



## Chapter Eight: Research



### Why research?

Research is the natural starting point for any PR initiative. It's the essential first step.

- Managers want results and proof of performance.
- Clients are less interested in what we think than what we know.



## So what is research?

❖ Research is the systematic collection and interpretation of information to increase understanding.

### ❖ Key Research Questions

- How can we identify and define our constituent (essential) groups?
- How does this knowledge relate to our message design?
- How does it relate to the design of our programs?
- How does it relate to how we select media?
- How does it relate to how we schedule media?
- How does it relate to the ultimate implementation tactics of our program?



## The real research challenge is:

- Knowing when to conduct it
- What needs to be considered
- With whom
- For what purpose

**Guest Satisfaction Survey**

Our records indicate that you recently had reservations at the hotel shown above on the date indicated.

**MARKING INSTRUCTIONS**

- Do not use red ink.
- Do not use a marker that will bleed through the page.
- You may use pencil to pen to complete this survey.

Please be sure to fill the response area completely.

Please take a moment and answer the following questions. If a question is not applicable to your stay, please skip to the next question.

**How would you rate our hotel on:**

**1. QUALITY OF ACCOMMODATIONS...**

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Cleanliness of your guest room										
Quality of service of your room attendant										
Overall cleanliness of bathroom										
Condition of bed and pillow										
Condition of bathroom										
Overall guest room quality										
Overall maintenance and upkeep										
Condition of the grounds										
Condition of the lobby area										
Condition of the restaurant and lounge										
Friendliness of guest room staff										
Condition of pool and pool area										

Everything on your item is working well?  Yes  No

Please share any comments you may have about the quality of our rooms, lobby and outside areas.

**2. QUALITY OF HOTEL STAFF AND SERVICES...**

Did you make your reservations through the hotel?  Yes  No

When you arrived at the hotel, was the information the hotel had concerning your reservations correct?  Yes  No



## Guiding principles for setting PR research standards

- Clear program objectives and outcomes tied to goals
- Differentiating between measuring outputs and outcomes
- Measuring media content in evaluation
- Consideration of multiple measurement techniques
- Consider differences in effectiveness of tools
- Measurement of overall effectiveness stems from clearly identified key messages, target audiences, and desired channels of communication.

1997, Institute for Public Relations Research and Education

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## In general, we use research to:

- describe a process, situation, or phenomenon.
- explain why something is happening, its causes, and what effect it will have.
- predict what probably will happen if we do or don't take action.
- Three major types of research:
  1. Applied research
  2. Theoretical research
  3. Secondary research

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## 1. Applied research

- Applied research solves practical problems.
- It can be strategic or evaluative.
  - Strategic research is used for program development to determine objectives, message strategies, or establish benchmarks. It examines the tools and techniques of public relations.
  - Evaluative research, or summative research, to determine whether a program met its goals and objectives. It can be applied to monitor progress.



## 2. Theoretical research

It is more abstract and conceptual, and helps build theories in PR work about:

- why people communicate
- how public opinion is formed
- how a public is created

Theoretical research provides a foundation for understanding applied research findings. Knowledge of theoretical research is important as a framework for persuasion and as a base for understanding why people do what they do.



### 3. Secondary research

This type of research utilizes data collected by someone else.  
Examples of sources include:

- industry trade journals
- government information
- Websites
- informal contacts
- public records
- census data
- professional organizations



### Methods of PR research

1. Surveys
2. Communication audits
3. Unobtrusive (discreet, understated) measures

**S I D E B A R**

**Online Public Relations Resources**

You say you want to use the Net for additional public relations knowledge? (How could you need more knowledge when you're reading the world's greatest public relations textbook?) Just kidding. Well, here is where you might turn.

**Free Publicity**  
6 Horizon Road  
Fort Lee, NJ 07024  
[www.PublicityIdeas.com](http://www.PublicityIdeas.com)

**The Holmes Report**  
[www.holmesreport.com](http://www.holmesreport.com)

**Interactive Public Relations**  
316 North Michigan Avenue  
Suite 300  
Chicago, IL 60601  
[www.sagan.com/opr](http://www.sagan.com/opr)

**Media Bridge Newsletter**  
[www.themediasidebridge.com](http://www.themediasidebridge.com)

**Media Relations Textbase**  
5900 Hollis Street  
Suite R1  
Encinitas, CA 94408  
[www.infobcongroup.com/mrl.html](http://www.infobcongroup.com/mrl.html)

**O'Dwyer's Newsletter**  
271 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10017  
[www.odwyers.com](http://www.odwyers.com)

**Online PR Workshop**  
316 North Michigan Avenue  
Suite 300  
Chicago, IL 60601  
[www2.sagan.com/onlinepr/4](http://www2.sagan.com/onlinepr/4)

**PR Intelligence Report**  
316 N. Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60601  
[www.sagan.com/pr](http://www.sagan.com/pr)

**PR Reporter**  
P.O. Box 500  
Eaton, NJ 08833-0500  
[www.prapub.co.uk](http://www.prapub.co.uk)

**PR WEEK (UK)**  
174 Hammersmith Road  
London, ENGLAND W6 7ZP  
[www.prsweek.com](http://www.prsweek.com)

**PR WEEK (US)**  
PR Publications Ltd.  
220 Fifth Avenue  
14th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
[www.prsweek.com](http://www.prsweek.com)

**Sagan Report**  
316 North Michigan Avenue  
Suite 300  
Chicago, IL 60601  
[www.sagan.com](http://www.sagan.com)

**The Source and Strategic Communications Management**  
First Floor, Chelsea Reach, 79-89 Lots Road, London SW10 0BL  
[www.asforum.com](http://www.asforum.com)

**The Strategist/PR Tactics**  
33 Irving Place  
New York, NY 10003-2376  
[www.prs-089](http://www.prs-089)

**Web Content Report**  
316 North Michigan Avenue  
Suite 300  
Chicago, IL 60601  
[www.sagan.com/wcr](http://www.sagan.com/wcr)

Courtesy of the Council of Public Relations



## 1. Survey research

- This is one of the most frequently used research methods in PR
- Surveys are used to measure attitudes, opinions, behaviors
- The two types of surveys are:
  - Descriptive
    - Descriptive surveys describe a condition or situation — they answer “what.”
  - Explanatory
    - Explanatory surveys explain a condition or situation. They provide insights into cause and effect — they answer “why.”
- **Surveys consist of four elements:**
  1. Sample
  2. Questionnaire
  3. Interview
  4. Analysis of results

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## The sample

- The sample refers to selected target group representative of the total public.

Always remember:

- Data is perishable and dynamic, so complete sampling quickly.
- Sampling must be conducted with accuracy.

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## Types of sampling

### A. Random Sampling

Two properties are essential- equality and independence

#### Keys:

- Equality: every element has an equal chance of selection
- Independence: selection of one element does not influence selection of any others.

Generalizations from the sample are made to the population.

(Non-random Sampling is explained in slide 17)

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## Types of random sampling

1. Simple random sampling—every person has an equal chance of selection.
2. Systematic random sampling
  - Random starting point on the sample list, with every nth person selected.
3. Stratified Random Sampling
  - Stratified to survey segments of the population. For example, if an organization wants to determine the relationship between years of service and attitudes toward the company, it may stratify the sample to ensure that the breakdown of respondents accurately reflects the makeup of the population.
4. Cluster sampling
  - Breaks down population into homogenous subsets or clusters (i.e. geographic area).

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## B. Nonrandom sampling

*This is broken down into three types:*

1. Convenience samples: Accidental, chunk or opportunity samples; unstructured and unsystematic. Designed to elicit ideas and points of view.
2. Quota samples: The researcher chooses subjects based on specific characteristics. For example, the attitudes of a certain number of women, men, blacks, whites, rich or poor may be needed.
3. Volunteer samples: These utilize willing participants who agree to respond.



## The questionnaire

Before creating a questionnaire, ask yourself about the:

- Objective of the research
- Scope
- Publics
- Method of research
- Design





## Questionnaire design elements

- Keep it short
- Use structured questions
- Measure intensity of feelings
- Clear understandable language
- No loaded questions: "is management doing all it can to communicate with you?"
- Pre-test
- No double barreled questions: "would you like management meetings once a month, or are bimonthly meetings enough?"
- Include letter of intent
- Hand stamp envelopes with unique stamps
- Follow-up post card
- Send out more questionnaires than needed
- Enclose a reward

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## Interviews

Interviews can provide a more personal, firsthand feel for public opinion. They can be conducted face-to-face, via the telephone, mail or Internet.

Formats include:

- Focus groups
- Telephone interviews
- Mail interviews
- Delphi panels
- Intranet interviews
- Drop-off interviews
- Intercept interviews

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## Focus groups

- A focus group is a type of convenience sample.
- It has become the most common type of convenience sample used in public relations research.
- It typically consists of 8 to 12 people, with a moderator encouraging in-depth discussion on a specific topic.
- Rather than validate hypotheses, the focus group generates concepts, ideas on a particular product, organization, or idea.
- Participants are representative of the socioeconomic level desired by the research sponsor and are almost always compensated.

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## Results analysis

Now it's time to take a look at what you really have. This is a key step in order to make meaningful recommendations.

- Were the results both valid and reliable?
- What is the margin of error?
- Were the results statistically significant?
- Was the study conducted appropriately and ethically?

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## 2. Communications audits

- Used to determine communication consistency, effectiveness, validity of relationships, and methods.
- Involves analysis of internal and external communication channels.
- Researchers must consider:
  - **Scope:** may be as broad or as narrow as the size and complexity of the organization's demands.
  - **Subjects**
  - **Methodology**

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## 3. Unobtrusive methods

Often, research can be as simple as looking around you.

Consider:

- **Fact-finding:** read organizational files, publications, biographies, press clippings, media lists, literature, charters, and by-laws.
- **Content analysis:** describes a message or set of messages utilizing categories such as frequency of coverage, placement, reach, message conveyed, editing, and attitude conveyed.
- **Copy testing:** target publics are exposed to PR campaign messages in advance of publication. This helps ensure that messages are understandable and effective.

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## Evaluation: what happened and why?

Successful evaluation depends on:

1. Setting measurable PR program objectives
2. Securing management commitment
3. Determining the best way to gather data
4. Reporting back to management
5. Selecting the most appropriate outcomes

❖ Accountability is the key word. Resources are limited, and management expects it.



## Types of measurable outcomes

- Awareness and comprehension measurement: probes whether targets received the messages directed at them, paid attention to them, and understood them.
- Recall and retention measurement: does the target remember what was said?
- Attitude and preference measurement: measures how the message moved an individual's attitudes, opinions, and preferences.
- Behavior measurements: the ultimate test of effectiveness. Did the message get people to vote for our candidate, buy our product, or agree with our ideas?



## Research and the Web

Key questions to ask when evaluating a website:

- How much traffic is coming to the site?
- What pages are people looking at?
- How often do they go beyond the homepage?
- What do they find most useful and interesting?
- What parts never get looked at?
- Where do visitors come from?
- Is the site functioning as expected?

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## What about doing web-based research?

Follow these steps:

- Establish objectives
- Determine criteria
- Determine benchmarks
- Select the right measurement tool
- Compare results to objectives
- Draw actionable conclusions: you've received 100,000 visitors to the site. So what? Interpret the significance of the numbers and do something with the data to make progress.
- ❖ Review Question:
  - Explain what a focus group is and discuss some of its characteristics.

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