more open. Time-consuming and therefore expensive, but might be appropriate when you need detailed evidence eg, consulting project partners to construct a funding application, interviewing a sample of regular subscribers before you revamp the subscription scheme.</p> <p>Customer circles or user groups - you can establish a regular group that meets at intervals to give you feedback about your organisation, its products and services. Likely to be your loyal regulars, so doesn't give you the whole picture, but useful for staying in touch with current opinion or gaining instant reaction.</p> <p>Mystery Shoppers - A chance to re-create the experience your customers have and gain direct feedback about identified facilities or services. Ten mystery shoppers try to book tickets the day booking opens for your new season – how easy was it, did they encounter hurdles? Five first-time attendees come at your invitation and are given a crib-sheet to chart their experience – from travelling to the venue to getting a drink in the interval to their enjoyment of the production.</p>	<p>Ten Tips for Focus Groups</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use an independent moderator. It's difficult for someone in your organisation to be objective. 2. However you have recruited your participants, send them a letter of confirmation with a map. 3. Eight is the optimum number for a focus group. 4. Expect to pay them something for their time and to contribute towards travel expense – at least £10. An additional gift – eg shopping vouchers (sponsorship in kind?) is a thoughtful thank you. 5. Serve simple refreshments on arrival – make them feel welcome and comfortable. 6. Ask open questions (see next section). Encourage, but don't lead. 7. Write a discussion plan in advance – time it to make sure you can cover all the issues. 8. Tape the session – you can't take adequate notes during it – but ask their permission at the start 9. Be informal, but professional. Consider your moderator in relation to the participants. Teenage members of your drama club will need a different approach to regular concert subscribers. 10. Never base your findings on the result of one focus group.
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Closed or Open Questions?

A whole section on questions?! Questions are the nuts and bolts of your research. What you ask and the way you ask will affect the amount and quality of information you get. Also, think about how you will analyse the responses.

Closed questions work best on questionnaires and in large surveys. Allow respondents to express an opinion but within a limited framework. Makes the analysis of a large number of responses more manageable. For example:

Have you used our events brochure?

Yes No

Do you think our events brochure is easy to use?

Yes No Don't know

It is possible to structure questions to gain a little more insight: How would you rate our events brochure?

very easy to use

quite easy to use

neither easy nor difficult to use

quite difficult to use

very difficult to use

Won't tell you **why** someone finds your events brochure easy or difficult to use, but gives more information than the previous version.

Closed questions can also have multiple-choice responses: How do you get your copy of our events brochure?

by post, I'm on your mailing list

I pick it up when I'm in the theatre

from my local library

from my local leisure centre

Remember to indicate whether respondents can tick more than one box – you may want one answer only.

You can delve a little bit into opinions on a questionnaire by using statements they can agree or disagree with:

Anytown Arts Centre is a friendly, welcoming place

disagree strongly disagree slightly neither agree nor disagree agree slightly agree strongly

The image of Anytown Arts Centre is off-putting for some people

disagree strongly disagree slightly neither agree nor disagree agree slightly agree strongly

Open questions are generally used in focus groups and depth-interviews. Allowing the participant to offer full and honest opinions, allows you to gain gut reaction. Encourage and prompt to gain the feedback you need, but never lead or influence. Ask 'What do you think about the Council's decision to close the swimming baths' **not** 'Do you think the Council's decision to close the swimming baths was a bad one' or 'Are you angry about the council's decision to close the swimming baths'.

<p>For anyone to try</p> <p>Create a pick-up comments card for the box office, foyer and café areas – give it a different topic every month – summarise the main comments each time and see how much feedback you have at the end of the year</p>	<p>For more experienced practitioners</p> <p>Send a one page questionnaire with the 5 things you most need to know to your customers – analyse the findings manually, on an excel spreadsheet or farm it out to a data processing bureau.</p>	<p>May need specialist input</p> <p>Employ a telephone research agency to survey a sample of attenders to your Festival. Find out how far they travelled, whether they stayed overnight and what else they did (ate in local restaurants, used local shops, visited the award-winning craft centre nearby).</p>
<p>Low cost and time</p> <p>If your event/activity involves ticketing or enrolment, at least ask them where they heard about you.</p>	<p>Medium cost and time</p> <p>Include a questionnaire and pre-paid envelope with your season brochure mailing for instant feedback on the print and the events.</p>	<p>Resource intensive</p> <p>Plan an in-depth survey of your customers to gain everything you need to revitalise your business plan and marketing strategy. Include a questionnaire to gain a picture of the demographic profile of your audience, together with their programming preferences and buying habits. Build on this with focus group discussions to identify the things they love and hate, round it off with mystery shoppers to tell you what it's really like being your customer!</p>
<p>Useful resources</p>	<p>Further reading: The Marketing Manual by Heather Maitland published by Arts Marketing Association DIY Guide to Marketing by Moi Ali published by Directory of Social Change – good section on doing research yourself Commissioning Market Research by Liz Hill published by Arts Marketing Association - all the right questions to ask if you're employing someone else to do it</p>	<p>Sources of secondary data: www.artscouncil.org.uk/information/publications various published research reports and the Index of Market Research for the Arts www.statistics.gov.uk the home of official UK statistics based on census data and other surveys – you can specify local areas and the data you want to see www.newaudiences.org.uk case studies and publications on audience development Target Group Index Findings from the British Market Research Bureau's annual household survey – available to ACE clients</p>