

How to Conduct a Market- Research Survey

We know it can be hard to conduct research – asking strangers to spend 10-15 minutes answering questions is not easy. But, market research is critical to your business plan in order to know as much as you can about your customers and competitors. The more detailed your questions, the more people you speak to, and the way you analyze your results, the better the “picture” you will have of your customers and your competition.

When conducting a market research survey, here are some things to consider:

Doing your Customer Survey

- Whether on the phone or face-to-face, smile!
- Make sure the survey takes no more than 10 minutes of someone’s time to complete.
- When possible, ask the questions yourself in order to get better and more detailed answers; you can probe, confirm, and clarify more easily if you’re the one doing the asking.
- Don’t let someone “off” with just a Yes or No answer – find out why they responded that way.
- If calling someone on the phone, ask if this would be a good time to complete the survey; if it’s not, ask them for a better time to call back.
- Talk to people other than your friends and family. You can get referrals from friends to potential customers, but you need to talk to at least 20 people, 15 who should be “strangers”.
- When determining who to contact, focus on people in your target customer group – if you are targeting Women 25-54 who live in Aurora, don’t spend time talking to Men 65+ in Toronto.
- Talk to both your primary and secondary customer groups, and record the results separately; consider the percentage of business you anticipate from each group, and target your calls accordingly.
- When you’ve completed the survey, ask whether you can either:
 - Talk to that person again when you’re further along with your business
 - Use them to test out a prototype of your product/service
 - Add them to your customer mailing list so they can get updates and mailings about your business.
- As soon as you’ve completed the survey, review your answers, and update your research. When the information is fresh in your mind, you can better remember the details.

Doing your Competitive Research

- Before calling your competitors, try and get the name of the storeowner or manager so you can ask for that person directly; you stand a better chance of talking to them if you know them by name.
- Always check if you’re calling at a good time – calling a restaurant at lunchtime, or a retail store on a Saturday will get you nowhere.

- Prioritize your questions – ask the most important questions first in case the business owner has to cut short the conversation.
- Be careful about asking your competitors about financial information – consider the need for that information, how you can delicately phrase the question, and when, in the interview, you should ask it. For example, rather than saying, “How much money did you make at Christmas?” you could ask, “Thinking back to your gross sales figures last Christmas, could you please indicate the appropriate range?” (and then provide a range of sales figures)
- Talk to as many competitors as you can; again, the more the better.
- If you are considering a storefront for your business, make sure you go and look at businesses with similar locations so you can watch the traffic, type of customers, length of customer visit, and how customers get to the business.
- As soon as you’ve completed the survey, review your answers, and update your research. When the information is fresh in your mind, you can better remember the details.