



# E-BOOK SERIES: PLANNING AND MANAGING FOCUS GROUPS LIKE A PRO



# FORWARD

I'm writing this e-book as a way of passing along the lessons and insights that I have learned about conducting focus groups over the last dozen years.

Focus groups can be one of the most flexible and informative research methods available. Qualitative research in general, and Focus Groups in particular are one of the best methods of drilling down beyond the "what" people are doing and saying and to actually understand the "why" and "how"s. This capability provides more than a cursory look that may not yield as great of an insight into just where the marketplace is going, but why it's going there and may enable a savvy marketing or R&D manager to skip ahead of the competition to a better long term solution to customer's problems and pain points.

Over the last decade, I have planned and managed hundreds of focus groups all over the world and have put together a simple step by step process that will help even a first time market research manager to plan and conduct successful focus groups. My goal is to provide both the fundamental knowledge and the tools to help you objectively plan, find an appropriate research vendor and get the business questions that you need answered so you can be successful in whatever business decisions your company is contemplating.

The steps involved in managing market research in general are not particularly difficult, however there are a number of places that a market research can get derailed and end up in the weeds. Unfortunately

the steps in conducting research tend to build upon one another, so an early mistake or misunderstanding will only be amplified as the research goes on and the eventual research findings can easily be far afield from what was originally expected. This is the primary reason that larger companies hire dedicated market research managers who work with the different groups in the organization (product marketing, R&D, Usage, Human Factors Engineering, Advertising and so on) is to make certain that the research objectives are clearly laid out, with as little ambiguity as possible, the potential business decisions are well understood, the research method is carefully chosen to satisfy the objectives, a knowledgeable vendor is selected from the thousands available and of course that the research is well executed and the final report addresses management needs.

I'm not claiming that this single document will enable you to do all of this as well as someone with decades of experience, however it will give you a foundation on which to build a quality research project and with some time and thought, should keep your project from running astray.

In case there are areas of research that you would like to prefer to get an unbiased view on, we are also available for ad hoc consultation for prices that pale in comparison to the cost of a research project gone bad.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Hawkes has worked as a market researcher for Hewlett-Packard for over a dozen years, initially in secondary market research and later as a primary market research manager. During his tenure, Chris has worked for a number of organizations, focusing on consumer and commercial products, applications, services and a number of new business opportunities.

Over the last decade Chris has:

- Conducted research on a variety of new product and service concepts to assess business feasibility. (some of which were launched and some of which were not).
- Conducted research on hardware products from inkjet printers to cameras to high end copiers
- Conducted research on services and software solutions from micro-businesses to enterprise level solutions.
- Utilized nearly every market

research method in order to ensure that HP receives the highest quality of information possible.

- Logged nearly a million air miles, conducting market research the world over, in order to understand the different, and evolving, customer expectations in various cultures and economic environments in which our products operate.

Along the way Chris has worked with various levels of HP management, across different functions (Labs, Marketing, Research & Development, Sales...) to understand the business decisions that are being considered.

In addition to managing market research for Hewlett-packard and creating the Market Research 101 website, Chris has also been a guest lecturer at a number of local colleges and is currently a blogger for the Product Development and Management Association (PDMA.org). He has also been a guest blogger for

the New York Times.

Chris' academic background includes a degree in Finance from Boise State University, and attendance at well over a dozen market research and marketing courses and conferences over the years.

Chris lives, skis and mountain bikes in Boise, ID with his family and can be reached at [chawkes@marketresearch101.com](mailto:chawkes@marketresearch101.com).



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## INTRODUCTION TO FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are a simple, but powerful type of market research. Typically a focus group consists of 6-8 respondents (usually current or potential customers) who are recruited, and paid, to participate in a discussion which usually lasts 90 minutes to two hours. The discussion is managed by a independent moderator who manages the discussion, keeping the discussion on the topics of interest, soliciting feedback where necessary and gently guiding the discussion .

Focus groups are a very flexible type of research, allowing feedback to be garnered on a broad range of topics from, product concept tests, advertising, messaging research, customer satisfaction and even employee satisfaction. One of the greatest benefits of focus group research is the unstructured format that they can take, allowing the moderator to follow up on learnings that had not even

been anticipated during the planning of the research. Typically focus groups take place at a special facility, designed specifically for conducting market research. These facilities, in addition to having a room where the discussion will take place, also have a one-way mirror at one end of the room, from which the focus group can be viewed (typically by members of the company that is sponsoring the research). There are a couple of photographs of focus groups facilities on page 12.

Focus groups are qualitative market research meaning that they don't generate statistically significant data, but instead the flexibility of the research provides "directional" information and is sometimes followed up with quantitative market research to provide empirical information to confirm that the results of the focus groups were representative of the population at large.

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### CONGRATULATIONS!

You're interested in learning more about focus groups, or maybe you've

decided to have some focus groups conducted and want to know how the process works, in order to ensure that

your research yields the highest quality results possible. Focus groups are the most common qualitative market

**Our Guarantee**

*We believe that we provide detailed instructions and insights on market research that are not available anywhere else. We are proud of our products and want to make sure that our customers are happy with their purchases. If you are dissatisfied with this product, please contact us and give us a chance to fill in the pieces that you were expecting to get. If we can't do that we'll happily refund your money.*

*Best Regards,*

*Chris Hawkes*

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