Business-to-business research guidelines

May 2006

Introduction

These Guidelines interpret the MRS Code of Conduct (revised 2005) and provide additional best practice guidance. Unless otherwise stated, Guidelines are not binding. Their aim is to promote professionalism in the conduct of research.

Research is founded upon the willing co-operation of the public and of business organisations. It relies on the confidence of those involved that it is conducted honestly, objectively, without unwelcome intrusion and without harm to respondents. Its purpose is to collect and analyse information and not to create sales or to influence the opinions of anyone participating.

Every respondent must be assured that research projects are carried out in strict accordance with the Code of Conduct and that their rights of privacy are respected.

Rules from the Code of Conduct applicable in each section of this document are stated in the shaded boxes. These rules are binding on MRS members and breaches may result in disciplinary action. The guidance that follows the rules provides interpretation and additional best practice. Members are reminded that this document is designed to complement the MRS Code of Conduct and should not be consulted in isolation.

As specified in the Code, it is the responsibility of the researcher to keep abreast of any legislation which could affect research and to ensure that all those involved in a project are aware of and agree to abide by the MRS Code of Conduct.

This material is provided for information only. It is not legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. Specific legal advice should be taken in relation to specific issues.

Definitions

Research – Research is the collection and analysis of data from a sample or census of individuals or organisations relating to their characteristics, behaviour, attitudes, opinions or possessions. It includes all forms of market,opinion and social research such as consumer and industrial surveys, psychological investigations, qualitative interviews and group discussions, observational, ethnographic, and panel studies.

Business-to-Business Research – Business-to-business research is defined as research that seeks to examine the behaviour of companies, business or corporate structures through interviewing one or more individuals within organisations. It can involve the use of all established research technologies and methodologies but amongst respondents recruited by virtue of their role in an organisation rather than their status or category as an actual or potential consumer.

1: Research Planning & Respondent Anonymity

The Rules

B3	Members must take reasonable steps to design research to the specification agreed with the Client.
B7	Where lists of named individuals are used e.g. Client databases, the list source must be revealed at an appropriate point in the interview, if requested. This overrides the right to Client anonymity.
B8	The anonymity of Respondents must be preserved unless they have given their informed consent for their details to be revealed or for attributable comments to be passed on. *Comment: Members must be particularly careful if sample sizes are very small (such as in business and employee research) that they do not inadvertently identify organisations or departments and therefore individuals.*
B11	A follow up interview with a Respondent can be carried out only if the Respondent's permission has been obtained at the previous interview. The only exception to this is re-contact for quality control purposes.
B39	Members must ensure that, in instances where observers may know Respondents (as may occur in business-to-business research), Respondents are informed before the start that their interviews are to be observed, with a warning that the observer may include Clients who already know them.
B40	The issue of anonymity and recognition is a particular problem in business and employee research. If guarantees cannot be given then Members must ensure that observers are fully introduced before the group/interview begins and Respondents given a chance to withdraw.

Guidance

1. The client should be made aware before the project has started what respondent information will be detailed in the report. It is permissible to reveal the list of participants by either organisation name or job title or job function unless to do so would risk identifying the respondents.

2. When the range of respondents to be interviewed is limited by job title such that by identifying an organisation to a client the identity of the respondent is disclosed or potentially disclosed, to ensure adherence to B8 such information must not be revealed. For example if only Finance Directors have been interviewed, revealing the organisation name would identify the respondent because there is probably only one Finance Director in the named organisation, but if "Board Members" or unspecified "Directors" were interviewed then revealing the organisation name would not (of itself) automatically identify the actual respondent within the organisation. Wherever there is a conflict of interest between a researcher's duty and obligation to respondents and/or to clients, the duty and obligation to respondents is paramount.

3. At the planning stage it is critical to establish client requirements in certain areas which include:

   - whether the client wishes to have certain responses attributed
   - whether the client wishes to re-contact the respondent at a later date
   - when and if the client's identity is to be revealed

4. Due to the smaller size of the business to business population there is a higher possibility that respondents will be contacted on a regular basis. Therefore, questionnaires should be clear, relevant and logical to avoid respondent fatigue. All questionnaires should be piloted prior to use.

2: Respondent Consent

The Rules

A10 Members must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that Respondents are not harmed or adversely affected as a result of participating in a research project.

B2 All written or oral assurances made by any Member involved in commissioning or conducting projects must be factually correct and honoured by the Member.

B9 If Respondents have given consent for data to be passed on in a form which allows them to be personally identified, Members must:

- demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that it will only be used for the purpose for which it was collected and
- fully inform Respondents as to what will be revealed, to whom and for what purpose.

B10 If Respondents request individual complaints or unresolved issues to be passed back to a Client(for example in customer satisfaction research), Members must comply with that request. The comments/issues to be passed back to a Client must be agreed with the Respondent and must not be linked back to any other data or used for any other purpose without the explicit consent of the Respondent.

B17 Respondents must not be misled when being asked for cooperation to participate in a research project.

B18 A Respondent's right to withdraw from a research project at any stage must be respected.

B19 Members must ensure that Respondents are able to check without difficulty the identity and bona fides of any individual and/or their employer conducting a research project (including any sub-contractors).

B20 For telephone and face to face interviews, calls must not be made to a household (local time) before 9am weekdays and Saturdays, 10am Sundays or after 9pm any day, unless by appointment.

B21	Members must ensure that all of the following are clearly communicated to the Respondent: • the name of the interviewer (an Interviewer's Identity Card must be shown if face to face); • an assurance that the interview will be carried out according to the MRS Code of Conduct; • the general subject of the interview; • the purpose of the interview; • if asked, the likely length of the interview; • any costs likely to be incurred by the Respondent.
B22	Respondents (including employees in employee research) must not be unduly pressurised to participate.

Guidance

1. To meet the requirements of B9, when obtaining permission or consent for identification details or attributed answers to be passed to a client, respondents must be fully informed about what will be revealed and to whom. Respondents should also be reassured that it will only be used for research purposes before the start of the interview. However under the following circumstances it may be appropriate to obtain consent at the end of the interview:

- In instances where the respondent would need to consider all the questions and their responses before deciding whether the comments were suitable to be attributed
- In cases where prior consent could affect the responses given
- In some instances where the client does not want to be identified until the end of the interview

2. On some occasions, for example during customer satisfaction research, respondents may want requests or additional comments passed back to a client e.g. requests for the client to contact the respondent directly regarding separate issues. In accordance with B10, the relevant comments must be agreed by the interviewer and respondent and not linked back to any other data unless agreed.

3. A fax, letter or email explaining the nature of the research should be available for respondents who request it.

4. In accordance with A10, where use of the information might have an adverse affect directly on a respondent's organisation (e.g. when interviewing a competitor or a potential competitor), the nature and/or sponsor of the research must be revealed before the relevant information is collected. In accordance with B18, the respondent must be given the opportunity to withdraw.

3: Conducting the Interview

The Rules

A10 Members must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that Respondents are not harmed or adversely affected as a result of participating in a research project.

B8 The anonymity of Respondents must be preserved unless they have given their informed consent for their details to be revealed or for attributable comments to be passed on.

Comment: Members must be particularly careful if sample sizes are very small (such as in business and employee research) that they do not inadvertently identify organisations or departments and therefore individuals.

B21 Members must ensure that all of the following are clearly communicated to the Respondent:

- the name of the interviewer (an Interviewer's Identity Card must be shown if face to face);
- an assurance that the interview will be carried out according to the MRS Code of Conduct;
- the general subject of the interview;
- the purpose of the interview;
- if asked, the likely length of the interview;
- any costs likely to be incurred by the Respondent.

B24 Recruiters/ interviewers must not reveal to any other Respondents the detailed answers provided by any Respondent or the identity of any other Respondent interviewed.

Guidance

1. Researchers should ensure that minimal costs are incurred by respondents whilst taking part in a research project and in accordance with B21 any costs that will or may be incurred must be communicated to the respondent.

2. Researchers should take a 'business-like' manner when conducting the interview. In accordance with A3 and B21 researchers must be honest about the length and content of the interview.

3. In addition, researchers should:

   - Be courteous during the interview

   - Be properly informed of all the details surrounding the research with a full briefing and briefing notes, and any other information such as the sample source and technical definitions

   - Be careful to keep appointments and cancel them if not required

   - Not make any comments on the respondent's answers (other than as specified in any instructions for probing)

   - Not offer any comments or opinions of his or her own

   - Not comment on the wording or design of the questionnaire

4. In accordance with B24, researchers must not reveal any of the detailed responses or identities of other business-to-business respondents. This is of particular importance in business-to-business research where confidentiality and commercial sensitivity may be of particular concern for respondents.

4: Observation

The Rules

B9 If Respondents have given consent for data to be passed on in a form which allows them to be personally identified, Members must:

- demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that it will only be used for the purpose for which it was collected and
- fully inform Respondents as to what will be revealed, to whom and for what purpose.

B15 If there is to be any recording, monitoring or observation during an interview, Respondents must be informed about this both at recruitment and at the beginning of the interview.

B34 At the time of recruitment (or before the research takes place if details change after recruitment), Members must ensure that Respondents are told all relevant information as per rule B21and:

- the location of the discussion and if it is to take place in a viewing facility; and
- whether observers are likely to be present; and
- when and how the discussion is to be recorded; and
- the likely length of the discussion including the start and finish time; and
- the Member, moderator and/or research agency that will be conducting the research.

B36 If Members have agreed with Clients that observers are to be present, Members must inform all observers fully about their legal and ethical responsibilities.

B37 Members must make clear to Respondents the capacity in which observers are present; Clients must be presented as such, even if they are also Researchers and/or Members of MRS.

B38	There are some situations where observers could adversely affect Respondents' interests and/or wellbeing, and in such instances, Members must ensure that Respondents are told at an appropriate stage the identity of any observer who might be present at the discussion or interview.
B39	Members must ensure that, in instances where observers may know Respondents (as may occur in business-to-business research), Respondents are informed before the start that their interviews are to be observed, with a warning that the observer may include Clients who already know them.

Guidance

1. In accordance with B38, where there is a conflict between a client's wish to observe/monitor and a respondent's right to anonymity, researchers must respect the respondent's wishes.

2. In accordance with B9 and B15, any recordings must not be released by a researcher unless explicit permission has previously been obtained from all the respondents involved. Where such permission is to be obtained, the researcher must ensure that respondents are given as much relevant information as possible about the future use of the data, in particular:

   - To whom they are to be given
   - To whom they are likely to be shown
   - For what purposes they are likely to be used

5: Incentives

The Rules

B25 Where incentives are offered, Members must clearly inform the Respondent who will administer the incentive.

Comment: Incentives need not be of a monetary nature to be acceptable to a Respondent as a token of appreciation.

With the Client's permission, an offer to supply the Respondent with a brief summary report of the project's findings can sometimes prove a better alternative encouragement to participate in a research project. Other alternatives are for example:

- *Charity donations*
- *Non-monetary gifts*
- *Prize draws (for Prize draws the rules, as detailed in the MRS Prize Draws Guidance Note, must be adhered to.)*

Guidance

1. Incentives are an expression of gratitude to respondents for their participation in research. There are some circumstances e.g. interviewing doctors, attendance at groups, where the use of incentives is expected and necessary to help secure co-operation. Monetary incentives, when used, should be kept to a reasonable level and should be appropriate for the nature of the research project and the type of respondent.

2. In accordance with B9 where incentives are offered, the distribution must be administered by the researcher or a sub-contractor, unless the respondent has agreed for their details to be passed to the client for the administration of the incentive.