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▶ How To...

'Go International' Through Research

PR professionals today are increasingly embarking on international campaigns, armed with the insight of strong local market research. Traditionally, market research has been reserved for the final stage of a campaign – monitoring and evaluation of the campaign's effectiveness. But this is changing because of the availability, granularity and quality of international research available today. Now, market research is incorporated into all phases of an effective international campaign – from strategic planning to implementation to evaluation to strategic adjustment.

The following are eight recommendations for successful integration of market research in an international PR campaign:

1. Begin by thoroughly reviewing your requirements: Ask yourself precisely what kind of service you really need: a complete, detailed analysis with market recommendations or simple data collection? In the first situation, you should contract with a full-scale market research agency, in the second with a fieldwork agency, which can often also provide analytical capabilities. Obviously, the type of service you require will impact the final costs of your research.

2. When selecting a market research partner, size and experience matter: Make sure that your research/fieldwork partner has the breadth of capabilities to meet your requirements. There are significant differences in the scope and difficulty of organizing two focus groups in Paris for a message testing, and managing a research project simultaneously in several countries, spread over several continents. Agency experience will also be critical in the optimal selection of the investigation tools and the quality of their logistics. In addition,

if regular communication, continuous feedback and/or time zones are important, consider agencies that have a domestic presence as well.

3. Know that what is good for the goose may not be good for the gander: It is almost a cliché, but people still forget that what is doable in the U.S. might not be the best solution abroad. For instance, though the Internet is ubiquitous in the U.S. and Japan, relatively low Internet penetration and reluctance to answer self-completed questionnaires across much of Europe can render Web-based surveys ineffective. Similarly, in some Asian countries, face-to-face questionnaires are often the best – if not the only – solution.

4. Keep the end in sight: Organize your research not around the investigation tools you want to use but around your final objectives. In the words of some P&G executives, determine the “expected use of the research.” This allows your market research/fieldwork partner to recommend investigation tools that will best deliver the information you need to reach the strategic objectives of the research.

5. Make a plan, and then stick to it: It should go without saying, but the complete scope of the research and all related work need to be planned from the very beginning. There should be a structured timeframe including timelines not just for the major milestones of initial diagnostic, test and measurement stages, but also for continuous tracking of results to ensure rapid responsiveness to market reactions. This also ensures that the program progresses within time and budgetary allocations.

6. Know your countries and audiences: In your initial briefing with your market research/fieldwork agency, describe in as much detail as possible the char-

acteristics of the target audience you want to investigate at different stages of the research. Also bear in mind that investigating the same group in the diagnostic stage and in the final measurement tracking of the results of the PR plan will not necessarily yield the best ROI – you should therefore consider a different or wider audience for the final measurement. For example, financial analysts might be interviewed in the diagnostic stage, but shareholders chosen for the measurement stage.

7. Listen: In situations that allow it, such as qualitative investigations through focus groups or in-depth interviews, take the opportunity to directly listen to your targets either behind a one-way mirror or through a remote video transmission, using simultaneous translation as necessary. Listening to the “voice of the market” gives you incomparable insight into the key issues your PR plan needs to address.

8. Embrace quality over quantity: As in any other job, quality has a price. If there is a significant budget issue on the research, it is prudent to cancel a country or reduce the number of groups/interviews/questionnaires to be done in each country instead of trying to squeeze the same amount of work within an overly restricted budget. It is important to recognize the resources that international market research requires, including significant translation services and local market adaptation of research methods. PRN

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This article was written by Michael Wiesenfeld, a U.S. sales and marketing director, as well as co-founder of European Fieldwork Group (EFG). He can be reached at mike@efgresearch.com.