

Market Research: an Example with Qualitative and Quantitative Research

QuickStop Convenience Stores

Once upon a time there was a very successful convenience store, we'll call it "QuickStop". At some point the management team began to worry that QuickStop wasn't being patronized by as many women as men – and that QuickStop was losing a valuable part of the market.

Research Objective

A research project was designed to understand how women felt about shopping at QuickStop stores and why. It was decided that this research should be qualitative and the specific methodology would be In-depth-Interviews. The belief was that these women might be less likely to talk about their feelings about convenience stores in a group, so one-on-one interviews made the most sense.

Qualitative Research

About two dozen current or potential female customers were paid to come into a central facility to discuss the use of convenience stores in general, and specifically QuickStop convenience stores. The results were very surprising to the management team. The major qualitative findings included the following: 1) women viewed convenience stores to be primarily designed for men, with little or no consideration for women, 2) the bathrooms at convenience stores were believed to be the dirtiest that could be found in a city - "gross" was the most common description – and that perception permeated everything that women felt about convenience stores in general. 3) QuickStop was seen as one of the worst of convenience stores "kind of the place for a man to buy gas, get a six-pack of cheap beer and cigarettes, but not the kind of place I want to go".

Quantitative Research

Once the management team had an understanding of what issues they faced with female customers, they felt that they needed to understand how broadly these beliefs were held. Now they needed to get some hard numbers, and that meant that they needed to conduct quantitative market research. The research objective for this phase of research was: 1) Understand how female customers of QuickStop differ from those that don't regularly visit these stores. 2) Understand whether or not a renovation of QuickStop could entice each group to visit more frequently (or at all depending on whether the respondent currently avoided QuickStop entirely). For the quantitative phase of research they decided to conduct 250 telephone interviews with a combination of female respondents. The requirements to participate in this phase of research were that: half of the respondents stated that they had used QuickStop at least five times in the last year, and the other half admitted to intentionally avoiding QuickStop altogether, although they did use other brands of convenience stores. The major results from the quantitative phase indicated that: 1) Over 76% of all female QuickStop customers were women under 30 years old, without children, while women with children and with higher incomes were 5 times less likely to shop at QuickStop! 2) the good news was that of the women who didn't currently use QuickStop, 64% said that if these stores were to update their color schemes, clean up their bathrooms and update their health and feminine products that they would be willing to try QuickStop again.

The two phases of research gave the QuickStop management team a very good understanding of where they currently stood with female customers and why. Their quantitative research also indicated that those women who were not currently using their stores would "forgive" them if they changed their ways. Their decision now was to decide if gaining more middle-aged women as customers was worth the cost of updating their stores and spending more money to keep them clean and neat.

I hope that this example has helped to clarify the different uses and benefits of both qualitative and quantitative market research.

