



Alterra Group

Thought Leadership Marketing for Professional Services

Alterra Group Insights:

The Value of Surveys in Generating Awareness
and Leads

By Bernie Thiel, Susan Buddenbaum and Sam Brown



Overview

- > A well-designed and well-executed survey can showcase professionals' knowledge and insights to prospective buyers, and gain exposure among influential reporters and bloggers, helping with the challenge of building awareness.

- > However, many firms struggle to create high-value surveys
 - Some cannot get sufficient responses to their survey despite having the research in the field for months
 - Others are able to generate volumes of survey data but have trouble finding anything compelling in the research
 - Still others are roundly ignored by the media, clients and prospects

- > In this presentation, we explore how professional services organizations can avoid these common pitfalls and get the biggest return on their survey investments. In doing so, we review best practices in five key areas:





Phase 1: Scoping the research

- > A firm must select a research topic that is highly relevant to its clients and prospects, and insufficiently covered by other research studies.
- > Key Success Factors
 - Explore potential topics in a workshop with key firm stakeholders, including the head of the sponsoring practice or firm, appropriate subject-matter experts, and account managers and business developers.
 - After the workshop, conduct secondary research to avoid duplicating what others have already researched and to hone in on certain aspects of the topic.
 - Before proceeding with research design, appoint a program manager who can provide strong oversight of the initiative and serve as the point person for any questions about it. Doing so helps ensure the project stays on plan and within budget.





Phase 2: Designing the research

- > Develop a set of hypotheses to guide and focus the research and create a questionnaire that explores each hypothesis.
- > Key Success Factors
 - Ensure that each hypothesis is not too broad that it can't be covered adequately by a survey, and not so narrow that making new discoveries will be difficult. If a hypothesis needs more than five questions to probe it, it is probably too broad.
 - Ensure the survey takes no more than 20 minutes to complete and flows logically from one question to another.
 - Use mostly closed-end questions, avoid using questions that require a significant amount of thinking or calculation, and ensure all questions can be answered by the target participant.
 - To attract media attention, embed a key question or two that will lead to a counter-intuitive finding or touch on a particularly timely topic.





Phase 3: Identifying, reaching and motivating respondents

- > Select a set of target respondents and provide the right incentives to encourage their participation.
- > Key Success Factors
 - Select targets that are interested in the research topic and able to provide useful insights. These are often professionals at the manager, director or vice president level, not CEOs.
 - Weigh the pros and cons of different sources of participants: A firm's own list may have willing participants, but may not be large enough to generate sufficient results. Rented lists are larger, but their quality can be suspect, and their targets may not be as receptive. Also consider using business networking websites such as LinkedIn and Plaxo.





Phase 3: Identifying, reaching and motivating respondents (continued)

> Key Success Factors

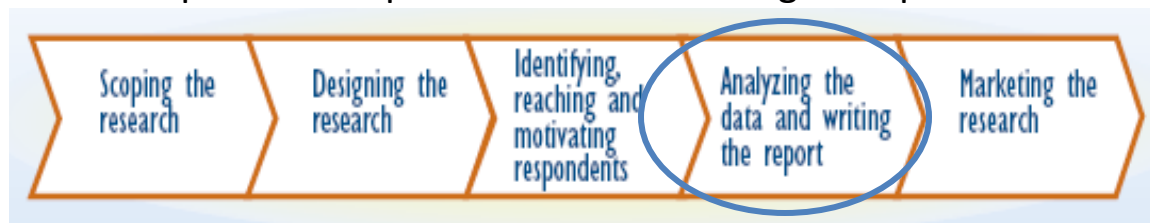
- Offer incentives for participation that combine personal appeal and business relevance: for example, a gift certificate and early access to the survey findings. Choose a survey method—phone, online, or in-person—that is appropriate to the survey and its respondents.
- Consider teaming with a relevant trade magazine or association to create access to a large group of interested targets, add credibility to the study, and generate visibility for the firm and its research.





Phase 4: Analyzing the data and writing the report

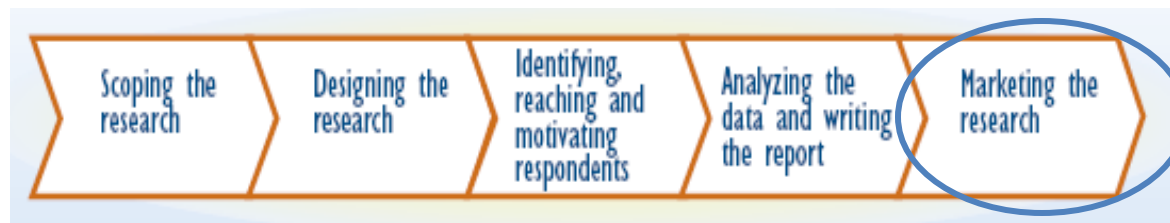
- > Analyze the survey findings, determining whether the hypotheses have been supported or refuted, and identifying the strongest storylines emerging from the data.
- > Key Success Factors
 - Dedicate sufficient time and effort to analysis. Three iterations are typical.
 - » The first round should simply aggregate all responses to each major survey question.
 - » Next, conduct cross-tabulations to find interesting storylines: differences between large and small companies, different industries, or leaders and laggards.
 - » During the final stage of analysis—typically done in a workshop setting—the findings are reviewed with the firm’s subject-matter experts to identify implications for clients and prospects and opportunities for further analysis.
 - Following analysis, the firm should develop the detailed outline and draft of the final research report that explores the firm’s findings and point of view in detail.





Phase 5: Marketing the research

- > Bring the research findings to market via a set of integrated, tightly synchronized activities.
- > Key Success Factors
 - Appoint spokespeople and train them to discuss the research with the media, clients, and prospects. Also make sure all relevant personnel can communicate the linkage between the research findings, implications for clients, and services the firm offers.
 - Craft a news release on the overall survey findings (as well as separate news releases tailored by industry sector and geography if sufficient data is available) and provide it to appropriate media outlets. In addition, develop bylined articles based on the most interesting slices of the survey findings and promote them to relevant media outlets.





Phase 5: Marketing the research (continued)

> Key Success Factors

- Promote the research directly to clients and prospects via such vehicles as conference presentations, webinars, direct marketing campaigns, firm publications, and standardized presentations that can be delivered by any account executive. Prepare and deliver tailored presentations on the survey to the management teams of select companies that participated in the research.
- Create dedicated microsites to house the research and related case studies and service offerings. The most effective microsites are interactive: For example, they enable visitors to take the survey and compare their responses to the larger sample.
- Make the research a recurring initiative, creating anticipation for the study among target executives and enabling year-over-year comparisons.





Example: Leading professional services company

- > We worked closely with the marketing team and subject matter experts to create hypotheses and questionnaires.
- > While the survey was in the field, we conducted case study interviews with more than 20 companies, as well as comprehensive secondary research to fully explore the issues identified by the hypotheses.
- > We then worked with the practice's marketing team and subject matter experts to conduct intensive analyses of the data, identifying the major themes and storylines.
- > Next, we helped develop a number of pieces that generated broad interest in the research:
 - A major report that explored the findings of the research in detail
 - PowerPoint presentations for the company's business development professionals
 - A news release that was disseminated to major media around the world
 - Bylined articles and white papers that explored specific aspects of the study findings

The study earned dozens of mentions in top-tier publications, and the company received hundreds of requests for copies of the research report from target executives.



Example: EXHIBITOR Magazine

- > EXHIBITOR magazine approached Alterra Group for help quantifying the economic impact of the green movement on the trade show industry.
- > We worked together to create segment-specific hypotheses and questionnaires. After several weeks in the field, the study had generated responses from nearly 500 exhibitors and more than 100 suppliers.
- > EXHIBITOR and Alterra Group spent several weeks analyzing the data. Armed with the results of the analysis, Alterra Group produced a series of documents designed to bring the research findings to market:
 - An executive summary which EXHIBITOR published as a supplement, and which earned significant advertising support
 - An in-depth research report that explored the survey findings in detail
 - A news release, which was disseminated by EXHIBITOR to relevant media outlets
 - A PowerPoint presentation on the research findings to be used in conference speeches

Within hours of the press release, a dozen external groups were promoting the research, and a presentation on the findings at the Exhibit Designers and Producers Association was filled at double capacity.



Conclusion

- > Survey research should play a central role in any professional services company's marketing strategy. Executed well, surveys enable firms to generate interesting and useful content that attracts executive attention while demonstrating that the firm understands the challenges these executives face.
- > A simple, yet rigorous approach to survey research can increase the odds that a firm's survey makes an impact in its chosen market, demonstrating its expertise and enabling meaningful discussions between a firm's client-facing professionals and their most important contacts.
- > Visit our microsite focused on survey research and read our full white paper and associated case studies. (link TBD)

About the Authors

Bernie Thiel and Susan Buddenbaum are founding partners with Alterra Group. Sam Brown is consultant with Alterra Group (www.alterra-group.com).



Who is Alterra Group?

- > Marketing services firm with a singular focus on professional services companies
 - Founded to meet the unique marketing needs of *companies that deliver expertise through people*
- > Professionals with deep experience in the consulting industry, as well as in key business, technology and industry issues
 - We know the business and the key issues consultants address
- > Clients include a wide range of firms focused on a diverse client base
 - From practices within multi-billion dollar public companies to start-ups funded by venture capital



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- > [Learning From Success: Survey Reveals the Keys to More Effectively Developing and Marketing Intellectual Capital](#)
- > [Getting Marketing and Business Development on the Same Page](#)
- > [Making the Most of Your Firm's Publications: A Portfolio Approach to Intellectual Capital Development](#)
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