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## Conducting Qualitative Research at Trade Shows

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Leveraging trade shows and conferences to conduct market research can be a smart move, particularly when access to higher-level healthcare professionals is needed to guide business decisions. Most market research recruiters have a tough time convincing a hospital CEO or industry expert to pick up the phone, let alone participate in a research interview, but at a convention; it is very doable. With proper planning, advisory boards/focus groups, usability testing, and in-depth interviews can all be achieved at a trade show. In this article, we will share benefits of conducting research at industry trade shows along with some best practices, and ten practical tips for successful group sessions — whether you are a seasoned expert or doing your first tradeshow-based research.

# Benefits of Conducting Research at Trade Shows:

## ● Participant Qualification and Cooperation

- > Those attending a national conference are there to learn, network, and, if presenting, teach. Attendee lists/conference programs often contain individual credentials and employers, leading to a high degree of confidence that participants will be qualified when screened or approached to participate.

Conference participants tend to be more relaxed and less distracted when they are free from their daily schedules. We've successfully engaged geographically dispersed caregivers and high-level individuals (e.g., KOLs, C-suite) who otherwise decline market research due to time constraints. Being able to network, hear what peers have to say, critique new products under development, brainstorm, or discuss what the future may hold is often the main draw for research participation.

## ● Efficiency and Costs

- > Since your research participants travel to the trade show from all over the world, you don't pay any travel expenses to obtain their opinions; typically, the triumvirate of 1) a topic they care about, 2) an appropriate incentive, and 3) a good meal is all that is necessary to have high-quality participants agree to participate. Likewise, your research team doesn't have to take the time or incur the expense of traveling to multiple markets to gain insights.

## ● Convention Insights

- > Attending keynote presentations and breakout sessions relevant to your study topic can enhance what you learn from your planned qualitative research. Often Q&A that follows presentations can be very enlightening. Make the most of your registration by thinking of the entire conference as an opportunity to gain insights from your target audiences.

### Tip #1:

Cooperation or show-rates for research at trade shows are generally high, but, if necessary, recruit from local hospitals or practices to supplement conference attendees.

### Tip #2:

For non-confidential topics, it may be useful to approach booth attendees who, after passing a screener, share their thoughts in a 10-15-minute conversation or complete a short survey.

### Tip #3:

Be sure to collect business cards/contact information as these individuals can also be an excellent source of participants for future research studies; sometimes these connections alone can justify the cost of the study.

## Where to begin?

### ● Agreements

- > Often contracts specifying confidentiality and fair market value for services performed are needed when working with healthcare professionals; partner with your legal department to prepare required forms and share with participants in advance of the research session.

### ● Personnel

- > Work with an independent, experienced moderator to author an unbiased discussion guide and conduct the research so you can actively listen and observe. This professional will provide a summary report of the research findings, which can be distributed to any team members and management unable to attend the session.

#### Tip #6:

In most cases, you will need an extra person to check people in, collect confidentiality forms, make copies, distribute incentives, or be available for last-minute items. Be prepared by bringing an extra person to assist you with these tasks.

#### Tip #4:

Leverage LinkedIn groups when possible.

#### Tip #5:

Make sure to time your sessions carefully so they don't conflict with important conference events. Hosting sessions at inappropriate times can create discord with conference organizers.

### ● Sponsorship/Partner

- > Some conferences offer "focus group" or "market research exhibit space" as a sponsorship category. For a fee, there is a range of support that may include recruiting, room rental or booth space, signage, participant food, etc. Evaluate this to see if it can work for your circumstances. For conferences not offering this type of opportunity, call the organizer to explain what you want to achieve. Often, they are willing to work with you if you position your request as something that benefits them with minimal effort on their part. Most associations will grant you access to the attendee list to recruit, or you may receive this with your conference registration.

**If the association is unwilling to work with you, MLC Expert Consulting can still help you conduct your research. We will employ alternative methods to achieve your desired outcome.**

## ● Meeting Room

- > Make sure to request the type of room and set up (e.g., classroom, u-shape, boardroom) needed to create the atmosphere you intend for the research; often meeting rooms are too large or ceilings too high, making it harder to create rapport with participants.

## Conclusion

Hiring the right moderator/consultant can make or break trade show-based research. Leveraging research professionals like MLC Expert Consulting, who know the ins and outs of working with associations, convention center/hotel staff, and healthcare professionals will give you the best return on your time, money, and effort.

### Tip #7:

Place observers in the back of the room or set-up live-streaming in an adjacent room to view — particularly if English is not the primary language of participants and translators are used.

- **Signage:** To avoid a prominent announcement of your research that could tip off the competition, be sure to specify with hotel staff the name of your event and where you want it posted.
- **Food & Beverage:** Keep food and drink simple. If you can, ask about dietary restrictions during recruitment. Be prepared for inflated hotel food and beverage prices, but don't scrimp; conference attendees appreciate good food.

### Tip #8:

Water pitchers, snacks, or dessert on the table can limit waitstaff interruptions.

### Tip #9:

Ask participants to arrive early to eat or host a meal after a group session.

- **Supplies:** Consider the technology and supplies you will need (e.g., Wi-Fi, A/V, flip charts/markers, name tents, copies, etc.) and obtain pricing in advance.

### Tip #10:

Consider shipping/bringing your own flip charts, projector, signage, digital recording device, and name tents to minimize these expenses.