



Seven Stupid, Random Research Tricks

by Carol Shea, CEO, Olivetree Research

First of all, let me make it clear that market researchers aren't perfect. Mistakes—by omission as well as commission—do happen. Thankfully many market research missteps don't have a substantial effect on research results. However, that is not necessarily true of some of the tricks listed here. If you have ever been or are party to any of the following, shame on you. And double shame on the focus group facility that doesn't respect chocoholics!

1. INTERVIEWING PROFESSIONAL RESPONDENTS

I'm not talking about legitimate panelists that occasionally complete a survey or participate in a taste test. I'm talking about those that will lie and cheat their way into a study to make 20 bucks. And bad! bad! bad! to those research firms recruiting these folks even when they know better.

2. BELIEVING EVERYTHING A RESPONDENT TELLS YOU

I asked Terry, my husband, what he thought of dinner last night and he said it was "very good." John, my 16-year-old son, was less sensitive but more honest when he told me it "tastes weird," saving Terry from having to eat that meal again. We ALL sometimes say things we don't quite mean...we might be embarrassed, don't want to hurt someone's feelings, want to please someone, want to feel good about ourselves, and sometimes we just say things even when we are not sure why. This is not to say we can't believe anything a respondent says – just that we need to be careful and apply good research and listening techniques.

3. SUGGING (I SWEAR THAT IS WHAT IT IS CALLED)

"Selling under the guise of research" ("sugging") is jargon for asking a consumer a few questions just to get them to consider buying your product or service at the end of the "survey." Flogging is too good for "suggers."

4. ASKING CONSUMERS IF YOUR PRODUCT IS "NEW AND DIFFERENT"

Have you ever asked someone eye-to-eye how "new and different" a test product is? First they look at you like a nitwit. and then they quickly answer lest you think they are a nitwit (unless it's a professional respondent --then see point #1 above). YOU know whether it is really new or not, so you don't need to ask the consumer. Try instead just asking how different (or unique) the product is. That's what you are looking for, isn't it?

5. SKIPPING THE PRE-TEST PHASE OF SURVEY DESIGN

You can't do much about messing up a critical skip pattern during programming or a misunderstood question after your survey is completely fielded. Start by just testing the survey out with a few respondents and you will sleep better at night.

6. USING SAMPLING ERROR AS THE GOLD STANDARD OF SAMPLE ACCURACY

Sampling error simply refers to the error based on a randomly drawn sample of a population under study (particularly with regards to the repeatability of the survey). It does not account for errors such as non-response and coverage errors, which are very difficult to measure.

7. NOT HAVING PEANUT M&M'S IN A FOCUS GROUP FACILITY

Granola bars in the back room?! Sheesh. I know I should be "good," but I still need my treats!