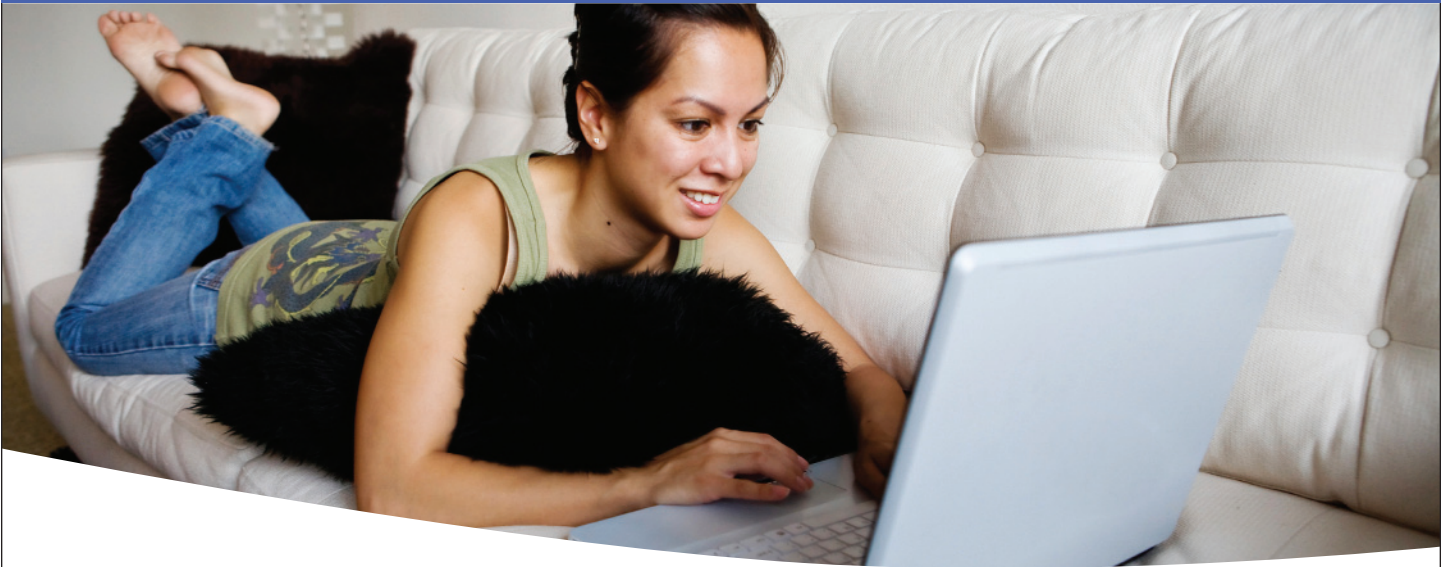


# Point of View



## Asking Cool Questions: Using Online Custom Panels to Engage Teens in Marketing Research



Your marketing strategy has lead you to consider doing market research with teens, but are you left with the question of how to best reach this group? Online is the most obvious methodology, however, there is more to consider before writing the first survey. Will teens be responsive to an invitation to participate in survey research? Are there special legal constraints that impact the process? Today's online research tools offer a new, cost-effective option – a proprietary custom panel – that has the advantage of addressing all these niche considerations.

Teens are indeed a powerful consumer group worthy of considerable attention from many consumer goods companies and service providers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, teens between 10 and 19 years of age make up approximately 18% of the worldwide population and kids under 10 add another 18% – in total, 36% of the world's 6.7 billion people are youth. They also have increasing buying power and influence over family spending.

This generation has grown up with computer technology. The oldest of the teen group were learning how to read at the same time as the first internet browser launched commercially. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, in 2008 over 90% of U.S. teens ages 12–17 were online.<sup>1</sup> But what's the best way to engage teens in online research? Custom proprietary panels offer many engagement opportunities and advantages from legal and technical points of view. These factors impact feasibility, timelines, and cost of doing research with teens. A research solution that addresses them in a cost-effective way offers much value, especially for organizations with ongoing research needs.

## Engaging Teens Online

Our research shows that many teens have easy access to the internet and are very comfortable expressing themselves online. Teens' time online is mainly spent socializing with others, downloading music, and playing games rather than doing functional things like banking, research, or even using email.<sup>2</sup> According to Pew, the tools teens use to stay in touch with friends include instant messaging, social networks, and blogs rather than email; in

fact, email use among teens in the US dropped from 89% in 2004 to 73% in 2008.<sup>3</sup> Although teens might be savvy users of new communication tools, their use of the internet is different from that of older age groups, which likely will affect their interest in participating in research.

Custom panels account for individual needs of a target teen audience in a couple different ways that provide the respondent with a tailor made research experience. First, the visual design of the online survey portal and tone of all panelist communication – including the invitation – are customized to suit younger respondents. For example, a fun and colorful design and casual language are well suited for a younger teen girl panel, while an older teen boy panel may benefit from a different look and feel.

In addition, for panels where the research topics are connected to a popular consumer brand, there are secondary opportunities such as development of a brand portal or targeted communications that further engage teens with the research. A community portal can have the affect of building affinity for the brand and can also serve as the source of recruitment sample for the research panel. Note, however, that some engagement strategies may bias the research towards brand enthusiasts and would need to be complemented with other sample sources to ensure a representative response.

Second, our experience recruiting teen respondents internationally has shown that there are cultural differences among teens that will impact the design of the research incentive plan. In markets like Australia, UK, and North America prize draws, contests, or point systems (e.g. collecting points for each survey conducted and then being able to choose a reward) are the most popular form of award, but in other countries these options are not viewed as equally attractive. Even a small guaranteed form of reward is preferred in these instances. A custom panel has the advantage of focusing exclusively on the target respondent and reward options are customizable to optimally engage teens.

In cases where retailer gift certificates are used as incentive, research at the beginning of the project will help identify the brands that are popular among the target teen group. The idea of 'cool'

<sup>1</sup> Fox, Susannah & Jones Sydney. Generations Online in 2009. January 28, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Laver, Mark. Inter@ctive Teens: The Impact of the Internet on Canada's Next Generation, January 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Fox, Susannah & Jones, Sydney. Generations Online in 2009. January 28, 2009.

may be quite different among teens depending on what activities they like or how they compare themselves to their peers. More than with any other age group, teens are very concerned with their self image and will be very particular about what they want. Sometimes one size doesn't fit all and allowing an option to customize the gift certificate may actually be seen as equally smart as the reward itself.

Furthermore, in countries where infrastructure prevents reliable incentive distribution through the postal system, other cost-effective systems are used. For example, an incentive scheme that rewards teens with mobile minutes that are redeemable online could be a practical reward option.

### **In Line With the Law**

If you're considering doing research with youth perhaps one of the most important considerations is whether it is legal to conduct online market research with this group in your target jurisdiction. Age of consent and parental permission requirements differ around the world making the recruitment process much more complex and potentially expensive. The benefit of a custom panel is that it is recruited to suit your particular research needs, including addressing what legal consent is required. For example, in addition to consent to participate, the legal documents can also outline rights of ownership of any ideas generated as part of co-creation exercises or online focus groups.

Some countries, largely in Western Europe, have very well defined laws specific to online research, while others—especially in politically unstable countries or countries with poor internet infrastructure—have only some privacy laws or they have laws not specific to market research and that are open to interpretation by the courts in that country. For instance, even though the research will be conducted online, written or phone consent from a legal guardian of the teen may be required to prove consent.

In general, if it is known that written consent is required from the parents or guardians it's wise to build in more time and a larger sample into the research plan. Parent response will drop significantly if they have to take extra steps or spend money to print and mail or fax permission documents. In all cases, the process should be guided by legal advice from local experts representing both the client company and research company.

### **Taking Advantage of Online Technology**

Similar to the look and feel of the custom panel interface, the format of the research survey and frequency of contact can also affect teen response rates.

Ipsos-managed custom panels are powered by dedicated software that in addition to its database management and communication functions includes survey scripting and results tabulation capabilities. The software encourages use of more frequent and shorter surveys. With teens, more difficult topics should be surveyed in smaller segments or related ideas surveyed separately. In addition to teens not being burdened with long surveys, they also stay engaged with the research process by participating more frequently.

Similarly, the overall turnaround time of the research is much shorter than traditional survey research because all functions are housed in one tool. An Ipsos researcher is able to script and launch the survey directly in the software as soon as survey questions are approved. Clients have direct access to all results – including topline charts and all detailed data – directly online as soon as the survey is launched.

Lastly, while the core of research today is primarily done on a desktop or laptop computer, in the future, online research will fragment to enable participation via other internet-ready devices including mobile phones. Currently, there are opportunities to use SMS technology for communication functions like recruiting or survey invitations that offer value for custom panel research.

### **A Custom Approach**

Teens are a niche respondent segment that requires a targeted research strategy. Access to cost-effective online tools allows for an agile process that is necessary when researching a teen audience. From building engagement to overcoming legal challenges, a custom approach allows for much needed flexibility.

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Ipsos is a leading global survey-based market research company, owned and managed by research professionals. Ipsos helps interpret, simulate, and anticipate the needs and responses of consumers, customers, and citizens around the world.

Member companies assess market potential and interpret market trends. They develop and build brands. They help clients build long-term relationships with their customers. They test advertising and study audience responses to various media. They measure public opinion around the globe. Ipsos member companies offer expertise in advertising, customer loyalty, marketing, media, and public affairs research, as well as forecasting, modeling, and consulting.

Ipsos has a full line of custom, syndicated, omnibus, panel, and online research products and services, guided by industry experts and bolstered by advanced analytics and methodologies. The company was founded in 1975 and has been publicly traded since 1999.

