

VISION CRITICAL PODCAST

VISION CRITICAL PODCAST Blind Versus Branded Panels

Caroline

Today we're going around the block with Kris Hartvigsen, VP of Vision Critical. My name is Caroline Hickton, and we're going to talk to Kris about Blind versus Branded panels.

Kris

I think before we get too far along in this discussion, I'd really like to just define what a branded panel is versus a blind panel. Just for the purpose of having that baseline, a branded panel is going to be a group of individuals who know who they are speaking with. So let's say it's something like NHL Fan Faceoff.com, or Virgin Mobile Informer.com. They know who they're connecting with, there's elevated trust as a result of that. We'll get into that a little bit later. With a blind panel, they only really know, typically, what the category is, or what the industry is going to be. So instead of it being the NHL Fan Faceoff.com, it would be The Hockey Informer.com panel, or if it was a wireless panel, it would be the Wireless Informer.com panel. So a slight difference there and allows you to conduct a slightly different kind of research.

Caroline

So Kris, how would a researcher or a marketer decide whether to do a blind panel or a branded panel?

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Kris

I think that all depends on the kind of research that they want to do. With a branded panel you have some advantages and some disadvantages, which I'll go over, and then we'll talk about blind panels afterwards.

So in a branded panel you certainly are elevating the trust of your respondent because they know that they are talking to you, they're connecting to you directly, there's no filter. You can build affinity towards your brand through that behavior, as well reinforcing positive behavior with those individuals. There is going to be an increase in likelihood of response, again because of that trust factor, because they know who they are talking to.

One of the biggest things is actually the speed to recruit. They are much faster to recruit because you can integrate some of your own resources into them, whether it be your database, your CRM, your website, any other touch points you might have with your customers, your listeners, your viewers, whatever your medium is and the types of people you reach out to. It allows you to validate your gut directly and talk specifically about your brand and your business. And certainly cost is going to be a big driver behind a branded panel because you have all those resources nearby you and you don't have to go out and reach-out for those resources.

On the drawback side of a branded panel, it will be a little bit tougher to conduct competitive research, especially if your incentives are product for your brand or your business. When you have that type of an incentive, you're definitely going to taint the results a little bit and have people leaning in toward your product, which isn't necessarily the right way to do it. But, if you

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adhere to some good methodology there, you can actually avert some of those issues by randomizing your incentives and not necessarily pegging your incentives to the study itself. And potentially there is some element of response bias. If you're going for market wide representative results from a branded panel, you can get the answers accurately, from the branded panel, with appropriate weighting and balancing techniques. That's something that people don't necessarily consider all the time. Yes, you might be skewing a little bit more toward affinity, but you can also weight those results back so they can come more into what you would expect from the normal market.

Caroline

And what about blind panels?

Kris

The advantages and disadvantages of a blind panel is a bit of a thinner list, really.

So your benefits are certainly that you're not going to have the product loyalty and brand loyalty issues that you might have in a blind panel, at least not to the same extent. If somebody is loyal to a product, they're going to be loyal to a product in a blind panel as well. And you certainly are able to do more in the world of competitive analysis as well.

On the drawback side, you definitely can't do a C-sat study through a blind panel because you need your customers to be able to know that they are doing a satisfaction study for you. That's a fairly obvious one. It feels like a bit of a black hole also, for respondents. What happens within a blind panel is that they

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don't know who they're speaking to, they don't know who is going to act on their feedback. And as a result, there is this diminishing trust that happens. As a result of not being able to share results with them about your business and about some of the things you've done with their feedback, there tends to be diminishing returns on response rates, etc., over time. The biggest drawback, certainly is going to be that they are much more expensive to recruit. What ends up happening in a blind panel again, is that you have to go out beyond your resources because you need to have people that don't know that they're being reached out to from something they've connected to you on, in the past. So that's the biggest drawback, and you know, a blind panel can range anywhere from 5 bucks a head, up to as expensive as 120 to 240 dollars a head if you're talking about neurophysiologists, and things like that. Something to be cognoscente of as you start to build your panel.

Caroline

So Kris, if I understand correctly, it comes down to the objectives of your research and what you want to do with your Customer Advisory Panel, whether you should do a blind or branded panel.

Kris

Yah, I think that if you're really trying to get at the heart of the matter of competitive research, then certainly a blind panel is the way to go. A lot of our clients today have both a branded and a blind panel to try to see if there is a difference between those two markets, and that's also another way that people can look and evaluate as they're going forward. Certainly one can work in conjunction with the other quite nicely. If you are looking to go with a branded panel, I think that the benefits far out weigh the

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disadvantages. I think that having those folks at your fingertips and having the trust and the elevated response rates are going to be things that are going to pay back in spades for sure.

Caroline

So maybe just before we go, Kris it's been great having you here, but could you tell us a short story of a brush with greatness that you've experienced?

Kris

Back in my first job out of university, I think I had an interesting brush with greatness. Robin Williams was in town filming Jumanji, and wanted to buy himself a new laptop so that he could tool around while he was on the road. I had the pleasure and benefit of being able to sell him his laptop. And he's as animated and weird and crazy in real life as he is on television and in movies. That was kind of an interesting brush.

Caroline

Sounds like a great brush. Thanks Kris. Really appreciate it and appreciate your expertise on the blind versus branded issue. Any listeners that have any comments or questions, feel free to send us an email. Our email is podcast@visioncritical.com. I'm Caroline Hickton and thanks for listening.