

OMNIBUS RESEARCH

Omnibus research is a varied and fast-paced industry that provides valuable insight for clients. Chris Menzies and Neil French take us through a typical week in omnibus



Individual solutions found in the crowd

Ever wondered how the survey results you see in the media are generated? From election forecasts to the nation's favourite superhero, charity campaigns to grocery shopping behaviour, the chances are that someone has commissioned an omnibus survey. What, you may ask, is an omnibus survey? Well, it's a syndicated survey where several clients can buy as few or as many questions as they wish for a fixed cost per question. The traditional analogy is that it is like buying seats on a bus.

Each omnibus involves interviewing a sample of 1,000 or 2,000 adults and is nationally representative of the population. Omnibus is an effective research vehicle for clients who require high-quality research in a short period of time and with a low budget.

ICM conducts scheduled telephone and online omnibus surveys each week, as well as regular face-to-face and global omnibus research.

Variety is the spice

Respondents often enjoy being involved in omnibus surveys due to the variety of questions asked. Any one omnibus can have a wealth of different topics, from political views to ad awareness, favourite holiday destinations to attitudes on recycling. ICM interviews over 1 million people in the UK alone every year, and around a quarter of these are omnibus interviews.

To give an insight into how the omnibus functions, here is an outline of a typical week in the life of the omnibus team at ICM.

Monday is survey results day. The weekend telephone and online omnibus fieldwork both finish on Sunday and clients are eagerly awaiting their results.

This particular week, 16 different clients had



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questions placed on either the telephone or online omnibus at the weekend, and each client receives a tailored set of results in tabular format. Each set of results are checked and sent to the client, often including a few comments about the survey findings. Although the data is presented in such a way that it is easy to understand, the omnibus team will receive a number of calls from clients wanting to discuss the results further and asking for additional analysis.

The next telephone omnibus is due to go live Monday afternoon, so the team are busy final-

ising questionnaires with two different clients. Once approval from the clients is given, the questionnaires are sent across to the call centre to be converted into a CATI (computer-aided telephone interviewing) script. This is the “script” that will appear on-screen for the interviewers. Usually one script-writer prepares an omnibus script with support from a survey manager, who is responsible for the survey while it is out in the field. Two members of the omnibus team will also check the final script as an additional quality-control procedure.

Fielding calls

On Tuesday morning the phones are red hot. An ICM poll about the Royal Family has hit the front pages and the team are busy fielding questions, from media outlets and other interested parties. The types of queries vary, from journalists wanting further information regarding the methodology involved in this particular poll, to PR agencies wanting to commission similar follow-up surveys.

A European omnibus study on the subject of “green energy” finishes today and the final results need to be checked and sent out. Some 1,000 nationally representative telephone interviews were conducted in eight different European markets using our network of approved partners in each country.

In the afternoon we have a conference call with a PR agency and its client to discuss the wording of some sensitive questions on crime and violence. ICM has largely built its reputation on fair and balanced phrasing of questions, and providing recommendations on question content and wording is all part of the service.

Towards the end of the day, we begin sending over approved questionnaires to be ►

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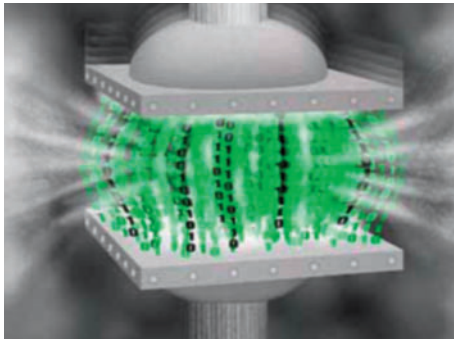
scripted for the next telephone omnibus due to start Wednesday afternoon. The first quarter of 2008 has been particularly busy, so we try to give our script writers as much time as possible. In March alone this year, 125 different clients placed a total of 878 questions across ICM's different omnibus services.

By Wednesday it is just 48 hours after we went live with the telephone omnibus on Monday, and the 1,000 interviews are complete and results available for clients. Each set of results are created by the data processing team who crunch the numbers to produce the summary data tables.

All systems go

As the deadline for the next telephone omnibus approaches at midday, it's all systems go for the omnibus team. Another 11 sections consisting of 43 questions are approved by clients, scripted up and checked.

By 2pm the survey is live with 60 interviewers working on it. ICM has over 900 registered telephone interviewers working in shifts across four different call-centre locations, each with a total capacity of 300 interviewing stations. In addition to the interviewers, each telephone omnibus involves up to nine supervisors, nine quality assessors and over 15,000 telephone calls to achieve the required 1,000 nationally



Number crunching: A team of data processors tabulate and summarise data from the survey results so clients can easily understand them

representative interviews.

Thursday is online omnibus day. The ability to play video clips, show images and interact with surveys makes online omnibuses a very dynamic research platform. Topics on today's omnibus include TV ad testing for a charity with live video, attitudes towards the Eurovision song contest, opinions of male drivers and preferred designs for a frozen food manufacturer's packaging.

The omnibus team are busy finalising online questionnaires with clients before they are sent across to be scripted by the online survey writers.

Invitations to participate in the online omnibus are e-mailed to members of ICM's proprietary panel called NewVista, which consists of over 120,000 members. Our panellists are unique in that they are rewarded for their considered opinions by being paid £1 for every five minutes of their time.

Endings and beginnings

Friday is the busiest day for the team and is known at ICM as "Omnibus Day". Results are available for clients who had questions on the telephone omnibus that started on Wednesday. The team is also busy checking the online script prior to invitations being sent out at lunchtime, as well as finalising the questionnaires for the final, yet largest omnibus of the week – the weekend telephone omnibus.

As members of other teams at ICM head out for lunch, the omnibus team usually remain glued to their desk until about 4pm by which time both online and telephone surveys are out in the field and set to run over the weekend.

Following another eventful but successful week, the team are finally able to put their feet up, enjoy a glass of wine and look forward to steering the good ship Omnibus through another week, starting on Monday.

● **Chris Menzies is Associate Director and Neil French is Project Director at ICM Research**

Want

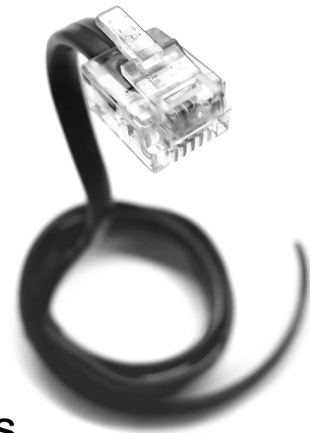
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