



Code of practice for conducting market
research in town centres
December 2002

The Market Research Society was requested by Field Conference 2002 delegates to produce a draft Code of Practice for market researchers working in town centres. The following document has been drafted and your comments are needed to help decide whether the Code of Practice should be put before the Association of Town Centre Managers.

The consultation period on this document is now over. The points raised are currently being considered by the working party and the final version will be available shortly.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the guideline is to assist all parties affected by market research activities in Town Centres. Researchers following this Code are addressing current concerns held by town centre organisations. It was drafted to help ensure that town centres can continue to be used as valuable sources of recruitment for market research. Researchers adhering to these guidelines are not subject to any disciplinary processes under the disciplinary regulations of the MRS, however it is understood that in order to continue to use the town centres as places of recruitment it is recommended that these guidelines are adopted.

What is The Market Research Society?

The Market Research Society is the world's largest professional body for individuals employed in market research or with an interest in it.

It exists to set and enforce the ethical standards to be observed by research practitioners, and to provide a framework of qualifications and membership grades reflecting the education, knowledge and competence required for the effective conduct of market research.

Market Research is one of the most useful tools in business, any business. It's the way in which organisations find out what their customers and potential customers need, want and care about. This involves the collection and interpretation of confidential data concerning people, products, services and organisations. The key elements in obtaining good research material is that we talk to a few people to get the views of many, and that it only works if we talk to the right number of people, ask the right questions and interpret the results correctly.

Who uses market research?

All sorts of individuals, companies and organisations use and benefit from market research, including public and private sector organisations, supermarkets, manufacturers, financial service companies and charities.

General Principles of The Market Research Society's Code of Conduct

- Research is founded on willing co-operation. It depends upon confidence that it is conducted honestly, objectively and without unwelcome intrusion or harm to respondents. Its purpose is to collect and analyse information, and not directly to create sales nor to influence the opinions of anyone participating in it.
- The general public and other interested parties shall be entitled to complete assurance that no information collected in a research survey which could be used to identify them will be disclosed to anyone else without their agreement; that the information they supply will not be used for purposes other than research and that they will in no way be adversely affected as a result of participation.
- Wherever possible, respondents must be informed as to the purpose of the research and the likely length of time necessary for the collection of the information.
- Research findings must always be reported accurately and never used to mislead anyone, in any way.

All activities shall conform to any legislation applicable to the research activity, in particular:

- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Human Rights Act 1998

The law is open to interpretation as to whether a license is required for this type of activity. However it is generally understood that as no financial transaction is taking place then no license is required. Out of courtesy it is recommended that the relevant access authority is contacted to check on any local restrictions.

All members must conduct research in accordance with the Society's Code of Conduct and supporting guidelines.

GENERAL:

Personal solicitation for interviews will be undertaken in a courteous and agreed manner:

It will:

- Be undertaken in a manner that will not bring the organisation or industry into disrepute.
- Only take place within the time and location agreed with the organisation and any relevant access authority.
- Provide clear and adequate, written or verbal, information to the public about possible follow up including any applicable telephone procedures.
- Be secure with respect to response materials.
- In the instance of a complaint, ensure that a record of the name, address and telephone number of the complainant is taken and the complaint referred immediately to the organisation.
- Never confuse or mislead the public.

Responsibilities to Respondents

- Respondents' co-operation is entirely voluntary. They must not be misled when being asked for co-operation.
- Respondents' anonymity must be strictly preserved.
- Researchers must take special care when interviewing children, young people and other potentially vulnerable members of society. The informed consent of the parent or responsible adult must first be obtained for interviews with children.
- Respondents must be told if observation techniques or recording equipment are used.
- Respondents must be enabled to check without difficulty, the identity and bona fides of the researcher.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS (THE ORGANISATION)

The organisation should be responsible for ensuring that interviewers comply with this Code of Practice.

- All interviewers must be trained before engaging in any contact interviewing.
- No research shall be undertaken without prior, structured briefing for all researchers involved in the particular approach.
- An identified individual within the organisation will be responsible for all aspects of the research activity as it is implemented:

The individual will:

- Ensure the safety and physical wellbeing of the researchers.
- Ensure that all interviewers wear ID badges at all times (IQCS companies must have the MRS IID Cards).
- Manage the research approaches to ensure that they are undertaken in an agreed and appropriate manner.
- Deal sympathetically, courteously and promptly with any questions or complaints that might occur.
- Keep an up to date list of interviewers.

Where the research activity occurs within a place of general public access, the following additional requirements should be met by the identified individual (see above) during the course of that activity:-

- Interviewers should be positioned to ensure that public nuisance and congestion do not occur.
- Interviewers should ensure that any materials used for the research activity whilst in their possession are not left behind or dumped in a manner that would pollute the environment.

Site Identification:

- Site identification for each particular market research activity should be identified and recorded by name as precisely as possible (street name, junction points, physical landmarks, name) and positioned with a defined venue.
- In determining site location, care should be exercised to minimise any possible congestion and/or nuisance to members of the public and retail traders.

In particular, organisations should be mindful that:-

- Pedestrian thoroughfares provide sufficient space for the placement of interviewers without causing congestion or danger to pedestrians or interviewers.

- Entrance points to retail premises and other buildings are not obstructed.
- Potential physical hazards are noted and avoided (i.e. traffic lights, junctions, zebra crossings, road works etc).
- Where possible cover is provided for interviewers in case of inclement weather.
- Locations are as fume free as possible.
- There should be no conflict with any other 'direct dialogue' organisation or industry and any territory disputes should be resolved through independent arbitration.
- Wherever possible, site location should be identified by reference to a map, which shall be maintained by the organisation and provided to the relevant access authority at point of request and to all interviewers at the interviewer briefing.
- Any amendment to site location should be noted and recorded by the organisation.
- Where requested by them, the organisation should abide by any direct limitations and or other guidance with respect to site location provided by the access authority(s).
- The organisation should ensure that it is fully appraised and mindful of any special needs and/or limitations pertaining to the site due to the needs of retailers and vendors.

Site agreement:

- No research activity should be carried out unless the organisation is satisfied that access for the approaches has been agreed by the relevant access authority(s).

In determining access authority, organisations will wish to ensure:

- The named identity, title and authority of a key contact within the appropriate access authority and where possible to have written notification from them.
- They have provided the access authority with a written request to undertake the market research activity.
- If agreement has been received other than through written correspondence then the organisation shall confirm the agreement to the relevant contact in writing at the earliest opportunity and before any research activity takes place.
- Courtesy contact must be made by the organisation with the relevant police station (usually local) to ensure that police are aware of the date, time, location and nature of the research activity that will take place.

Alongside the identified individual in the organisation interviewers share the following responsibilities:

- Interviewers should be positioned to ensure that public nuisance and congestion do not occur.

- Interviewers should ensure that any materials used for the research activity whilst in their possession are not left behind or dumped in a manner that would pollute the environment.
- Pedestrian thoroughfares provide sufficient space for the placement of interviewers without causing congestion or danger to pedestrians or interviewers.
- Entrance points to retail premises and other buildings are not obstructed.
- Potential physical hazards are noted and avoided (i.e. traffic lights, junctions, zebra crossings, road works etc).
- There should be no conflict with any other 'direct dialogue' organisation or industry and any territory disputes should be resolved through independent arbitration.
- Courtesy contact must be made by the organisation with the relevant police station (usually local) to ensure that police are aware of the date, time, location and nature of the research activity that will take place. *In this instance the interviewers may also find it beneficial to make themselves known to the local police station in case of any concerned calls.*