

# Questionnaire Design



By  
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# QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

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# PREFACE

This book is part of a series which focuses on specific subjects in the market researcher's armoury including questionnaire design, interviewing, sampling and reporting.

There are dozens of books on the shelves on market research and, in part, I have been responsible for a number. However, there are hardly any books on the fundamental subject of questionnaire design. Some years ago I read an excellent book<sup>1</sup> by William Belson which takes apart a tried and tested questionnaire used in a readership survey. It was frightening to see how even the simplest of questions can be misconstrued. Gradually my confidence returned and I realised that questionnaire design is a skill, guided by rules and principles, but it is also an art and as such is influenced by flair.


Perhaps there is good reason why there are so few books on questionnaire design - it is a subject on which an author is laid wide open to criticism. Every word in a question can be put under scrutiny. The order of the words in each question, neigh the order and style of the questions themselves, are all open to debate. The examples of questions in this book, which purports to be a guide to good questionnaire design, should be honed to perfection and yet I fear exposure since every one is open to misinterpretation by someone.

However, all is not lost. Good questionnaires are workable questionnaires. They are questionnaires which elicit the truth. The perfect questionnaire has never been designed. Give a room full of researchers a market research task to solve and even if the research method is the same (and the chances are there will be some marked variations), the questionnaires which drive the interviews will be different. This diversity of approaches is not wrong, it simply points to the flexibility of the questioning process which leads to the truth.

The market research industry is staffed with people who have studied a multiplicity of disciplines. Many are young, enthusiastic and inexperienced in business. They are researchers nevertheless and must do their best in the search for the truth. Very often they are thrown in the deep end and asked to 'knock up a questionnaire and find something out about this, that or the other'. They learn their craft by looking over other people's shoulders. Tips are picked

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<sup>1</sup>William Belson, *Design And Understanding Of Survey Questions*, 1982 Gower Press



up from other questionnaires and the researcher's own efforts are then screened, first by an experienced colleague and ultimately in the field where it is tried and tested as a working tool.

In theory it is in the field that a questionnaire lives or dies. However, such is the skill of most interviewers, even the most crass of questionnaires can be made to work in their hands. Answers to poor questions are achieved and the researcher could be deluded for long enough into thinking that his or her questionnaire design skills have been perfected. Certainly, over time they will improve as experience is the key to all market research tasks. But experience is another word for learning from mistakes and this can be costly since the *raison d'être* of market research is to reduce business risk. It is a dangerous game to learn the craft at someone else's expense.

It is hoped that this book will be received in good spirit. It is a practitioner's guide to designing questionnaires with lots of encouragement to have a go because practice makes perfect. It contains numerous examples to stimulate and to give ideas. Look critically at the book. Look critically at your own and other people's questionnaires. When questions are found to work, remember which they are and use them again and again. Keep a file of questionnaires to look at; listen to the criticism that the interviewers level against them since they are the people who know what really does work.

**Paul Hague**

# CHAPTER 1

## THE ROLE OF QUESTIONNAIRES




Questionnaire design is one of the basic building blocks of market research. Indeed, think of a market researcher and you may think of someone, clip board in hand, asking questions and writing the answers on a questionnaire. However, the questionnaire is not an end in itself. It is a vehicle by which people are interviewed. Without a questionnaire the interview has no structure. It provides the interviewer with a form on which to record answers. Data processing departments use the completed questionnaire to produce an analysis of what everyone has said.

The questionnaire does not therefore stand in isolation, it is an aid to the collection of data in an interview. At the same time as thinking about designing the questionnaire the researcher should keep in mind the wider context in which the questionnaires will be used. How many interviews will there be? Who will be interviewed? How will the interview be carried out? Who will be administering the interview? Cognisance of these broader issues will help the researcher design questionnaires which work.

### **The four purposes of questionnaires**

The questionnaire fulfils four purposes. Its first and prime role is to draw accurate information from the respondent. The researcher is trying to obtain as close a picture as is possible of what is happening in the market place. Accurate information is obtained by asking the right question of the right person.



Secondly, the questionnaire provides a structure to the interview so that it flows smoothly and orderly. It is important in any survey of more than just a few people that all respondents are asked the same questions in exactly the same way. Without this structure there would be chaos and it would be impossible to build the overall picture. The questionnaire acts as an aid memoir for the interviewer preventing an 'anything goes' situation. For the respondent it gives a logical sequence to the questions, driving towards a point and moving smoothly on to the next subject.

The third purpose of the questionnaire is to provide a standard form on which facts, comments and attitudes can be recorded. A record of an interview is essential as without it, points could be forgotten or distorted. Of course, a paper questionnaire is not be the only means by which the information is recorded, a tape recorder is an excellent means of capturing data. However, tapes have their disadvantages. They can break down and they run out. In certain circumstances they may inhibit the response. They are also time consuming to listen to and interpret after the event. Besides, even when a tape is used, a questionnaire is also needed to *guide* the discussion.

Fourthly and finally, the questionnaire facilitates data processing. The answers from different people are recorded in a place where the data processing team know where to find them. Without a questionnaire a survey of 500 people would produce 500 jottings or free ranging interviews which are burdensome to process.

Throughout the book various examples are used to illustrate points. However, at this early stage it may be helpful for the reader to view a questionnaire in its entirety in order to obtain a feel for the subject. The sample questionnaire was administered by telephone and the interview took between 15 and 20 minutes to complete.

**ALUMINIUM WINDOW SURVEY**

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent Name & Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Fieldworker: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Good morning/afternoon. This is . . . . . from B2B International in Manchester. I am carrying out a survey into trends in the aluminium window market and I wonder if you could help me. It will only take about fifteen minutes. Before I start can I make sure that you fabricate domestic aluminium windows or doors? (ONLY INTERVIEW COMPANIES THAT DO SO).

Q1. First of all, can I check if you fabricate any other types of domestic replacement windows or doors?

- UPVC 1
- Softwood 2
- Hardwood 3
- Steel 4
- Only aluminium 5
- Others (SPECIFY) 6

Roughly, what proportion of your domestic window or door business, in value terms is in . . . . . (SPECIFY THE DIFFERENT MATERIALS FROM WHICH THE FABRICATORS MAKES WINDOWS)?

		<5%	6-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-85%	86-99%	100%	None
Q2a	Aluminium?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Q2b	UPVC?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Q2c	Softwood?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Q2d	Hardwood?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Q2e	Steel?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Q2f	Other?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Q3a. What particular advantages does a domestic aluminium range offer you?  
(DO NOT PROMPT)

Meets customer demand	1
Offers an alternative	2
Looks better in certain houses	3
Stronger/more durable	4
Easier to fabricate	5
Cheaper/better value than UPVC	6
Wider range of finish/colours	7
Low maintenance	8
Good insulation properties	9
Condensation free	10
Other (SPECIFY) _____	11
_____	12

(ASK ONLY IF UPVC WINDOWS ARE FABRICATED)

Q3b. What particular advantages does a UPVC domestic range offer you?  
(DO NOT PROMPT)

Meets customer demand	1
Offers an alternative	2
Looks better in certain houses	3
Stronger/more durable	4
Easier to fabricate	5
Cheaper/better value than UPVC	6
Wider range of finish/colours	7
Low maintenance	8
Good insulation properties	9
Condensation free	10
Other (SPECIFY) _____	11
_____	12



Q4a. Looking to the future, would you expect your sales of aluminium windows or doors for the domestic market, to increase, decrease or stay the same over the next three years?

Increase	1	Q4b
Stay the same/don't know	2	Q4d
Decrease	3	Q4d
Refused	4	Q4f

Q4b. Why do you think that your sales of domestic aluminium windows will increase over the next three years? (DO NOT PROMPT)

Market buoyant/increasing	1
Innovations in aluminium design	2
Aluminium more competitive	3
UPVC degenerates over time	4
Aluminium easier to work with	5
Aluminium more profitable for me	6
Will push aluminium more in future	7
Other (SPECIFY) _____	8
_____	9

Q4c. Can I ask you to imagine that your sales of domestic aluminium windows and doors are 100 at the present, what do you think they could be in three years time, in 1990?

100	1
101 - 105	2
106 - 110	3
111 - 120	4
121 - 140	5
141 - 150	6
151 - 180	7
Over 180	8
Don't know	9

Q4d. Why do you think that your sales of aluminium windows and doors will stay the same/decline over the next three years?

UPVC will steal sales	1
Hardwood will steal sales	2
Competition fierce in aluminium	3
Fall in demand for replacement windows	4
Not a profitable market	5
Will get out of aluminium in future	6
Other (SPECIFY) _____	7
_____	8

Q4e. Can I ask you to imagine that your sales of domestic aluminium windows or doors are 100 at the present, what do you think they could be in three years time in 1990?

100	1
90 - 99	2
80 - 89	3
60 - 79	4
50 - 59	5
Will get out of aluminium	6
Don't know	7

ASK ALL

Q4f. What changes do you foresee within the market for different types of domestic aluminium systems? PROBE: What about thermal brakes? What about different colours? What about finishes? What about doors as opposed to windows - which do you think will grow faster?

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Q5a. Could I now ask you which manufacturers you are aware of that supply domestic aluminium systems to companies such as yourself? PROBE: Any others? DO NOT PROMPT.

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Q5b. I am now going to read out some other companies that supply this market. As I read them out, would you tell me which you have heard of? READ OUT ONLY THOSE NOT RINGED AT Q5a. ROTATE THE ORDER PLEASE.

	Q5a	Q5b
Adeptal	1	1
Alcan	2	2
AWS	3	3
Cego Crittall	4	4
Coastal	5	5
Consort	6	6
Duraflex	7	7
Glostal	8	8
HIS	9	9
Monarch	10	10
Prime	11	11
Scope	12	12
Schuco	13	13
Smart Systems	14	14
Other (SPECIFY) _____	15	15
_____	16	16

Now could I check out your views on some of these system companies that you are aware of. Which do you think is best in the domestic aluminium market for...?  
Q6a. delivery? Q6b. price? Q6c. quality?

	Q6a	Q6b	Q6c
Adeptal	1	1	1
Alcan	2	2	2
AWS	3	3	3
Cego Crittall	4	4	4
Coastal	5	5	5
Consort	6	6	6
Duraflex	7	7	7
Glostal	8	8	8
HIS	9	9	9
Monarch	10	10	10
Prime	11	11	11
Scope	12	12	12
Schuco	13	13	13
Smart Systems	14	14	14
Other (SPECIFY) _____	15	15	15
_____	16	16	16

Q7a. And now finally in this series of questions on companies, can I ask you which companies you use yourselves as suppliers of domestic aluminium systems?

Adeptal	1
Alcan	2
AWS	3
Cego Crittall	4
Coastal	5
Consort	6
Duraflex	7
Glostal	8
HIS	9
Monarch	10
Prime	11
Scope	12
Schuco	13
Smart Systems	14
Other (SPECIFY) _____	15
_____	16

Q7b. Are there any other companies supplying domestic aluminium systems that you would not use?

Yes	1	Q7c
No	2	Q8a

Q7c. Which companies are they?

Adeptal	1
Alcan	2
AWS	3
Cego Crittall	4
Coastal	5
Consort	6
Duraflex	7
Glostal	8
HIS	9
Monarch	10
Prime	11
Scope	12
Schuco	13
Smart Systems	14
Other (SPECIFY) _____	15
_____	16

Q7d. Why wouldn't you use this company? (STATE COMPANY IF RESPONDENT WOULDN'T USE MORE THAN ONE)?

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Q8a. What above all else do you look for when choosing an aluminium system supplier for domestic window or door frames? PROMPT & ROTATE FACTORS.

Wide range of aluminium systems	1
Rapid delivery	2
Assured delivery	3
Competitive prices	4
Technical advice	5
Good sales service	6
High quality systems	7
(Don't know)	8

Q8b. Is there anything else important?

Yes	1	Q8c
No	2	Q9a

Q8c. What else is important?

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Q9a. I am on the last leg now and you have been most patient. My final questions are simply to classify the information you have just given me. As with all the data it will be treated as absolutely confidential to ourselves. Which of the following activities are you involved in for the domestic market? READ OUT LIST

Aluminium windows	1
Aluminium doors	2
UPVC windows	3
UPVC doors	4
Other windows	5
Other doors	6
(Refused)	7

Q9b. Are there any other important sides to your business outside of these I have just mentioned?

Yes	1	Q9c
No	2	Q10a

Q9c. What else do you do?

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Very roughly, what proportion of your business in aluminium windows and doors is...

		<5%	5-30%	31-80%	81-99%	100%	DK/not stated	None
Q10a	domestic?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q10b	commercial or industrial?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q11. What were your total purchases of aluminium section used for domestic replacement windows and doors in 1986? Please exclude any section that may be used to reinforce UPVC windows or doors. RECORD ANSWER IN EITHER £ OR TONNES BELOW.

Under £25k (33 tonnes)	1
£26k - £200k (34 - 267 tonnes)	2
£201k - £750k (268 - 1,000 tonnes)	3
£751k - £1,500k (1,001 - 2,000 tonnes)	4
£1,501 - £2,500 (2,001 - 3,333 tonnes)	5
Over £2,500k (3,334 + tonnes)	6
Don't know/won't say/refused	7

Q12. LOCATION

North	1
Midlands	2
South	3

THANK & CLOSE