

Part Two of Learning to Manage Research Partnerships

Contributed by ValueNotes
Thursday, 26 June 2014

Part two: Before you start: Preparation and partner Due diligence - Written by Arun Jethmalani

1. Why are we doing this?

There are several reasons why we seek partners. These could be tactical, such as lack of bandwidth or time. Or they could be strategic, in terms of enhancing capabilities – domain knowledge or skill sets, or local presence. Or it could be cost – some tasks may be done cheaper by someone else. The danger is in looking at partnerships purely from a cost angle. This is short-sighted, as it tends to obscure the other advantages (or disadvantages).

We work with several field research agencies that deliver interviews across India and AsiaPac. Recently, one of our oldest and most trusted partners suddenly raised rates. The ValueNotes project manager got upset, and decided to work with a new and untested partner. Three weeks later, the project was in a mess. We ended up re-doing more than 50% of the interviews, and went way over-budget. As they say, penny-wise can be pound-foolish!

It pays to think long term – and develop a partner network that could meet a variety of future research needs and situations. Most often, the cheapest does not deliver the best long term RoI.

2. It's all about trust – do your due diligence

Sure – what's new? Don't we already know this?

Yet, how many times have we picked the wrong partner?

Most of us don't invest enough in finding the "right" partners. While I can understand this, what's amazing is that even highly talented researchers don't do much research on potential partners.

We once lost a project to a local competitor who bid far lower than us. We knew the company well, and were sure they didn't have the capabilities to execute that particular research. But we couldn't say that, could we? Three weeks later, the client called me in desperation – they'd been let down by their partner, and now had to deliver the project in half the time. Fortunately, we had people free and could help them out.

You must research your partner – the pain and cost of getting it wrong can be extremely high. Some of the possible questions that need to be answered are:

- What is the credibility of the management team?
- Is it a one-person show?
- What kind of people do they have working for them?
- Who have they worked for before?
- How long have they been around?
- Can they demonstrate experience and expertise on similar projects?
- What kind of ethical stance do they have?

Look at their websites, social media profiles and mentions, bios of key team members, and publications they might have in the public domain? Ask for samples and references. Call the references. Try and get to know the partner's team.

Republished with permission from ValueNotes. For the original article, [click here](#).