

Metro`s Reader Panel

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Proprietary online panels can be used to great effect. Louisa Marsh (BMRB) and Katharine King (Metro) describe Metro's award winning approach.

In 2002 Metro newspaper and BMRB began working together on the Urban Life project. The research was referred to in The Guardian as something that "may well be seen as the most innovative research initiative in press history" (Roy Greenslade, October 2002). The project also picked up Media Week magazine's Media Owner Research Project of the Year (2003) and Campaign magazine's Best Use of Research (2003). Urban Life has continued to evolve since then, going from strength to strength.

Metro's readership is concentrated around a valuable social group: young, affluent, brand-conscious, city dwellers, or "Urbanites" for short. Urban Life was created to be the first research study to lift the lid on what makes Urbanites tick: their lifestyles, attitudes, brand choices, opinions and motivations.

Metro's key aims were to:

- create an attractive research proposition that described and reflected Metro's Urbanite audience effectively to advertisers and agencies

- develop a deeper understanding of the Metro audience in terms of both behaviour, lifestyle, attitudes and motivations

- use the insights generated across the entire Metro business: feeding into editorial and marketing strategies, particularly in product development

- provide a research vehicle to offer added value to Metro's clients, enabling them to offer a free omnibus service to both existing and new advertisers

Doug Read, Executive Director at Metro said "Urban Life has been a great success and we feel it has extended the boundaries normally associated with media research projects. However, we have a principle on Urban Life that each year we "raise the bar" by setting more ambitious objectives for the project. This stops us becoming complacent and hopefully keeps it interesting for respondents. To achieve these stretched goals required imagination and hard work by all members of the Urban Life team, both at our end and from our research agency partner".

The web-based methodology was chosen because this young, mobile audience is so hard to research via traditional data collection methods. An online approach fits with the readers' busy lifestyles and is readily available to the vast majority of them, helping to facilitate a good response. It also has the advantage of allowing a fast turnaround of results giving virtually instantaneous polling on topical issues. The permissions required to conduct the research via email required the building of a reader panel.

Panel applicants are recruited through editorial content and adverts in the newspaper each year. Emails are also sent to panellists who were previously on the panel and might want to re-register. Panellists are then selected according to quota controls and survey respondents are linked into online questionnaires via email invitations. Every six months a new recruitment phase is undertaken to refresh the panel. Over the past few years the panel size has grown from 3,000 to 4,270 (in 2005).

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