

Using Tablets in Research

Contributed by Danni Findlay, head of retail at Marketing Sciences
 Friday, 21 March 2014
 Last Updated Monday, 14 April 2014

Technology is rapidly changing the nature of market research and how it is conducted. In 2012 we made the most of this by investing in tablet devices for our face-to-face (F2F) fieldforce, allowing us to conduct almost two million F2F interviews and save 724 trees to date. The sheer number of interviews completed in this time shows how valuable technology is and how it improves efficiency in research projects.

Computers have been aiding our interviewers for years, allowing us to work faster and more accurately than with paper questionnaires. Investing in Android tablets for our fieldforce of 1,000 interviewers means these same benefits can be realised when conducting in-store, on-street or in-home F2F interviews and studies. We trained our team via a roadshow held in 12 cities around the UK before conducting almost two million interviews (in fact, they conducted exactly 1,896,025). These were undertaken for our client Tesco, which uses research to work on improving the in-store experience for its customers. Tablet data collection offers significant benefits over paper-based methods. Tablets allow clients to learn from the data almost immediately and to use these insights to create business opportunities faster than ever before. They have made data collection more accurate, which is of great importance when conducting 100,000 interviews a month. They allow for more precise data inputting – the interviewer can be guided by directional prompts and errors can be detected by built-in sense checks which guard the results from human error or misinterpretation. Beyond the input methods, tablets also allow for a greater quality of results. We can activate the GPS on the device to detail where the interview took place, and similarly confirm that it took place at the right date and time. Ensuring that there are no anomalies within the results becomes a simpler task which does not depend on lengthy checking procedures. We can control which devices have access to which questionnaires, and immediately remove them when a project comes to its conclusion. Both of these measures reduce the likelihood of an incorrect interview being completed and further improve the precision of the results. Tablets are not just a platform to electronically replicate a paper questionnaire – they allow us to supplement the interview with photo or video content and gather multiple types of data. These in turn give us and the client a clearer picture of the customer experience. Before investing in tablets we did our research. Our fieldforce conducts thousands of interviews every day so it was imperative that the devices had adequate battery life and were light enough to be held for hours. We tested a variety of tablets for these features as well as for usability as a simpler user interface further decreases the likelihood of errors. In order to maximise battery power we selected app-based questionnaire software as opposed to an internet browser, eliminating the need for power-draining Wi-Fi. We’ve also chosen software that works across all mobile platforms, meaning that if we upgrade our devices we can continue with the same software. We have gained much from using tablet data collection, and we recommend its use to researchers. If it’s an investment you are looking to make, there are three key points to remember:

- Practicality: Tablets should be light, have an easy to use interface and have a battery life that will last for the length of the interviewing process.
- Creativity: A tablet offers more scope for creativity than a traditional paper questionnaire. Take advantage of this and experiment with your stimuli to make the interview process more engaging.
- Longevity: Don’t let improvements be a challenge – future-proof your technology by choosing software that runs on a range of platforms, making upgrades an easy option.

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