



## EMERGING AGRICULTURAL MARKETS TEAM

UW COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Bill Wright

# Market Research: Surveying Customers to Determine their Needs

“Market research  
helps farmers  
look outside of  
themselves...”

The message “change is inevitable, growth is optional” applies to each of us and to every business. Food consumption patterns demonstrate changes in where and what we eat. The number of “new” foods introduced in stores each week numbers in the hundreds and “convenience” foods occupy more shelf space than ever before. Even the meat case holds products such as goat and bison that were seldom seen in stores just a few years ago. To keep up with these changes in the marketplace, it is extremely important for direct marketers to acquire information through marketing research.

Marketing research helps identify and define marketing opportunities and problems, allows you to evaluate your marketing efforts, and helps you to understand the marketing process. Some direct marketers may be tempted to conclude that they understand national consumer trends and that such trends have little or no relevance to their business. However, market research helps farmers look “outside of themselves” for information, as well as helping them understand marketing problems and solutions to these problems.

There are two basic types of market research: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research addresses issues that deal with “why” or “how” and is usually achieved through observation or unstructured conversations with customers. Quantitative research addresses issues that deal with “how many” or “how much” and usually involves a survey using a questionnaire. However, for the questionnaire to be effective, give serious consideration to the content.



## Designing a marketing survey

When designing a marketing questionnaire, you must first determine the reason for the survey. What specific problem are you trying to solve, what decision are you trying to make, or what question are you trying to answer? Some possible issues you may be trying to address include:

- In what advertising media should I spend my advertising dollars?
- Is there certain media I should use to reach my customers?
- What image does my facility/product(s) or personnel portray?
- What other products or services should I be offering?
- Why do my customers buy from my competitors?

After you have determined what you want to learn from the survey or questionnaire, consider the following criteria when designing the questions:

1. **Relevancy:** Does the question relate to the objective of your survey?
2. **Brevity:** Questions should be limited to 20 words or less.
3. **Objectivity:** Questions should not be worded to suggest a particular answer by “leading” the respondent.
4. **Clarity:** Is the question expressed clearly in words that the respondent will understand? Avoid words such as much, most, few, often, occasionally, should, could, and might, as they will mean different things to different people
5. **Specificity:** Will the respondent be able to answer the question? (Sometimes respondents will answer questions that they do not know the answers to so that they do not appear ignorant.)

As mentioned earlier, it is extremely important to identify the specific information needs of the business before designing the survey questions.

## The interview process

The interpersonal skills of the person conducting any interview is critical. It is essential for the customer to fully support the interview process and to have the sense that the information will be useful to the business and to the customer. Give the customer a thank-you gift such as a coupon or one of your products for participating in the survey.

## Take action

The final step is to tabulate the results and develop a plan of action based upon the information you’ve received. After all, the ultimate purpose of market research is to aid you in decision-making and therefore improve the performance of your business.

**Authors:** Bill Wright, UW-Extension Brown County urban garden coordinator. Edited by Rose Skora, community agriculture educator for Kenosha/Racine Counties, University of Wisconsin–Extension and Jody Padgham, Midwest Organic Sustainable and Education Services (MOSES). Reviewed by Rami Reddy, UW-Extension direct marketing specialist, University of Wisconsin–Platteville.

Adapted from a newsletter article by John Cottingham, former agricultural marketing specialist and emeritus professor of agricultural economics at the UW-Platteville.

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