6 INGREDIENTS FOR HEALTHIER B2B RESEARCH

SPICEWORKS
Where IT goes to work.™

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With more choices and easier access, the menu of options for consumers is massive. As a result, smart market research is critical to reaching (and understanding!) these more sophisticated palates.
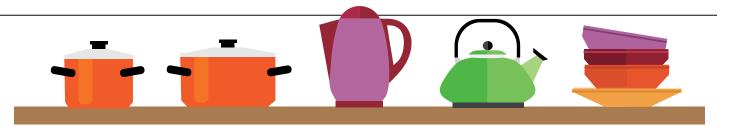
The challenge? The need for customer insight has exploded over the last ten years, forcing the consumer research industry to cook up creative solutions. But B2B research has been feeling the heat (and lagging behind) as they've held onto traditional methods of collecting feedback. For those of us in the tech market, the research kitchen is especially chaotic. As the speed of innovation continues to increase, it's getting harder to justify using traditional market research methods. In other words, it's time for a new recipe.

The market fluctuates at a rapid pace... all while technology needs and purchases grow more complex. But this doesn't mean that market research has to be complex as well. Endless surveys, lengthy timelines, and massive budgets are—and should be—relics of the past.

B2B customers have changed, and marketers must adapt with more modern utensils. Social media, mobile technology, and big data play bigger roles in business, and they should play bigger roles in market research as well. You need real, honest customer insight not only for business clarity, but to uncover action steps and identify gaps. And the traditional way of gathering this insight is simply no longer palatable.

Incorporate these six research ingredients into your marketing mix for faster, more useful insight that informs better business decisions. Bon appétit!

NEW FLAVORS: DITCH OLD SCHOOL SURVEYS

Industry experts have known for years that long, traditional market-research surveys are a dying breed. While slow cooking might add flavor in the kitchen, it only fuels frustration in surveys. Why? Because attention spans have shrunk (thanks, smartphones) and survey fatigue is rampant.

HUMANS TODAY HAVE SHORTER ATTENTION SPANS THAN A GOLDFISH, ACCORDING TO A NEW STUDY FROM MICROSOFT.[TK1]

The Pew Research Center reports that survey response rates fell from 36% in 1996 to 9% in 2012. And they're not expected to bounce back any time soon. Lengthy surveys have been shown to be more susceptible to respondent "satisficing" (taking the fastest route through a survey just to get it done and receive the incentive). The result? Bland data.

In fact, research shows that as surveys get longer, people spend less time on each question.[TK2] Sometimes portion size is mistaken for quality. And to top it all off, long surveys flat-out don't work on mobile devices. Sure, they can be mobile optimized, but who fills out a huge survey on their smartphone? Probably not the people you really want to hear from.

SURVEY ABANDON RATES INCREASE FOR SURVEYS THAT TAKE MORE THAN 7-8 MINUTES TO COMPLETE, ACCORDING TO A STUDY FROM SURVEYMONKEY.[TK2]

The point? Most customers today won't spend 20 minutes filling in a survey. Those who take the time to fill out long surveys are significantly different than your typical customer. They won't represent the people you are actually trying to reach with your product or service.

If you search "ideal length for an online survey," you'll probably come up with a standard range of 15-20 minutes. But IT professionals are specialized diners. We actually asked them, and they told us their ideal survey length: Five minutes. Any longer and they tend to glaze over or drop out. Survey taste buds begin to go numb after the five-minute mark, and results become unreliable.

> " A RECENT PANELIST SHARED, "HOW CAN SURVEYS BE BETTER, LIMIT THE NUMBER OF QUESTIONS. TOO MANY AND THE 'GIVE A CRAP' FACTOR GOES RIGHT DOWN THE TUBES. "

LESS IS MORE WHEN YOU'RE SURVEYING IT PROS.

Too much seasoning... ruins the dish. If your market research recipe still calls for overly detailed, infuriatingly lengthy surveys, your outdated methods are going to get you unhelpful responses at best (and zero responses at worst).

> " AN IT PRO SHARED, "BREVITY IS IMPORTANT - I DON'T HAVE A LOT OF TIME TO DEVOTE TO SURVEYS. "

The dilemma: How to shorten surveys when you need tons of data on your market, products, or services. Besides whipping up more concise questions, you can also use alternative data sources and tap into research communities (a topic we'll delve into in just a bit).

Brevity is gourmet in B2B market research. Respondents answer quickly, and your company can gain insights at the breakneck speed of today's business world.

RESPECT: CONSIDER PARTICIPANTS PALATES

Prepare to take your marketing to master chef level. We've figured out how to conduct market research in a way that gets healthier results, and we're about to share some of those juicy secrets with you.

Wait... who are we to spout the market research gospel? Well, 86% of our Voice of IT panelists told us in a recent survey that they ONLY participate in Spiceworks research. They're exclusive Spiceworks diners—we believe because we treat them like the human beings they are.

At Spiceworks, our global community of real IT buyers gives it to us straight (if your dish is bland, it helps to know!). We listen, because they aren't just "respondents" – they're people. They're also techies who work with brands every day and have valuable insight to share.

No surprise: Our IT pros told us they don't want to spend a long time filling out surveys. So we keep them short, sweet, and to the point. They're able to relish every question, and we get data we can trust. Win/win!

CHEF SECRET #1:
Respect their time and keep surveys short.

Busy IT managers? They're not sitting around all day with nothing better to do than spend 20 minutes taking a survey for points they can eventually cash in for a coffee mug.

CHEF SECRET #2:
Use straight talk.

Cut the jargon. Trim the fat. Don't make your audience break out their dictionaries. Write your survey questions in an understandable way.

> **A RECENT PANELIST SHARED, "I LIKE SPICEWORKS SURVEYS BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE PERSONABLE. SOMEWHAT FEELS LIKE PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF SYSADMINS WRITE THE QUESTIONS."**

In B2B, and especially in tech, people have a tendency to over-engineer survey questions. Too many flavors leaves respondents scratching their heads, trying to make sense of what they're being asked. This does not result in great feedback data.

Ask questions as if respondents were standing right in front of you. Strive for clear and precise language to make your questions easier to answer.

CHEF SECRET #3:
Don't abuse your audience (should go without saying).

IT pros are busy people. They're putting out user fires (sometimes literally!), upgrading software, and restoring servers. That leaves little time to fill out surveys. When we hear horror stories about online panels sending 50-60 survey invitations to their panelists per day, jamming up inboxes with spammy pleads to take another long survey in exchange for pennies... well, it gets us riled up.

That's no way to treat people. It's the equivalent of constantly harassing a table after they've said "please leave us alone." It's an ineffective approach—they're just going to get annoyed and opt out completely.

If you want survey respondents to give you their time and valuable feedback, treat them with respect. Make your requests legitimate, offer decent incentives, and keep your invitations to a minimum. There's a good chance they'll help you out (and maybe even return for second servings).
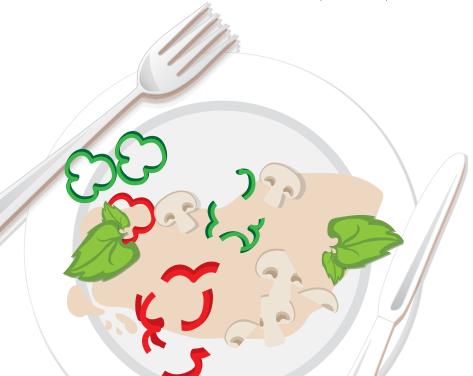
CHEF SECRET #4:
Deliver a five-star experience.

Building on the three former points—keep surveys short, write clear questions, and treat respondents with respect. One more strategy to getting great results from your survey: Make it a pleasant experience.

Right... but how? There are tons of ways: gamify surveys or include rich interactive elements for better engagement. One element many businesses skip over: Optimizing the survey for mobile. IT pros are on-the-go all day long. They're more likely to fill out your survey if they can do it easily from their smartphone (and not have to pinch the screen to read your questions). In fact, about 30% of all online surveys are now taken using a mobile device—and that percentage is expected to increase quickly.[TK3]

When you find more engaging ways to interact with your respondents, they'll give you higher-quality responses—which result in more valuable insights for your business. Just remember: a fancy survey will go unconsumed if it's poorly written, too long, or delivered in a spammy way!

> **" YOU ARE GATHERING FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE. ASK YOURSELF: WOULD YOU TAKE THIS SURVEY? "**

QUALITY:
TASTE TEST
RESEARCH SERVICES

You think you're getting feedback from a CIO—turns out it's just Mike the Pizza Guy, who lied to get into your survey for the incentive.
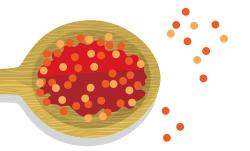
You discover one respondent has completed your survey 37 times to take advantage of the "tell a friend" recruitment carrot.

None of your survey data makes sense... until you learn that half of your respondents already spent two hours completing competitors' surveys before they finally took yours. Yikes!

Think this doesn't happen often? You'd be surprised. There's a whole population of "professional respondents" out there who've figured out creative ways to goose their incentives. It's no secret that the quality of B2B online panels is... a bit spoiled.

Then there are the hacker farms. These banes of the market-research industry are getting smarter and more creative all the time. They get around digital fingerprints and encrypted URLs with ease. They can even fake online identities well.

Not only do these false sources waste your resources – they dilute your feedback data and ruin the whole meal.

TO GET REAL INSIGHTS FROM REAL PEOPLE IN YOUR TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC, YOU NEED TO BE VIGILANT.

You take the time to create surveys that'll get you the insights you need to move your company forward. But do you really know who you're sending those surveys out to?

Falsified, low-quality, and biased panelists (artificial flavors) are a real problem for companies seeking market insights. We all know it. And there are things you can do about it.

1 PICK YOUR PARTNERS CAREFULLY

Find a market-research company that has a foolproof method for qualifying panel participants, such as a research community like Spiceworks.

2 SCRUTINIZE THE DATA YOU'RE GETTING

Is it giving you the insights you need? Is data quality going down over time? Are you seeing strange patterns emerging? Don't get complacent. Keep your eyes open.
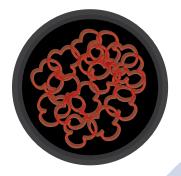
3 EXPLORE NEW DATA SOURCES FOR INSIGHTS

Social media, big data analytics, and boutique panels are good examples.

Like many other industries, market research is being inundated with scammers and hackers – and sometimes even legitimate panel participants are biased or simply not qualified to answer your surveys.

The heat is rising in the kitchen, but there's no need to flee! Know where your respondents are coming from and understand how they're being qualified. These are issues businesses have to address today – so don't hesitate to pose those questions to your researchers.

This is why we rely on our internal panel so much here at Spiceworks. We know who we're talking to because we can look at a participant's Spiceworks Community profile and see the conversations they're having. If they're using the Spiceworks app, we can even look at their usage and verify they are... who they say they are (FDA approved!).

What are your researchers doing to ensure your survey respondents are legitimate, qualified, unbiased, and 100% all natural?

BIG DATA: TURN IT INTO BIG INSIGHT

Big data is a BIG buzzword. It's also incredibly powerful... and often misunderstood.

IBM reports that 90% of the data in the world today has been created over the last two years alone.[TK4] This data—structured and unstructured—comes from everywhere: social media, sensors, email, video, photos, financial transactions, and GPS signals to name a few. This mass of data is what we now call Big Data–the protein of every good market research diet.

That said, its sheer size is overwhelming for businesses (and for researchers who are trying to make the most of it). Data scientists are the best at working with this data, but their focus is on transforming data into understandable formats (bite-size chunks). They're not focused on translating that data into marketing objectives and research hypotheses.

"SEMANTICS ARE CREATING ARTIFICIAL BARRIERS BETWEEN 'MARKET RESEARCH' AND 'BIG DATA'."[TK5]

And that's where you have the opportunity to take your market research results from good to gourmet.

DATA SCIENTISTS + RESEARCHERS TURNS BIG SCARY DATA... INTO INSIGHT.

You need both ingredients: data and research. If you're only making business decisions based on a survey, or you're only analyzing big data, it's possible you're limiting your flavor profile and what's really happening in the broader market. But how do you bridge that gap?

It's actually no one person's responsibility. The task: Come to the table together and collaborate. The researcher must learn enough from the data scientist to interpret results and drive conversations. In essence, the researcher becomes an interpreter.

Research agencies that operate as interpreters help you get to the right data for your specific needs. Brands today can no longer afford to silo their research and data—they need to blend these insights or find providers that will do it for them.

Traditional analytics have their place; big data is growing in importance. But when paired together (like the right wine with the right dish), they're a powerhouse of customer insight.

SPEED + PERFECTION: A WELL-BALANCED MEAL

Business leaders are increasingly wielding the chef's knife and making critical decisions without the customer insight to back those decisions up. Why? Because the market research took too long. "Right but late" doesn't do anyone any good.

"COMPANIES IN THE TOP THIRD OF THEIR INDUSTRY IN THE USE OF DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING WERE, ON AVERAGE, 5% MORE PRODUCTIVE AND 6% MORE PROFITABLE THAN THEIR COMPETITORS."[TK6]

Leaders have to make decisions now. But quality research takes time, right?

Not necessarily.

Think about it for a minute: Do you really need to send out a survey with absolute methodical precision—or can you just get something out there to the right audience and get some insights quickly? If you're stuck in perfectionist mode, you end up fine-tuning your dish until your buyers decide to dine elsewhere. Consider this quote from Seth Godin:

"IT'S THAT LITTLE VOICE IN THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD, THE 'BUT' OR THE 'WHAT IF' THAT SPEAKS UP AT THE CRUCIAL MOMENT AND DEFEATS THE JOY AND INSIGHT YOU BROUGHT TO THE PROJECT IN THE FIRST PLACE. IT'S THE LIZARD [BRAIN] THAT RUINS YOUR CAREER, STUNTS YOUR PROJECTS, AND HINDERS YOUR ORGANIZATION."[TK7]

Decide if you want to be a slow-cooker (delicious, but what's the sacrifice?), or go the good-enough-but-quick route. While there may be scenarios in which you have no choice but to work through the 3- or 4-month research timeline, there are also ways you can get useful data much faster.

After all, there are other sources of insight beyond surveys. Social media and big data analysis are two such sources to consider. This kind of information is always on and constantly being gathered. They might not answer all of your questions, but they probably answer enough to gain a few quick insights to inform your next move.

Even better, use that data stream to answer as many questions as possible, then conduct a brief survey to fill in the gaps. We help clients with this all the

time, actually. Instead of asking survey respondents about their technology usage, our clients just use Spiceworks data to see what IT pros are using. This leaves fewer questions to ask when they send out surveys.

This doesn't mean you should take shortcuts (substitute margarine for butter) when putting together a survey. You should still follow best practices to ensure the data you gather is certified fresh. But using other methods of gathering data can help you speed up the process.

This is one of the beautiful things about a vertical social network like Spiceworks (or Doximity, or Edmodo). These are ready-made research communities—and they're changing the way businesses gather insights. These communities have a collection of professionals eager to help with research, and the members are already profiled and qualified. This results in higher response rates and more reliable data. This also significantly reduces the amount of time required to find respondents, qualify them, invite them, wait for their responses and then review the data.

Communities give you access to people. You can either tap into existing research communities like Spiceworks, or build your own market-research system using the tools and platforms that are available today. Research communities have made insights more accessible, more trustworthy, and faster. They're your research brain food, all in one place.

CREATIVITY:
BREAK THE MOLD

Still conducting market research the old-fashioned way? It's time to modernize your kitchen.

Why? Because you have more options today than ever before. You have access to focused communities. You have big data.

Thousands of tech vendors have tapped into the hearts, minds, and budgets of millions of IT professionals with Spiceworks tools and our qualified Community. Our annual State of IT report alone gives businesses unique insight into the everyday work lives of IT pros.

Its insight they can use to make better decisions faster, eliminate unnecessary surveys, and combine with big data for smarter, healthier business moves.

You're not stuck with traditional market research methods. Thanks to technology and a more interconnected customer-base, you've got a cabinet full of data sources.

Ditch the status quo. Abandon the old, tireless way of doing things. Create a meal that satisfies your business needs. How? Drive innovation with innovative research methods.

Consider this your call to arms. Help us change the research industry and how we gather insights! Mix our six research ingredients together for heart-healthy, quality data.

WHO ARE WE?

Spiceworks has shaken up the tech space and transformed how tech products and services are sold to IT pros across the globe. Some of the biggest tech companies in the world are using our panels to gather critical market data and advertise in our IT-pro-centric community.

How are YOU marketing to tech pros today? It might be time to shift your strategy... and add a dash of spice!

SOURCES

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