

# Internet, CATI or Both?

## How CATI is the Best Ally for Your International Web Surveys

By Fernand Wiesenfeld

When working with an international Web survey, most U.S. research companies jump right into a straight forward “All and Only” Web methodology, more or less the same way they would be proceeding in the U.S.

Although this method may work fine, my experience has taught me that this is not what happens in a large number of situations. Therefore, I would strongly advise American market researchers to ask themselves a few key questions when considering the best methodology to proceed with when conducting international quantitative research. Some questions to consider include:

1) Are the countries I need to survey culturally well-oriented towards self-administered questionnaires or do I risk having a very high drop out ratio that will make it much more difficult, but also expensive to complete?

To make it simple, and if we think of the European market, you have two main clusters of countries: the northern countries, where self-administered questionnaires have always worked reasonably well (first for mail surveys and now for online surveys) and the southern countries, where it never really worked. The incentive level here is an important regulatory variable, but it also may strongly jeopardize one of the two major interests of doing online questionnaires, i.e.: the cost and speed.

2) Am I surveying high incidence populations, or are the specific profiles I am looking at push my global incidence level to low levels? In the first situation, I would probably find access panels that could provide the invitation lists required – at least if I surveyed developed countries. In the second situation, I would most likely have to recruit



through a telephone screening, with a drop out level I would have to consider right away to anticipate the necessary over-recruiting, unless I choose to keep over the phone the eligible targets through a “walk along approach”.

3) Concerning my questionnaire, how long is it going to be? Does it need to include material to show? To make it short and clear, there is really only one situation when doing a straight forward international Web survey out of the U.S. that works fine. This is when the research deals with “easy” targets in “easy” countries, i.e. mainly consumer researches with high to

very high incidence levels (>80%) in Western Europe, where you can easily acquire listings from access panels. In all other situations, it is generally very difficult for a Web survey to achieve alone its objectives in terms of completes.

Now, let's analyze, very concretely, the two main situations where Internet cannot work research up to the end by itself.

1) The targets are very “sharp” and there is no way to find all (or even most) of them with “access panel” listings. For instance, interviewing any kind of doctor in Europe or Asia is a

challenge, and even more when:

- Those doctors are specialists,
- The countries are countries (for instance France, Italy, Spain, etc.)

where self-administered questionnaires do not work very well, with the consequence of generating a quite high level (40/50/60%) of drop outs between the agreements to complete a Web questionnaire and the real completion of the questionnaire.

More generally, this is also true for most B2B targets for which "access panel" listings are, in most countries, insufficient on a quantity point of view, but also in terms of precise definition of the functions. For instance, there is no such a thing as an access panel where you would find ERP decision-makers in small, medium or even large companies.

As far as consumers are concerned, this is also the situation for (very) specific targets with a low/very low incidence rate such as patients suffering of a precise disease.

In this situation, telephone plays a very important role for the success of the project, and at several different levels:

a) "Telephone recruit to Web," to build the "invitation list" of eligible respondents.

b) "Call backs" to try to get questionnaires completed by persons who had previously agreed to answer.

2) The questionnaire is (too) long, which frequently goes along with "sharp" targets.

In this situation, "straight-forward" CATI interviews might be the best solution, both on an operational and a cost point of view, except, of course, when there is a need to SHOW some stimuli (complicated concept boards, pictures, colors, videos, etc.) to the respondents.

In this situation, and even more when the target is sharp and that, consequently, finding the respondents matching all the screening criteria is already a costly challenge, the most effective way of proceeding is a "walk-along" procedure. This consists to continue the initial "telephone recruit to Web" approach in KEEPING over the phone the eligible respondents and convincing them to fill it in right away. If they agree, the link is sent to the respondents, and they fill in the questionnaire

while still having over the phone the interviewers whose job is mainly to avoid the drop out situation and, if necessary, help the respondents to clarify some questions.

Two main conclusions to have in mind when thinking about conducting an international Web survey:

1) Review in detail all the key variables structuring the survey to eventually anticipate from the very beginning the need of building a data collection methodology smartly mixing telephone and Web.

2) Carefully evaluate the advantages of a Web-driven survey vs. a pure CATI approach, as at the end of the day, the cost advantage might not be on the Web side if there is a need for high incentives and/or difficult over-recruiting and/or numerous call backs to properly complete an online survey.



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