

Chapter 10

Reporting and Communicating Findings

Introduction

In this chapter you will learn about:

- The way that market researchers make data accessible through the use of table, charts and text.
- Planning a report so that it fulfils the requirements of the research sponsor by meeting the brief, presenting clear findings and with strong conclusions and recommendations.
- Making effective presentations.

Making information accessible

Most market research studies are carried out to guide business decisions. Business decisions tend to be directional – should we go left or right, make this decision or the other? However, the decisions that market research guides are seldom that simple. Indeed, the very fact that market research has been commissioned implies that all is not clear. The research is to act as fog lamps, showing the way down a dark and murky road.

One problem with any study is the volume of data that is produced in a very short time. These data may be partly conflicting because it is not unusual in any market that there will be respondents with different views or desk research which offers yet another view. The researcher must accommodate these differences, accepting that the

different data offer layers of understanding until finally the way forward is clear.

The findings are almost always captured in a document and today this is more likely to be a deck of PowerPoint slides than a wordy report. The PowerPoint slides (or at least some of them) will be the basis of the de-brief to the commissioning team.

The written document of the report will contain three different types of data:

- Tables
- Charts
- Text

Tables

Tables are one of the most efficient ways of presenting data. The figures in the rows and columns show results that enable the reader to see the raw data and, if necessary, use the information for further calculations. A table can hold far more information than a chart and remain intelligible. They do, however, require the reader to work on the data more than in a chart.

Tables should be used wherever:

- there is a considerable amount of information which would become over complicated in a chart or diagram.
- the figures in the table are important and the reader may require them for further computations (as in a company's financial accounts or in currency conversion tables).

A table should quickly communicate a pattern of information to the reader. Consider Figure 10.1. This table is reproduced exactly as it was found in a draft report that required editing before sending to a client.

Think about

Look at figure 10.1 and see how many ways you could improve it. Represent the table and compare your results with figure 10.2 later in this chapter.

Figure 10.1 Dissatisfaction with motor, personal accident or sickness and holiday insurance

	motor	acc/sick	holiday
unweighted base; those dissatisfied	149	28	33
cause of dissatisfaction	%	%	%
misled by broker/salesman into taking unnecessary/expensive policy			
special conditions imposed (inc. excess)	1.2	16.3	0
cost of policy/premium increase	6.45	7	6.6
claim not covered by policy	39.3	27.4	11.4
claim not met in full	1.6	9.9	15.2
long delay in dealing with the claim	6.7	17.4	17.1
other complaints	19.8	19.1	29
not stated	26.9	12.6	10.2
	6.1	10.8	24.4

There are at least 10 ways in which the table could be improved:

1. The title

The title should clearly and succinctly say what the table is about. The title of the table is too long and would be better shortened to “Reasons For Dissatisfaction With Insurance Policies”.

2. Grid lines to separate rows and columns

Tables are harder to read if they stretch across a page without grid lines to separate the rows and columns.

3. The column headings

The column headings, though short, are not altogether clear. What precisely does acc/sick mean? It would be worthwhile making the headings stand out by boldening. There is no heading at all over the left hand column.

4. The rows

The first row of the data is likely to cause a problem for most readers. What exactly is meant by “unweighted base; those dissatisfied”? The table presents findings from a survey of people with different types of insurance and the words “unweighted base” would have

been far better to have simply said “sample size” or “number of respondents”.

5. The spurious accuracy of the figures

In a good table the reader can easily relate one set of data to another and so pick out patterns. In this table the figures have been calculated to two decimal places. Given that there are two columns of data with a sample of only 28 people in one and 33 in another, the figures imply a level of accuracy that isn't warranted. It is much easier to consider figures that are rounded and in this case it would be more appropriate to not show any decimal places.

6. Ordering of the rows

The whole point of the table is to show which issues cause dissatisfaction with insurance policies. Therefore, it would be easier for the reader if the rows were listed in declining order of importance. If the rows are not ordered, the reader has to work hard to do this themselves. “Cost of policy” should be the first in the list as it is by far the most important cause of dissatisfaction. But what of those rows further down the list where there are large differences between the types of policy? Should “misled into expensive policy” be before or after “special conditions imposed”? This would be an easier decision if there was a “total” column. The total column would also be useful for making comparisons between the columns.

7. The large number of respondents in the “dustbin” categories

Key point

Tables are one of the best ways of presenting large amounts of data but the way tables are laid out will affect how easy or difficult they are to interpret.

There are a worryingly large number of people in two rows of data labeled “other complaints” and “not stated”. This fuels our curiosity as to what could be in the “others” category. There is not much we can do about this without going back to the raw data – the original questionnaires – to see if there were responses that should either have been slotted into the categories or pulled out as a new one. Without access to the raw data we either have to make a decision to suppress these rows completely (so that they don't cause any

distractions) or leave them in, but as the last rows in the listing.

8. The labeling of the rows

The labels on the rows look as if they have been lifted straight from a coding sheet and have not been smartened up in any way. They

could be improved by shortening and with capitals at the beginning of the line.

9. Labeling of the sum of the columns

Most people looking at the table would wonder if the results, being percentages, should add to 100%. If someone ran this check they would find out that each column adds to more than 100%. This is because this is a “multi-response” question to which more than one answer could be given. It would help if there was an explanation to this effect.

10. Source of the data

Without knowing where the data has come from or when it was published, we cannot judge its authenticity.

The improved table would look as follows:

Figure 10.2 Reasons for dissatisfaction with insurance policies

Cause of dissatisfaction with policy	Type Of Policy			
	Total %	Motor %	Accident/ Sickness %	Holiday %
Cost of policy/premium increase	33	39	27	11
Delay in dealing with claim	21	20	19	29
Claim not met in full	10	7	17	17
Special conditions imposed	7	6	7	7
Claim not covered by policy	5	2	10	15
Misled into unnecessary/ expensive policy	3	1	16	0
Other complaints	22	27	13	10
Not stated	10	6	11	24
Total	*	*	*	*
Sample size (those who were dissatisfied)	210	149	28	33

* Multi-response therefore total exceeds 100%

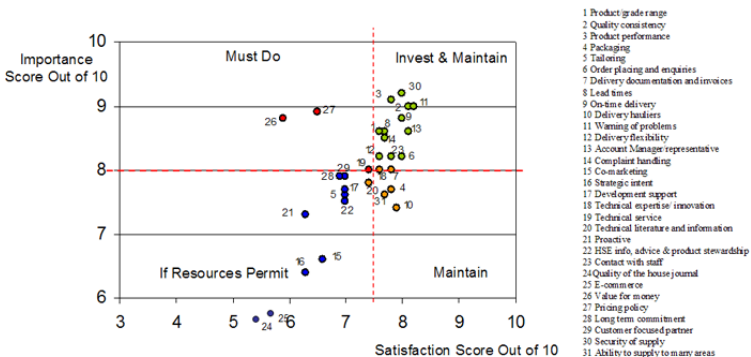
Source: *Attitudes To Insurance Policies, Bloggs Research – 2004*

Charts

A picture has always been worth a thousand words. Graphs have more impact than tables because they simplify the data and pull out key findings in pictorial form. There are five major types of diagrams used by researchers:

- **Bar charts** – horizontal bar charts are possibly the most popular type of chart used by market researchers. They are useful for comparing different data sets (such as “motor”, “accident” and “home”) as shown in the insurance policies table.
- **Pie diagrams** – used to show parts of a whole such as the market shares of suppliers or the age split of a sample.
- **Graphs** – show trends over time and can be line graphs or bar graphs.
- **Flow diagrams and representational charts** – show how a market is organized. They can relate to how a market is structured, how an organisation operates or how an individual makes decisions. The key issue for the development of a flow chart is the structure of a process.
- **XY graphs** – these compare two variables. This comparison helps in the interpretation of the data. For example the findings from a customer satisfaction survey could show importance scores of issues plotted against the satisfaction scores with those issues. The attributes that are in the “north west” corner stand out as those which require immediate attention.

Figure 10.3 XY Graph Plotting Importance & Satisfaction



Text

Text forms the narrative in a written report and as such it is used to tell the whole story. Text is also used in tables and charts in PowerPoint slides to describe and add explanations to the findings. A PowerPoint slide deck, that is prepared to report on the findings of a survey, will normally have text to sum up the conclusions or for an executive summary.

Text should aim to clearly and simply present the findings and so needs to be written in short simple sentences. Frequent headings that break up the text will help people speed read and gut the report. Bulleted text can similarly be used to give impact to points.

Key point

Ranked horizontal bar charts are one of the most useful charts for researchers because they make it easy to see the most important issues and compare data from different groups of respondents.

Qualitative researchers make use of verbatim comments to communicate exactly what was said by respondents. Quoted comments are especially useful for enlivening and adding personality to a report. They forcibly remind the reader that the views which are being expressed are those of respondents and not the researcher. The onus is on the researcher to ensure that the quotes genuinely reflect the general view and have not been selected to support a personal prejudice. It is also important to remember that a whole string of quotes should not be used

without providing a meaningful commentary, leaving the reader to try to draw a pattern or some conclusions.

Planning and writing a report

The complexity of the research findings are clarified to the reader by a well structured report. A structure can be obtained from a number of sources:

- The research method – separate sections for the qualitative and quantitative stages.
- The questionnaire – following the order of questions in the questionnaire, as this usually has a logical sequence.
- A time-line – describing the past, the present and the future.

- A hierarchy of subjects – for example, starting with a broad subject such as the structure of the market and moving on to subjects of greater detail such as how people choose suppliers.
- A business tool or framework – such as a SWOT analysis (describing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats).

The researcher must choose a structure that is most appropriate to the objectives of the study and the audience that will be reading the report. Operational and functional staff such as market research managers will be more interested in detailed data that they can work with. Senior managers and directors especially look for strategies and ideas that help them plan. Figure 10.4 shows the results of a survey of 100 users of market research data and what they look for from reports.

Figure 10.4 What Makes A Good Market Research Report?
(Findings from an open ended question)

Requirement From The Report	Total % Mentioning
Answers the brief	33
Clear structure	29
Interpretation/conclusions	27
Recommendations/action points	21
Concise	21
Well-presented	19
Good executive summary	18
Total	*
Sample size	100

* People mentioned several factors, therefore the total does not add up to 100

The best report structures follow a strong story line or thread that goes through the report with links between the chapters and a progressive build up towards the conclusions and recommendations. As with every good story there could be complications and diversions that merit special mention, but always these should help build a greater understanding of the subject and the actions that will follow.

A classical structure for a market research report is as follows:

- **A front page.** This is the window into the report. The title has the power to draw people into the document and it should be carefully chosen to be short and interesting. Also on the front page should be the date of publication of the report, the author and contact details such as address, phone number.
- **A table of contents.** Any report over half a dozen pages should have a table of contents. This formalizes the report and is the map that the reader can scan to see what it contains.
- **Executive summary.** A report of just a few pages deserves a summary. Because it is the last thing that is written, there is a danger that it will be skimmed. It should be the most polished part of the document because it will certainly be the part that is most read. The summary should cover all the main points discussed in the document – the methods, findings and the conclusions/recommendations. Typically the summary is 10% the length of the total report.
- **Introduction.** Following on from the summary is a short section which covers the background that led up to the study, the study objectives and its methods.
- **Findings.** This is the body of the report. It will be broken down into many compartments or chapters each covering one of the major subjects of study. Any doubtful content in the findings section should be put into an appendix of supporting material. All sources of data in the findings should be referenced so that it is clear where they have come from and so that their credibility can be assessed.
- **Conclusions and recommendations.** The conclusions vie with the summary as the showcase of a research report. They should begin by summarising the key learnings from the study and then set these within a framework that suggests a way forward (or offers options for moving forward – the researcher may not be able to be definitive about a favoured course of action because there may be other factors influencing this decision of which they are unaware). There are a number of business and marketing frameworks which can be used to locate the research findings.

Figure 10.5 Frameworks For Drawing Conclusions And Making Recommendations

Section of Conclusions	Purpose of the section	Examples of Frameworks
Situation analysis	To summarize the key issues and bring them together	Life cycle, Ansoff grid
Marketing and business goals	To show what can be achieved	Porter's generic strategies, adoption models for new products, hierarchical communication models (eg AIDA), SWOT, decisions making models
Recommendations	To show what action is required	Four P's, XY grids, process flow models

Key point

The best market research reports meet the brief, and clearly and concisely lead to a course of action.

When all the findings are written up and the reporting is complete, the report is not yet finished. The problem is that this is the stage that most researchers give up because they have had enough of the subject and are ready to move on. In fact, this is just the occasion when they need to find the enthusiasm to stay with the report because it is now ready to be passed across to the sponsor of the study who is about to become very interested in it. Before the

report is given to the client, it should be read and re-read, the first pass checking on the content and the structure and the next edits on the spelling and the prose. In one of the final edits it nearly always helps to take material out or put it in an appendix. Most market research reports suffer from being too long and their authors hate to remove words, charts and tables they have produced. Very seldom are researchers criticized for reports that are too short!

In the final window dressing of the report, care should be given to the following:

- Has it got a title page with full details of who prepared it, when it was prepared and contact details?
- Has it been fully formatted with page numbers and labels and headings to all charts, tables and diagrams?

- Many companies use standard reporting templates – has this been followed in every detail?
- Is the report consistent in every respect including use of fonts, margins, heading styles?
- Is the report free of typos? Bear in mind that the reader will judge the report on detail and sloppiness in presentation will, by association, mean that the research output itself is also assumed to be sloppy?

Think about

What type of reporting style sits comfortably within your company? How could you change your standard reporting template to improve the appearance of your reports?

Presenting research findings

The presentation of a market research study will normally last up to 2 hours. They are almost always delivered using PowerPoint slides which may be supported by other materials such as sample products, video and audio clips. Audiences vary between one or two people up to 30 or more, though typically there will be around 10 people in attendance who have a key interest in the study. As with reports, prior knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of those attending the presentation can help the researcher tailor the presentation to their different needs.

What makes a good presentation is a good presenter. In market research, the slides play a more important role than in other presentations as they are the source of the data.

The presentation is an opportunity for the researcher to emphasise key points, explain detail and generally add confidence to the results through a polished performance.

A meticulous preparation is the key to a good presentation. The audience want to hear the presenter talk around the slides, expand on the bullet points, pull out the important data, draw their attention to the important words in a verbatim quote and to make links with previous slides (or even future slides, if appropriate). This makes a lively presentation and leaves the audience with a feeling of added value.

Key point

The best presenters know that the key to good presentations is practice, practice, and more practice.

This means that it is vitally important that the researcher who is making the presentation is immersed in the data and knows it inside out. A junior researcher should thoroughly rehearse the presentation even if this is on their own, in front of the computer, or better still, in front of a tame audience.

Tips for a good performance

- Dress for the occasion
- Control your nerves in a way that works for you. Settle yourself and the audience. Try to introduce yourself to everyone before the presentation begins. Write down their names.
- Use people's names (but make sure they are correct!). Address their concerns and questions honestly.
- Control any unwanted body movements and habits eg swaying, pacing, jangling keys etc. Try to avoid the constant repetition of words or phrases. Don't use "close up body language" of crossed arms and hand over mouth.
- Know the data and the presentation structure inside out. Memorise the slides and the background to the points on the slides
- Practice the presentation and what you will say on the day. Have your introduction and some concluding words prepared because these are two vital moments in the presentation.
- Sweep the room constantly to make eye contact with everyone in the audience
- Smile and use encouraging gestures to engage with the audience.
- Speak clearly and use intonation of your voice.
- Pace yourself and the presentation – keep your eye on the clock. Never go on too long – seldom are you criticized for a short meeting while those that go on too long on will eat into other people's agendas and possibly cut short the time for the all important final section on conclusions and recommendations.

Think about

Make a list of your weaknesses at presenting. Ask others how they think you could improve. Work on your weaknesses and polish your strengths. Presenting requires a certain amount of acting plus much emphasis and enthusiasm. Whenever you watch someone present, think about what makes them effective. Copy the good ones but don't ape them – be yourself, but even more so.

SCARY STORY

Some years ago I was asked to present a research paper to a group of business students at a university in Bulgaria. I was excited by the prospect and had visions of addressing hundreds of people in a large tiered amphitheatre. I spent hours fine tuning my presentation and including lots of graphics that would “wow” them.

The build up to the occasion was considerable as it was my first visit to Bulgaria. When I met my host, he walked me through the University and out of the back door. We wound our way to a shed around the back where around 10 students eagerly awaited me. There was no screen, no projector, just brown walls and broken Venetian blinds that were impossible to shut.

I had no choice but to abandon my paper. Instead I asked everyone to tell me something about themselves and what they hoped to learn from the session. In the audience I recall a mixed bag of people including some academics, a medical doctor, a bus driver and a hair dresser. They all wanted to find the capitalist Holy Grail and thought that market research was the path that would take them there.

The presentation I made had no visual aids and was geared around the interests of the small group who had turned up. Fortunately it went down well. However, it taught me three things:

- Always check in advance what facilities there are for making the presentation, including the equipment, the size of the room, the size of the audience and its composition.
- Visual aids are just that – simply aids. Good presentations can be made without any. Also, by using a variety of visual aids (or none) you will obviate the “not another horizontal bar chart!” syndrome.
- What matters in a presentation is not what you want to tell the audience but what the audience is interested in learning. Make sure that the presentation focuses on the audience's needs not yours.