



INTRODUCTION

In matters of tax and financial management, brand building doesn't come easily – the subject isn't the sexiest around. For software maker Intuit, whose solutions are used by more professionals than any other in North America, staying top of mind and being responsive to client requirements is paramount. When traditional market research methods proved to be too slow to keep pace with the company's needs, Intuit turned to Vision Critical to build an online community panel and to restore its ability to gather and respond to client input in a timely manner.

THE CHALLENGE



Intuit provides a complete array of accounting, tax, and practice management solutions for accountants. More than 150,000 accounting professionals use QuickBooks to support their clients' businesses. Intuit's premier tax preparation applications are used by more than 100,000 tax professionals and are tailored to meet the needs of specific practices, from entry-level firms concentrating on basic tax returns to full-service practices handling the most complex returns.

To the outside world, accounting software doesn't sound overly exciting or innovative. But the reality is each new year ushers in a wide range of changes to tax codes and reporting requirements, so vendors like Intuit must stay nimble. This is coupled with demand from customers to enable faster and simpler preparation of financial and tax reports. Intuit must constantly develop new products to stay competitive. Constrained by the limitations of traditional market research techniques, Intuit sought a new way to connect with tax accounting professionals throughout the United States who rely on Intuit's software products to service their own clients. The length of the research process restricted Intuit's ability to be dexterous and responsive; the data they were working hard to collect was stale and no longer actionable by the time they received it.

“Our standard research methods took at least six weeks to generate results,” says Eric Rothdeutsch, Manager of Customer and Market Insights at Intuit. “We were losing the ability to contribute effectively to the organization, so we had to evolve our tactics.”

THE SOLUTION:
FASTER, RICHER
INSIGHTS



In order to speed up the process of collecting timely, rich customer insights, Intuit decided to build a community panel comprising accountants who use their software products. The market research team knew that the rapid, accessible and sophisticated findings of a community panel would yield faster, more reliable research leading to faster, better product development.

Intuit considered three potential vendors to assist them in establishing a community panel. As a leader themselves, the vendor Intuit selected needed to have a reputation as a leader in the market research world. The pricing model had to work within their budget limits, and they would have to be transparent, making the total cost clear up front.

After appropriate due diligence and reference checks, Intuit confidently chose Vision Critical, based on its core competency in market research, a flexible and affordable self-service option, and the absence of an initial setup charge—the Vision Critical panel came with no capital expenditure requirements to eat into Intuit’s research budget.

Intuit’s Accounting Professional Research Panel is now a fundamental component of their primary research investment of more than three quarters of a million dollars annually. As much as half of all their research projects now go through the panel.

The company’s Product Managers trust results from the community panel to guide the direction of product engineering. They are able to quickly and easily translate customer requests and feedback into tangible product changes. The community panel findings also go directly to Intuit’s business and senior leadership teams during their annual planning.

“We’re now able to shoot out some questions to our panel, pull results and get answers a lot faster—within two weeks or so,” notes Rothdeutsch. “We can even ask questions and have some data to look at within 24 hours. The process is almost instantaneous.”

Intuit does not offer their Accounting Professional panelists any incentives. In fact, they take a very hands-off approach with the goal of keeping respondents unbiased—stopping them from turning into brand evangelists just because they are asked to provide their opinion. Since the panel is the only mechanism their organization uses to gather quantitative data on new product concepts, Intuit deliberately keeps its distance so as not to alter the behavior of the accounting professionals they target. The end result—products truly shaped by the customer—is the reward for their valuable feedback.

THE RESULT



Intuit’s panel gives it the ability to stay nimble, doing more research faster than ever and contributing valuable ‘Voice of the Customer’ feedback throughout the company. While reducing their budget was not an objective at the outset, they are pleased to have seen their overall market research spend go down while the number of studies they perform has grown. The research cycle has also been shortened by 40 to 60 per cent from as much as eight weeks down to as little as two.

Intuit also runs monthly omnibus surveys through its panel, grouping questions from various departments instead of each one sending out its own survey. “The Product Management team really loves this capability,” notes Rothdeutsch. They can also do better quantitative targeting, which helps when trying to hone in on a very small population segment. In the past, Intuit’s post-purchase surveys were painful for their customers—Vision Critical’s Sparq technology has increased efficiency and effectiveness and created a new form of dialogue between the company and their clients.

“Vision Critical is responsive, understands our unique research needs, and is more than willing to do whatever we ask,” says Rothdeutsch. “Nothing rattles Vision Critical.”



About Sparq

Sparq is the market research industry’s most adopted platform for managing online communities and panels, with more than 450 installations around the world. Sparq’s broad capabilities, easy to use interface and engaging panelist experience tools enable organizations of any size to connect with their customers quickly, creatively and meaningfully.



About Vision Critical

Vision Critical is a global research and technology firm that creates software and services solutions for over 600 clients, including one third of the world’s top 100 brands. The company has offices across North America, Europe and Australia as well as a Global Partner Program that provides other research companies and consultants with access to top-of-the-line technology. Its Sparq™ product is the most widely adopted community panel platform on the planet.