



QUIRK'S

Marketing Research Review

Mastering the art of writing quantitative research reports

Let's face it: we've all seen those dreaded reports, full of mind-numbing tables. Data here; data there; data, data everywhere! But aren't quantitative research reports all about numbers? Isn't it necessary to show the results of questions with **numerical tables**? Maybe we can show a few pie charts or a bar chart or two, but isn't the core of the research the numbers? Our answer is no. Numbers do not tell the story. As researchers, that's our job.

Quantitative research reports are really about telling a story and using the data as supporting information. Of course this is easier said than done. Numbers are often just as tedious for the analysts as they are for the person reading the report. The good news is there are a number of things an analyst can do to ensure that a quantitative report will be readable, tell a story and allow the consumers of the information (our clients) to make critically important business decisions.

First of all, know your market. Stay up to date on current events, macro/micro trends and the com-

petition. This information can be invaluable when giving insights into why the market has shifted in an unsuspected way.

Next, use study objectives as a guide. Review the objectives and match them to specific question batteries. This makes certain you are meeting the critical needs of the study. Write down each objective and review the questions that address them. Then write a single sentence that answers each objective. For example, if the objective is to identify the optimal price point for a new product, write down the ideal price point. Keep it simple and short. Don't elaborate or try to explain methodology or give supporting materials at this point. We need a 10,000-foot view before we address the details.

Then draft a one- to two-page summary. This always helps get out of the trees and see the big picture. Once you have your summary, the storyline should take shape. By rearranging your points you can find an ideal flow - a way of presenting the critical information

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that communicates the most important results of the study.

Road map

Now it's time for reporting. The first step is to lay out a road map of the report. Using your executive summary, ask yourself, "How do I want my client to consume this information?" This is a critical step, one often overlooked due to time pressure and the availability of cookie-cutter report templates. Remember, each story you tell is different, and your report should reflect its uniqueness. Once you have the report laid out it is time to tell the story.

Executive summaries are always a good way to begin a report. Keep the insights tight and pithy. No matter how long the survey was, executive summaries should never be more

than one or two slides. If yours has more than this, you are sure to have superfluous information. Next follow your road map by building slides that support your insights from the summary. Also, keep in mind that each slide should be able to stand on its own with both graphical and text-based content.

When writing your report, ignore the order in which the survey questions were asked. Few reports flow well and few stories are compelling when the information in the final report follows in the exact order of the questions in the questionnaire. Instead, present the most important information up front. Follow the flow that made sense in the summa-

ry. This will help the final report tell a compelling story.

Today many reports are crammed with data. Take time and ask yourself: Why did I put that data there? What is its purpose? What point does each number convey? If the data is not essential for communicating the point, leave it out. Use flow charts, arrows and other graphical tools to walk people through your slide. You want the reader to spend their time absorbing the information rather than trying to figure out what is going on in the slide.

Other tips: use color to denote differences and carry readers through your report. Also, omit data cuts or segments where differences

do not exist. Few things clutter up a report more than slides showing comparisons between data cuts which then conclude that there are no differences worth noting!

Educate and enthrall

At the end of the day it is important that you effectively and efficiently communicate the information to your client. But realize that your client wants information to help make critical business decisions, not mountains of numbers that are difficult to sift through. Put yourself in their shoes and you'll write reports that enlighten, educate and enthrall. | Q
