

Pointofview



Taking Healthcare Market Research into the New Normal

A Practical Guide to Building Your Online Community

Robert Ramirez, Ipsos Healthcare



Ipsos Healthcare
The Healthcare Research Specialists

The 'New Normal' of Research

Welcome to a brave new world. In the past several years, social trends, technology, market pressures, innovations and new ways of thinking have profoundly changed the way we think about, conduct and use market research. There is a "new normal" and the implications for the healthcare and pharmaceutical business are enormous.

So what does the "new normal" mean for market research?

Social Media

One of the biggest changes in recent years is the emergence of social media. With both its implications and its opportunities, the world of social media is revolutionary. People are living their lives out in social media. They are sharing photos, news, comments, opinions, ideas and recommendations. They are engaging with one another, their friends, family and strangers – as well as with brands and companies. They are putting a lot out there and they are not afraid to share it. People are constantly connected and consumers are always on. Social media has massive effects.

From a market research point of view, this is an enormous opportunity to listen and learn so as to grow and build better brands.

Surveys No Longer Enough

Let's get this straight – survey-based research is a critical component to your understanding of consumers and brands. But it alone is no longer the solution. The leading firms in the market research industry are moving away from the view that only traditional survey research offers the most robust solutions.

We're moving towards a culture where information about most things becomes freely available and there's no shortage of ways to connect. Again, technology is helping to drive this. This has given us a world of "super abundance," with tools, choices, apps that are allowing us to move to "one touch" actions to create a wealth of information not always captured in traditional surveys. We can be where consumers are and capture what they are thinking at almost any moment.

Put It into Context

Contextualized market research is also becoming the norm. We are accelerating toward a new singularity — a tipping point where a consumer's life information will be in a single device that is both portable and digital. The technology and use of it is literally putting enormous amounts of information into our very hands. It is engaging. It is interactive. It is faster. It is more efficient. And it is more relevant. The old methods just can't keep up in our socialized, technological and connected new world.

Experiment and Evolve

Life is about change. The seasons change. Fashions change. Social norms change. The same applies to research. As an industry, we need to think, challenge and innovate to keep up with consumers. So, we experiment with new methodologies and new technologies and we evolve our way of thinking. It is exciting stuff and the learning is enormous.

New Rules or No Rules?

With all this change, it is only comes natural that the rules have changed as well. Indeed, they don't even apply! But fear not. The new normal is dynamic. This world of "no rules" means freeing ourselves from old constraints that don't work in an environment of constant change.

It will be uncomfortable, but it's the only way forward. And we're all in it together.

How Did this Happen?

Chalk much of this up to the impact of social media. Social media has changed so much.

"Social networks remain an emerging business founded on innovation; yet they have already achieved levels of market acceptance that might have seemed inconceivable just a few years ago" — Deloitte's 2011 Social Network Predictions

It took the telephone 89 years to reach the same level of household penetration that Facebook has achieved in 5 (Kaite Paine, social media consultant and author of "Measure what Matters"). Why, you ask? It has succeeded so brilliantly because social media provides constant connections with other people for open and transparent conversation. From politics to business, transparency is becoming a consumer expectation.

The Road Forward

The research industry is seeing the effects of this rapid and massive shift from one-way, blind surveys to multi-threaded, transparent conversations. Research is moving from a static, structured Q&A format to a dynamic, transparent, multi-threaded conversation. As one Fortune 100 global research lead told us: "The more people see two-way engagement and being able to interact with people all over the world, I think the less they want to be involved in structured research."

Older methods are still important to the way we do business, but on a parallel path, we must innovate to connect with consumers in a way that is relevant to them in their connected, networked, "always on" reality.

In the new normal, it's only natural that custom panel and online community research continues to grow rapidly. From the business leader's point of view, agility, accelerated decision-making and "running the business in real time" are the new orders of the day. From the consumer point of view, a transparent, two-way dialogue with brands is SO much more engaging and relevant.

Being able to listen, engage and dialogue is invaluable. And in a world where budgets are tighter, change is more rapid and the need to get deeper insights and launch new products more frequently is greater, that invaluable information can lead to great success.

How To Build an Online Community

So now you know why you should build an online community, but do you know how? Easier said than done, right. Fortunately, Ipsos has the tools, experience and resources to help.

Getting Started: Strategy

You can't get to where you want to be without a plan; strategic planning is the foundation of a successful community. To build a successful online community, all of your stakeholders need to be clear and aligned on a number of critical factors.

You need to be strategic in your thinking and be crystal clear about:

- who should be in the panel and more importantly, who should NOT be in the panel
- the research objective of the social space
- the business objectives informed by the research
- the value proposition to the members (in a two-way dialogue, there must be a two-way exchange of value)

These strategic questions must be answered before you can make tactical decisions about the community name, community branding, the size of the panel and your recruitment strategy.

With the right people on both client and Ipsos side, these milestones can all be achieved in the first week

Ready, Set, Engage!

In your strategy stage, you should identify the criteria for who you want to recruit and how you plan to engage them in the community experience. This is vital. For a panel to succeed, it needs to be engaging. You may value the insights and lessons gained from the research, but for the participants, it is the experience of participating that is key. But note: there is a difference between fielding a study and engaging members in an ongoing experience. Engagement takes work, commitment, and trust.

So how do you keep your respondents engaged? There are several key factors that you should bear in mind and employ as your guiding light.

First, be as transparent as possible about who you want to talk to. And then second, screen out the people you don't want to talk to. There is no need in wasting anyone's time trying to talk to people who do not fit your profile.

Once you have the audience you want, be clear in communicating with them about what's in it for them. There are numerous ways of doing this. Offer tangible rewards and incentives and let them know what those are. Offer exclusive access to new information and ideas which they would find interesting. Let them know about the opportunities they have to make an impact on the products and services they use. And allow them to create and build a social status within the community.

Make sure your research plan is well-aligned with both your learning objectives and the value proposition to members. In addition, establish standard operating procedures for exchange information and needs between your community vendor and your internal stakeholders.

Platform Development

Next, it's time to start populating your platform. In nearly all cases here, your community vendor will manage the bulk of the work this process.

They should configure the platform with your imagery and branding (if you are building a branded community) and any and all legal matters, such as terms and conditions, privacy policies, contest and sweepstakes rules, etc., should be cleared up and made available.

Members

Populating your community takes time and effort but it is very important. Decide where you want to find your members. You can find them by mining panel samples, river samples, or various databases.

A diversified approach to recruitment will allow you to actively monitor which recruitment sources are delivering qualified and registered members and which are not. Focus your time, energy and budget on the sources that are delivering.

One helpful tip we employ at Ipsos is to invite potential participants from your own customer databases. This is a great way to save money on sample and develop a more engaged community from the start since they already have familiarity with your brand. This may introduce some bias into your panel, but it is likely not the positive bias you might expect. There are always surprises! With your existing contacts, at least you know the nature of their existing attitudes toward your product and brands. Plus, members who come from these sources can be tracked in results so you always know how their answers compare to the rest of your community population.

Countdown to Launch

Three, two, one...takeoff! You've devised your strategy, built the platform, recruited the panelists, and are ready to load all launch activities. Congratulations! You are almost ready to begin.

An important first step is to welcome members to the community – make them feel valued and start the engagement process early. Your moderator can do this or, if a branded community, include a welcome video directly from the brand.

Launch activities should focus on acclimating members to the community experience. They are new to this as well and will no doubt have questions or need time to get used to how it works. Keep the topic approachable and the tone conversational. Enhance content with rich media to make the experience feel vibrant, and seed content to make the experience feel social

Depending on your target social space size and the incidence rate of your consumer universe, recruitment to your full membership can take anywhere from a couple weeks to a couple months. And as members participate, you'll begin to see the new relationships grow:

- Relationships between members and the moderator
- Relationships between members and the brand (if a branded community)
- Relationships between members and each other

When all is loaded, review everything with your vendor (invitation messaging, screener survey, profile questions, launch content, legal, look and feel) to ensure all is ready for launch.

And then press 'go' and voila! You have an online community.

Heart of the Matter: A Case Study

The how and why of an online community are important to discuss and understand, but because of the investment involved, there must be a return for the effort. At Ipsos, we've built and managed countless panels and communities for clients across North America and around the world. So, we present a brief case study from an actual client panel we manage for a medical devices client.

The client manufactures pacemaker devices and came to us wanting to gain a better understanding of current perceptions of wireless pacemakers and test the waters for opportunities for a new product.

Using our proprietary techniques, we built a community for them to do just that. Ipsos recruited 140 physicians who specialized or had extensive experience in implanting pacemakers.

In the first part of our study, we conducted a 15-minute online survey over a one week period. The survey probed the physicians' thoughts on the benefits of wireless pacemakers as well as the barriers to their use. The discussion also touched on their impact on their respective practices and gauged their attitudes toward the concept of the client's wireless product proposal.

The second part of the study went back to the community with a five minute follow-up survey. This time they wanted to further explore specific barriers, such as cost and reimbursement issues and find out the key 'whys' behind specific attribute preferences.

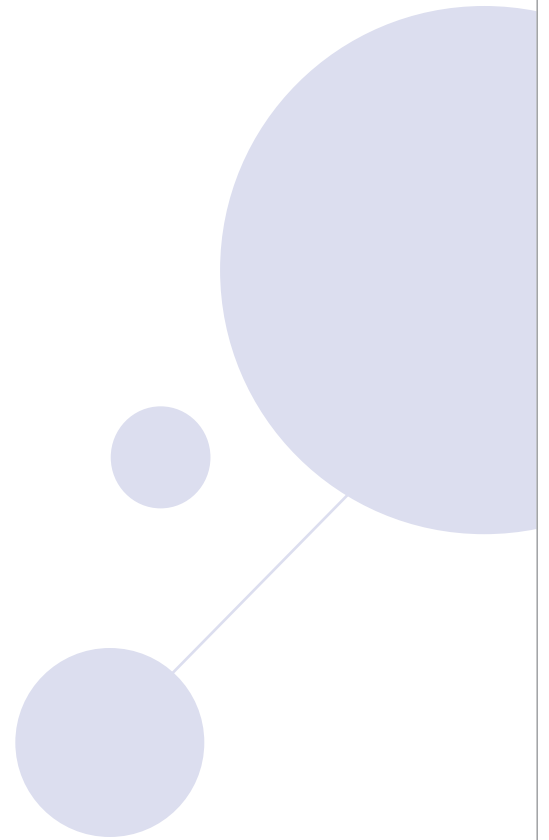
Feedback received from panelists on the discussion board was encouraging and provided additional perspective on the client's areas of interest. The initial discussion on barriers in the first part of the study provided a general overview and then allowed the client to make informed decisions on what to ask in the second part, and that ultimately allowed them to make better informed business decisions. The additional detail regarding cost, for example, led to different marketing executions, as the client had a better understanding of the concerns physicians had and what messages they needed to communicate to address those concerns.

For this client, the online community provided benefits that went beyond traditional research.

First off, it was very cost effective. The insight gained per dollar spent was greater than what they would have achieved through traditional research.

Second, it was fast — only a few weeks — meaning a greater speed of insight and a shorter timetable to market success. Offering real-time responses and the ability to follow-up with the same group of physicians to probe deeper on a response, the panel gave the client fast access to the information they needed.

And third, but just as important, was the engagement they built with the physicians. Physicians and medical specialists can be a difficult group to reach — hectic schedules, heavy competition for their time — they are not easy to tack down. But with their place on the front line of the health care industry, their insights are invaluable to creating and launching new medical breakthroughs. The online community gives them the flexibility to contribute, express their opinions, share their experiences and thoughts and help our clients benefit from that wealth of insight, knowledge and information.



About Ipsos Healthcare

Ipsos Healthcare is a global business focusing on research in the pharmaceutical, bio-tech, and medical device markets. It is also the leading provider of global syndicated patient chart studies covering over 20 different disease areas in over 20 countries. Operating in over 40 countries, the team of 600 healthcare market researcher experts, marketers and client-side brand-builders focus on delivering outcome-oriented research for its' clients. Drawing from a broad range of qualitative and quantitative techniques, Ipsos Healthcare offers custom and syndicated research programs to evaluate motivations, experiences, interactions and influence of stakeholders forming the multi-customer markets which increasingly drive business success in the healthcare industry.



Ipsos Healthcare
The Healthcare Research Specialists