When dealing with consumers who have an affinity to the online–social media realm, technological tools will be best. If you need to cover large geographies or work in categories with low incidences, net-based tools work very well. If you have flexibility with your timelines and are investigating strategic thinking, face-to-face engagement will yield best results.

In any case, the success of your projects will be determined by an open and honest discussion with your internal stakeholders and your research suppliers. If you are a supplier, providing case studies that explain a methodology is always appreciated, especially when collaborating with risk-averse organizations.

QUALITAS
Is It Bad to Have Too Much Fun?
Caroline Freakes
Ipsos Reid UU - Qualitative

There is concern that a qualitative discussion that is too much fun for respondents can influence response, say, towards a concept or product idea. But is this concern legitimate?

Before we answer this question, think about a time when you were in a meeting where, maybe, some difficult or less than exciting issues were being discussed. Was it easy to open up when the energy in the room felt flat, or you felt that you were being judged, or you were nervous about what you wanted to say? No, it wasn’t.

However, adding a little laughter to a situation can ease it, helping everyone to feel more relaxed, open and engaged – with the topic and with each other. And it can help you think more objectively about both positive and negative issues, leading to a richer and more productive discussion.

The same is also true in a qualitative discussion. Taking a discussion about a potentially dull, serious or dry subject and making it fun can help respondents open up, relax, and share their true, underlying feelings. Doing so also helps engage respondents rather than readily turn them off.

Take finance as an example. This is a personal issue for many, but it can also be considered a little dry and confusing, especially given the complexity of the jargon. Yet, by introducing techniques such as role-playing or wacky hats, you can help respondents really engage with the topic and open up on a new, refreshing level.

Warning: It is true that a session that is too much fun can become silly or even provide permission for excessive negativity. This potential needs to be carefully managed; but any experienced moderator knows just how to do so.

So, can a group be too much fun?
Yes, it can. But leveraging fun to really engage respondents can result in refreshing insight and a great night for all.

THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION
Dare to Repair
Ruth M. Corbin, CMRP
CorbinPartners Inc.

Vue’s “Dare to Compare” series over the past several months offered case study examples of ways to avoid the landmines surrounding comparative advertising.

Rafe Engle, outside legal counsel to Advertising Standards Canada (ASC), offered a much appreciated comment on part one of the series. In that article, “puffery” was described as a possible defence to a competitor’s claim that your ad’s comparison is unfair or untrue.

Rafe’s concern was that the article’s unlimited reference to puffery might leave the impression that the Canadian and American interpretations of and position on puffery are identical.

Certain American courts have found that puffery is an acceptable defence if the ad does not create a misleading general impression. Acceptance in Canada of the puffery defence is neither universal nor categorical.

In a recent ASC seminar, puffery was described as “a general claim of superiority over comparable products that is so vague it can be understood as nothing more than a mere expression of opinion, or an exaggerated, blustering, and boasting statement upon which no reasonable buyer would be justified in relying.”

It sounds like an innocent enough basis for creative advertising. But applying that standard to a real-life advertising dispute can prove more complicated than the simple words suggest.

On another matter, Rafe thought it worth keeping in mind that research which supports competitive claims has a shelf life. The comparative claim should remain as defensible during the course of the ad campaign as it was when the research was conducted.

“Since research is, in effect, a snapshot, a time capsule,” Rafe observed, “what may have been the case when the research was conducted may become outdated – or irrelevant – when comparative claims supported by the research are publicized in advertising. The compared-to products may have been reformulated or redesigned. The competitive environment may have changed materially.”
And as for using the word new to grab attention, the shelf life for new in today’s market may arguably be shorter than the conventional wisdom of a twelve-month window.

Thank you Rafe.

Comments or requests for future column topics are always welcome. Please email rcorbin@corbinpartners.com

STANDARDS

MRIA Adopts ICC/ESOMAR Code
Donald Williams

In 2008, MRIA’s national board of directors approved the endorsement of the International Chamber of Commerce/ESOMAR Code on Market and Social Research. And in October 2011, it voted to move to the next step, which would lead to the adoption of that code. The MRIA board acknowledged that the pace of change in the marketing research environment would require frequent and relevant updates to marketing research standards.

The MRIA Standards Committee is currently conducting a concordance review of the ICC/ESOMAR code of conduct versus the existing MRIA code. The committee will create an addendum that includes standards and guidelines unique to the Canadian marketing research environment.

Global Updates

In January 2012, a new global trade association, Mobile Marketing Research Association (MMRA) was launched. The main objective of this association is to develop professional standards and ethics related to the use of mobile devices for marketing research. For more information, visit www.mmra-global.org

In December 2011, the European Pharmaceutical Market Research Association (EphMRA) revised its code of conduct to reflect the proposed ESOMAR definition of social media. Over the past few years, the number of EphMRA members using social media has increased significantly. The revised definition of social media brings the association in line with other marketing research associations.

In January 2012, the European Commission (the executive body of the European Union) announced its decision to move ahead with comprehensive reform of the EU’s existing data protection rules. These rules would strengthen online privacy rights. While not directly tied to the marketing research industry, the new rules could potentially impact new data collection techniques.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Making Sense of the Online Consumer
Corrine Sandler

Universal interconnectivity means that everything in life is inextricably connected. And this interconnectivity has dramatically changed the consumer shopping experience. Today, consumers are connected to numerous social networks 24-7 via multiple media, and they use these platforms to talk, research, buy, and stay informed, as well as to report on and entertain themselves.

As mobile Internet penetration continues to grow, shoppers are becoming accustomed to a culture of real time, of instant feedback and advice. No corporate claim is left unverified, no offer unexamined, no product purchased without first comparing competitive claims: the Internet is the zero moment of truth.

The trick for researchers is to make sense of all this online chatter in order to draw conclusive insights. Google+ and Facebook are already inviting their users to categorize contacts into various circles or lists—a trend that makes us wonder when product reviews and other content will be streamed so that individuals see only the views of their most trusted contacts, or else the views of those who match their own demographic profiles—a feature that will aid in unearthing valuable insights from this space.

Complementing social media findings with traditional marketing research will enhance our level of understanding about the way consumers feel about products and brands. Take continuous tracking, for example. Overlaying the traditional tracking method with social media listening promises to yield deeper insight into the relationship between social campaigns and ad spend, on the one hand, and brand usage and preference, on the other.

Constant connectivity is revolutionizing the way we shop for products one click at a time. Hence, researchers need to welcome social media analytics into their tool box so that they can deliver the most accurate and real-time insights possible.

The escalating use of social media is an important technological trend that has big implications for how researchers (and people in general) communicate and collaborate with respect to various products, services and brands. Researchers have a huge amount to gain from engaging with social media in various aspects of their work.