16 Report Writing and Presentation

Learning Objectives

1 Explore the importance of the written research report
2 Describe the organization of the four sections of the written report
3 Explain how to write a professional research report
4 Discuss how best to communicate information during an oral presentation

INTERNATIONAL AUTOMAKERS ARE LISTENING IN

Ford, Chrysler, and Toyota all have a new way of researching consumers' attitudes and preferences: they are researching blogs. Ford is using BrandIntel, a research company located in Toronto, to track what consumers are saying about Ford's styling and performance plus their overall impressions of the company. To obtain this information BrandIntel monitors daily conversation in blogs and discussion groups, looking for comments on over 200 product attributes. Chrysler also uses the services of online marketing research firms. However, Chrysler focuses on monitoring the views of influential auto enthusiasts. They use this information or early 'buzz' about their autos to design their ad campaigns. Meanwhile Toyota uses a company called Buzz Metrics to monitor what is being said about their models. Toyota believes that what is said on blogs and in discussion groups is so influential in motivating consumers to purchase that their new FJ Cruiser SUV was introduced without using any traditional media.

Question: With the growth in new ways to gather consumer opinions online, should the information and recommendations from a research company be presented in some other format than the traditional written and oral report?

Source: Halliday, 2007

16.1 The Importance of a Written Report

Marketing researchers do not conduct research just for the sake of 'knowing'. Research is conducted to find a solution to a problem. Even though the data have been collected and analyzed, marketing researchers' work is still not done. After all, the analysis that the marketing researchers have completed does not solve management's problem. Instead, it is the raw material that provides the insights that researchers will use to make the recommendations that will solve the problem (Schlaikjer, 2007). Once researchers have completed the analysis and developed the recommendations, the next step is to communicate this information in a written and oral format that is both understandable and actionable.

Researcher responsibilities after completion of a research study

- Analyze data for relevance to research question
- Make recommendations for action based on the data
- Prepare a written and oral report to communicate the data, analysis and recommendations

16.1.1 Reasons for preparing a report

Unfortunately, too often researchers do not allocate enough time or importance to this last step of report preparation. Perhaps this is because researchers enjoy the research process more than report preparation and writing. As a result, researchers might simply prefer to move on to the next research project.

However, there are important reasons why a written report is necessary. First the report gives legitimacy to any recommendations by describing the research methodology. There is also a need to preserve information for the future. A report also communicates recommendations while providing documentation that can be used to clarify any misunderstandings. After all, the company that commissioned the research will be paying for recommendations that can be implemented to improve their performance, rather than just facts based on findings (Schultz, 2005).

Of course today there are other methods used to present research findings than a traditional written report. For example, reports can be prepared in the form of videos. This type of report is more common when conducting research with trendy products and young research participants. A video can capture 'attitudes' that are difficult to communicate in writing.

Reasons for a written report

- Explanation of research terminology and methodology
- Preservation of knowledge for future employees
- Documentation of actionable ideas based on research
- Clarification in case of misunderstanding

Explanation

Researchers must prepare a thorough report as management may not be able to understand the research methodology or the analysis process without a clear explanation. Terms such as

'stratified sample', 'projective techniques' or 'confidence level' may have no meaning to those whose responsibility it is to make decisions based on the research. Without an explanation of these terms the data will either be meaningless or misunderstood. Marketing research is also used in fields other than just consumer marketing. For example, a study done on political issues may well have a reader who is familiar with political strategy but unfamiliar with research methodology (Wring, 2006).

Preservation

A second reason for a written report is so that the knowledge that is obtained from the research continues to be available in the future. The research data and recommendations need to be maintained for both the marketing department and management. All companies have personnel changes and it is particularly common for marketing professionals to change positions frequently. Even the manager who commissioned the research may be promoted or leave the company. If there is no written report, the new manager will have no access to the knowledge that resulted from the research effort. In this case duplicate research may be conducted.

Documentation

An important purpose of the report is not only to report data or information. The written report is where the recommendations that result from the data and analysis are explained. These recommendations are the result of marketing researchers' analysis and interpretation of the data. These recommendations should be reported as actionable ideas that management should consider implementing.

Clarification

A final reason for writing the report is to ensure that the marketing researchers who have conducted the research have a document that details findings and conclusions in case of future misunderstanding. If management makes a decision that causes a future loss of revenue, it might be easy to state that the decision was based on research conducted by the marketing department. If there is a written document this misrepresentation can be clarified.

16.1.2 Types of research report

One size does not fit all when preparing research reports. More than one type of report may be needed. First, preliminary reports may be prepared to reassure those who commissioned the research that any efforts are on track. In addition, different groups of individuals will have a desire and need for varying levels of detail in the report. These groups include the marketing staff, management, company employees and participants. When preparing the various reports required researchers should consider carefully both the length of the report and how it is to be disseminated.

Preliminary report

If the research process spans a considerable length of time, a marketing researcher may prepare a brief preliminary report. A preliminary report can assure management that the research is preceding as planned. Having read the report, those who originally commissioned the reseach may decide to make changes in the methodology based on the preliminary results that have been presented. It is better to find that management wants changes before the process is complete. Of course a more detailed report will be prepared after the research and analysis have been finished.

Marketing staff report

A report being prepared for the marketing staff of an organization should contain all details of planning and methodology. Marketing researchers will be interested in all of the results and analysis, whereas management will only be interested in the main findings. This document will also be used for reference when planning future research.

Management report

A report prepared for the management of an organization will provide an overview of the research process. Management will generally not have the time or inclination to involve themselves in all the details of the process. However, they will usually want more information on any findings and recommendations. A shorter report that leaves out most of the technical details has the advantage of being less expensive both to write and reproduce. In addition, researchers should remember that a shorter report is more likely to be read and understood. Because managers are busy with many responsibilities, a long report may be put aside to be read 'later' when there is more time. Unfortunately, this 'later' (with ample free time for reading the report) may never arrive. Researchers working together with management from the beginning of the research process will prove advantageous for both (see the box below).

RESEARCH + MANAGEMENT GOALS = SUCCESS

Marketing research practice now emphasizes partnerships between researchers and management. Today researchers understand that their research must deliver more than numbers. Research findings must translate into concrete benefits for companies by helping them achieve business goals. If not, management will not commission research again. Ten tips to ensure that the research findings are seen as useful by management are:

1　Align market research with the marketing plan.
2　Link market research with business results.
3　Link business activities with future business results.
4　Integrate the voices of customers and employees into the strategy process.
5　Link customer attitudes with customer behavior.
6　Engage stakeholders in the research process.
7　Define success measures.
8　Track those measures.
9　Create a process for driving insight.
10　Create a process for driving improvements that produce action.

Source: Rosenberg and Wikstrom, 2006

Employee report

If the research report recommendations involve a change in the product line or targeting a new consumer segment, a company may wish to share the research that resulted in these recommendations with their employees. If the company wants the support of its employees in making changes, the employees need to understand the research that resulted in the recommendation.

However, company staff may not be interested in all the details of how the research was conducted, so the report needs to kept short. This type of report can also be posted on internal websites so it is shared with everyone in an organization.

Participant reports

When conducting the research, participants may have expressed a wish to learn about the outcome of the research. This is especially true if the research was undertaken for a nonprofit organization. If they are interested, participants should be provided with a short summary of the findings. After all, it is the participants who made the research possible. However, participants should not be provided with a copy of the recommendations as this is information that belongs to the company or organization commissioning the research.

16.2 Components of a Written Report

Reports may vary in writing style, but all reports should contain an introduction, a section on methodology, any findings and recommendations, and appendices (see Table 16.1 below). The introduction will identify those involved in the research and provide a brief overview of the contents. The next section of the report will explain the research question, objectives and methodology. The third section would discuss the research findings and recommendations. The appendices will provide background information that will more fully explain the report's contents.

16.2.1 Introduction

The introductory material contained in a report will include a title page, a letter of transmittal, a table of contents and an executive summary. The report will start with a title page that provides the name of the research study, the date of the report submittal, the names of the researchers, the names of the people or organization that commissioned the research and contact information for both groups. A letter or memo of transmittal will be included for marketing research studies that were conducted by an outside firm. The letter of transmittal formally concludes the research study and transmits ownership of the information contained in the report to the management of the company. The letter will also describe the legal ownership of any supporting material, such as tapes or completed survey forms. Because of the sensitive nature of some research, the commissioning organization may wish to have this information destroyed and in this case the letter will also state that this has been done.

The report should next contain a table of contents and should be indexed in some way so that each section can be easily found. This table of contents and the indexing are useful when the report is discussed in meetings, as each section can be easily and quickly located. A table of contents should not only list the main sections, such as the introduction and findings, it should also list the pages for any subtopics under the main topics. A table of contents should also provide a separate listing for any graphs and tables. The more detail that is provided in a table of contents, the more easily material can be found.

An executive summary quickly states the research question, the methodology, findings and conclusions. As most people in positions of management are under time pressure, the

Table 16.1 Components of research report

Introduction	Title page
	Letter or memo of transmittal
	Table of contents
	Executive summary
Research methodology	Introduction
	Research question
	Research objectives
	Sample selection
	Methodology
Findings and recommendations	Findings
	Recommendations
Appendices	Further details on sampling procedure
	Examples of methodology
	Full presentation of data

executive summary is essential to communicate quickly what a report contains. In addition, if the executive summary does not communicate effectively that the research methodology, findings and recommendations are important, the report may never be read. While included early on in the report, the executive summary is actually the last part that is written. An example is provided below.

SAMPLE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report addresses the research question of 'What benefits do older travelers aged 62–75 want from a summer cruise experience?' The research objective was to design a vacation package that could be promoted to older travelers to increase market share and overall revenue by 10 per cent. The research found that activity preference depended on age, with older travelers preferring local cultural experiences. The recommendation is therefore that the company design holiday packages that have interactions with local people, such as the opportunity to learn local crafts.

16.2.2 Research methodology

The body of a report will include information on the research question, the research objectives and the research methodology. First, the problem that resulted in the research being conducted should be explained and the main and any secondary research questions should be stated. Since the findings and recommendations should directly address the research question, it should be highlighted from the body of the report by using bolding or italics so it can be easily referred to later.

The research objectives should also be explained. If they are not included, anyone reading the report may wonder why certain aspects of the research findings are not discussed further in the recommendations. For example, a research objective might have been to discover what percentage of current customers would be interested in buying a product but produced in new colors. The findings might contain information discovered during focus groups that customers are not aware of the company's promotional material. While this interesting fact might be included it will not be expounded upon, as it was not the purpose for conducting the research.

This section of the report should also describe the sample selection process. It should clearly explain how it was determined who should participate in the study and how these specific individuals were chosen from the total population. The legitimacy of the findings of a quantitative study depends upon whether the appropriate people were asked to participate. Even for qualitative research, if the wrong people are asked to participate in the research, the information will not be relevant. Therefore, to give legitimacy to the research findings and recommendations, it is important to describe the profile of participants and how they were selected.

Finally, the body of a report will explain the research methodology. For a survey this will include how the questionnaire was developed and tested. The report will also inform the reader of how many surveys were conducted, the method of contact and the dates of the research. For a focus group, similar information will be included but the name of the moderator will also be given. Readers may be less familiar with research techniques such as observation, projective techniques, and ethnography. If less well known research techniques have been used, the report will need to explain the methodology in more detail.

16.2.3 Findings and recomme ndations

The next section should discuss the research findings and recommendations. This section should include a summarization of the research findings. It should not provide all the data that were compiled during the research process, instead it should summarize the data that were used to develop the recommendations.

Research always provides a wealth of information. However, providing all the detail at this point in the report will only confuse the reader. For example, a survey might have been conducted to discover what activities consumers want to experience on a cruise ship. The research will have also asked survey respondents demographic information. During the analysis stage, researchers discovered that the geographic location of consumers' homes made no difference to preference. This fact will be stated. However, there is now no need to present a detailed breakdown of the home location of each participant in the body of the report. This data can be added in the appendix. On the other hand, if age was a very important variable that affected what activities people wanted to experience detailed information on age and activity preference should be included in the body of the report.

Recommendations are the most important component of a research report. After all, researchers are not paid just to collect data. They are also paid to analyze and interpret the data. The recommendations should directly address the research question and the research objectives. The concern that research proves useful and it doesn't just sit on someone's desk is not new (Christian, 1962). There has been increasing attention paid to this issue, as some business owners do not know how to use research for obtaining recommendations, as is shown in the example below.

16.2.4 Appendices

The final section of the research report will provide the full data that were obtained during the research process. These could be in the form of printed tables of data or the data can be provided on a CD. It will also include information that provides further details on the research sample and methodology. For example, details on the research sampling method can be explained. If referrals were used, the organization and individuals contacted can be listed. Examples of the research methodology such as survey forms, projective techniques or focus group scripts can also be included.

16.3 Writing a Professional Report

If the research report is going to be read, instead of just sitting on someone's desk, it is important that it be readable, interesting, and concise. A report that contains too much jargon, is poorly organized and is visually unattractive will not be read. This is especially the case because most people have multiple tasks to accomplish each day and will complete the easiest task first.

Readable

Issues that researchers should consider before writing a report must include the writing style. It is as important that a report be written in the right style as that it provides the right information. Before beginning to write a report, researchers should determine for whom the report is being prepared. If a report is being written for someone in the marketing department, a more professional style will be used. Here it can be assumed that the reader will be familiar with research terminology. However, if the report is being written for someone who runs a small business researchers must write in a more colloquial style while being careful to explain every term.

Interesting

Any report should also be interesting to read. Researchers should not just state facts but also give examples of interesting incidents that occurred during the research process. This type of detail will help to bring the information to life in the mind of the reader. Another way to add interest to a report is to use photos of the participants as they were involved in the research process. If this is not possible actual quotes can be used to give readers the feeling that they were at the research sessions.

Concise

A report should be kept as short as possible whilst still including all necessary information. It should also be arranged so that readers can process the amount of information they wish without necessarily reading the entire report. This can be accomplished by providing a well written executive summary and clearly labeling each section. In addition, headings and subheadings should be used throughout the report so that a specific issue can be found quickly.

16.3.1 Using visual material

The research findings section will contain a wealth of detailed numerical data. A report writer should use visuals to help communicate this information whenever possible. These visuals will assist readers in understanding the relationship between different sets of data. For example, readers can quickly visualize the relationship if 46 per cent of the respondents were female while 54 per cent were male. Readers would not have a problem understanding that slightly more participants were female than male.

However, if part of the research question addressed the age of the survey respondents this demographic data can be quite detailed. For example, if 12 per cent of the respondents who used the product were aged 18–22, 16 per cent were aged 23–29, 26 per cent were aged 30–39, 23 per cent were aged 40–49, 14 per cent were aged 50–59 and 9 per cent were 60 or older, it is extremely difficult for readers to visualize quickly and see the relationship among these numbers. To assist readers, such detailed data can be presented in the form of tables, charts and graphs.

Tables

A table simply lists numbers in rows by categories. Individual numbers will still be discussed in the body of the text. However, if the report writer uses a table they will not need to mention all the numbers. In the example given above, the writer might include in the body of the report that the largest age group of product users was 30–39, at 26 per cent, with 23 per cent of the users aged 40–49. The writer might then add that the smallest group was aged 60 or older, at 9 per cent. This comparison thus makes the point that most users are middle-aged. The remaining

numbers, while still relevant in showing the distribution, should not be discussed in the body of the report as it makes it too difficult to read.

Pie charts

A pie chart is a visual method to present raw numbers and their relationship as percentages of a whole. A pie chart is simply a circle that is divided into areas that are represented by size. Pie charts are useful when representing numbers that make up a whole, such as the percentage of customers in different age groups. The different sections of a pie chart should be shown in various colors or in shades of gray for each group. Using color to differentiate the sections makes a pie chart easier to read and use.

   Pie charts are static, in that they do not show changes over time. However, constructing more than one pie chart can be used to show how data have changed. For example, a pie chart can be constructed using current data on the age of product users and another can be constructed using data from a previous time period. These two pie charts are then easy for a reader to compare visually. Using the two pie charts would visually show the loss and gain between market segments. For example, younger purchasers' share could be seen to decrease which could forecast problems in the future.

Bar charts

Bar charts represent the values of different items so that these can be easily compared. The difference from pie charts is that bar charts do not necessarily show items that are part of a known whole. However, a bar chart will be used to show the relative size of the raw numbers of people in each age group who are product users. A bar chart can be shown with the bars vertical or horizontal. Bar charts can also be used to show changes over time by combining two sets of numbers collected at different dates. Each set of data can be shown next to each other on the chart.

Line charts

A line chart is designed to show changes in data over periods of time. Time is shown on the horizontal axis, while the numerical measurement is shown on the vertical axis. A line chart can show the percentage change in a product's sales by any measurement of time, such as by the day, month, season or year. The advantage of a line chart is that it can easily display movement in a value over time for more than one variable. For example, a company may collect sales data for five different products all of which could be shown on the same line chart. This could then reveal if there is any relation between changes in sales figures. For instance, when one product falls in sales, does another increase?

16.4 An Oral Presentation

An oral presentation is an opportunity for researchers both to explain and to 'sell' to management any research findings and recommendations. An oral presentation also allows researchers to provide a more effective description of the research methodology. This is because during an oral presentation a presenter, by observing their audience, can become aware of when they are encountering difficulties and can explain any confusing details more fully. In addition, a presenter can more clearly explain how report recommendations are related to any research findings. Finally, an oral presentation provides a means to clarify any misunderstandings about the research process.

Table 16.2   Sample outline for 30-minute presentation

Introduction 10%	Identify research participants
(3 minutes)	State time allotted for presentation
	Inform audience when questions can be asked
	Describe contents of presentation
Methodology 20%	Statement of research question and objectives
(12 minutes)	Brief explanation of sample selection procedure
	Description of methodology
Recommendations 60%	Description of findings
(18 minutes)	Recommendations for action
Conclusion 10%	Restatement of research question and main recommendation
(3 minutes)	Thanks and questions

Reasons for oral presentation

- A clearer explanation of methodology
- An oppportunity to explain the tie between research findings and recommendations
- An opportunity to clarify misunderstandings

16.4.1 Presentation str ucture

Presentations, just like written reports, must have a structure for two reasons. A structure helps the audience anticipate, and concentrate on, information that is of particular interest. A structure also helps a presenter stay on topic. No one would throw together a written report at the last minute as its poor organization would leave readers confused. It would be quite obvious to them that researchers had not taken time to present the material in a logical manner.

However, people do throw presentations together at the last moment and believe that their audience will not notice. Unfortunately a poorly prepared oral presentation will leave listeners just as confused as a poorly prepared written report. A well prepared presentation will have four major components: an introduction, methodology, findings and recommendations, and a conclusion. It is important when planning a presentation that most time is devoted to the recommendations section. Table 16.2 shows a sample outline for a presentation. Please note how the time has been divided to ensure that all topics will be covered before the conclusion of the presentation. Not all sections are given equal time as not all have equal importance.

Introduction
The presentation's introduction should identify the researchers and the commissioning company. It also should explain how long the presentation will take. During the introduction the presenter should inform the audience whether questions may be asked during the presentation or if the audience should keep their questions until the end. The introduction should then very quickly state the research question and describe what information the presentation will contain. For example, in a 30-minute presentation, the introduction should only last about three minutes.

Methodology

The section of the presentation on methodology is where the presenter will first state the research question and objectives. The presenter will then briefly inform the audience of how the research participants were selected. The presentation should not be used to describe the technical details of the sampling procedure. If the audience is interested, the report will contain all the necessary information. The purpose of describing the sampling procedure during the presentation is simply to give credibility to the findings and recommendations. The same holds true for the methodology, although more time should be spent on this topic so the audience will better understand how the findings were obtained. At this point in the presentation, a sample survey form can be distributed, projective techniques can be displayed, or a short video clip from a focus group can be shown.

Findings and recommendations

The presenter should spend more time presenting the findings and recommendations. They can use visuals such as graphs to quickly show to the audience what has been learned from the research. The presentation should never try to explain all the findings, as there simply isn't the time and the audience will get lost in the details. In addition, it is the presenter's responsibility to sift through all the findings to determine what is relevant for answering the research question. However, any findings that have an impact on the recommendations should be presented. The box below discusses how researchers and management can work together.

WHEN CAN RESEARCH BE CON SIDERED EFFECTIVE?

The answer to this question is clear to those market researchers who attended a seminar sponsored by Research Solutions, based in New Zealand. In their opinion, marketing researchers must 'come out from behind their pie charts' and become partners with the organization commissioning the research. What does such partnership mean? A true partnership was defined as exhibiting four factors.

First, the partnership must be based on trust. This means that management must trust more than the numbers. Of course a good market researcher will produce accurate findings but management must also trust the recommendations made by researchers.

Second, management must be willing to risk making changes based on research findings. This risk-taking approach must start at the research proposal stage. If the research proposal is written to allow only a conservative research approach, no breakthrough findings can possibly result.

Third, researchers must be in contact not just with management and marketing but also with other departments throughout a company. This must be the case because the recommendations that result from the research will impact on more than just the marketing department. The decisions will impact on finance, production and even human resources. If these departments do not trust the marketing researchers, they are more likely to argue against taking action based on their recommendations.

Fourth, management must accept that research findings are based on consumers' viewpoints, which can be surprising and sometimes uncomfortable for management to hear. It is not the responsibility of researchers to only bring good news.

Source: Focus Research, 2006

Conclusion

The conclusion to a presentation should be brief. The presenter should restate the research questions and the main recommendations. They should also thank the audience for their attention. The presenter should allow adequate time to answer any questions. The audience should also be informed of who it is they can contact if they have any questions in the future.

16.4.2 Presentation rules

A presentation has a different purpose than that of a written report. Giving a good presentation is a skill. However, presenting is a skill that can be learned. Everyone understands that being able to produce a clear, concise and interesting written report takes time and effort.

However, too often presentations are afterthoughts that people expect will happen automatically once they are in front of an audience. After all, while not everyone is skilled in writing, everyone can speak. Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

The general rules for an effective presentation are to be interesting, organized, and brief. A presentation should never be thought of as simply an oral presentation of all the information in a written report. The purpose of a presentation is not just to communicate information. After all, the audience at a presentation can read the written report for themselves. The purpose of a presentation is to 'sell' the ideas contained in the report by persuading an audience to act upon its recommendations. If an oral presentation is successful, the audience should be eager to read the written report for more details.

16.4.3 Unforgivable sins made during presentations

A successful presentation depends on preparation (see the box below). In addition a good presentation must be interesting. If it is not interesting, the research recommendations may be ignored because the audience simply lost their attention and they have not been heard. Everyone has probably had the experience of having to sit through a poorly prepared presentation. There are a few unforgivable sins that are guaranteed to result in a poor quality presentation.

BEFORE IT EVEN BEGINS

Everyone knows that a good presentation requires preparation. However, not everyone knows that there are other issues that must be considered if a presentation is to proceed flawlessly. These include:

Know the audience – including who they are, what they already know about the subject, what they want to learn from the presentation, and what management wants them to learn from the presentation.
Know the surroundings – including the comfort of the room, where the audience will sit, where the presenter will stand, whether the layout will allow the presenter to circulate around the room and the availability of flip charts, white boards and computer equipment.
Know the presentation – including the length of time required by practicing the presentation while using the required equipment, either alone or in front of others.

In fact, if possible a presentation should be practiced in front of a similar audience in the same room that will be used later. A practice presentation will mean that when the actual presentation is given, the presenter will be relaxed and able to concentrate on the audience instead of the presentation.

Source: Polonsky and Walker, 2004

A presenter should never insult an audience by reading anything longer than a short quotation. After all, the audience came to hear an oral presentation and they could have stayed in their offices to read the report on their own. In addition, audiences should never be frustrated by being shown any PowerPoint slides that can't be easily read. They should also never be bored – life is difficult enough without struggling to stay awake during a presentation. A presenter should never be so rude as to ignore the audience, nor should they overwhelm an audience with too much detail. Bear in mind that humans can only assimilate so much information at a time. Finally, a presenter should care about the information that is being presented. After all, if the presenter does not care, why should the audience?

Unforgivable sins committed during oral presentations

- Reading out the report
- Presenting PowerPoint slides that are unreadable
- Boring the audience
- Not interacting with the audience
- Using too much supporting material
- Not being emotionally involved with the presentation's contents

16.4.4 Using visuals during a presentation

Because of today's multimedia environment, people have become accustomed to receiving information in more than one form at the same time. It is now common for the evening news, and even other programs, to include a scroller at the bottom of the TV screen which people can read while they are watching the show. In addition to the broadcast and scrolling information on the main screen, a small inset screen will provide even more information. People seem to have no problem understanding these multiple sources of information. After all, in everyday life people routinely listen to music on their iPODs while performing other tasks (Sadler-Trainor, 2005).

So it is not surprising that people have a difficult time simply listening to a verbal presentation with no other visual interaction. Even the most interesting oral presentation may leave an audience with their minds wondering as to what they need to pick up at the grocery store on their way home from work. Therefore, using visual material not only helps to communicate the research information it also helps an audience stay focused on a presentation. Visuals used during a presentation may be computer generated. However low-tech methods, such as using a whiteboard, flipcharts, handouts and photographs, can be just as effective.

Low-tech methods

PowerPoint is probably the best known method of presenting visual information during oral presentations. However low-tech methods can also be used, including writing on a whiteboard, using flipcharts, and distributing handouts with relevant information and photographs of products or research participants. Whiteboards and flipcharts can be used to draw attention to important facts. If a surprising 78 per cent of consumers surveyed were unaware of a company's new promotional campaign, this number can be written out in red on the board or paper. The number becomes a clearly drawn exclamation point for this fact.

Even if a presenter chooses to use PowerPoint during a presentation, it is still useful to use a low-tech method such as handouts of the slides. If PowerPoint is not used handouts are even more important. Audience handouts, which should only list the main findings and recommendations, serve two purposes. They can be used to reinforce what a presenter is explaining and they can also provide a place for an audience to write notes as they are listening. Handouts can also be used that contain other material, such as maps of the study area or copies of the survey form or projective techniques. Photographs of the product under discussion can also assist an audience in better understanding the relevance of data. These photographs can be used as displays around the room where a presentation is taking place.

High-tech methods

High-tech presentation aids include the projection of an online source, videos and PowerPoint. Using a PC and a projector, presenters can bring up on screen material that is online. For example, if the research involved perception of a company's image the home page of that company's website can be shown. Video clips of participants, perhaps in focus groups or involved in ethnographic research, can also be used during a presentation. The use of videos is becoming increasingly common when making research presentations. Videos will bring the material to life in ways that other material cannot. Sometimes research studies have relied on videos to record events or behavior that are then analyzed. Of course these studies should include some of the video clips in the presentation (vom Lehn, 2006).

Benefits

PowerPoint slides can be used to help an audience comprehend information. However when these are badly used, which they often are, they will only confuse and distract an audience. There are some general rules on the use of PowerPoint that everyone should follow. First, presenters should remember that PowerPoint is best used for showing the summarization of data in charts and graphs. PowerPoint's worst use is for displaying large amounts of text. As PowerPoint is a visual media, the fewer words that are used the better. For example, a PowerPoint slide could be used to show an insightful quote made by a focus group participant. In addition, a few keywords that came up frequently as answers to an open-ended question on a survey can also be shown. These could then be discussed by the presenter. If PowerPoint is used, it should combine using slides with projecting other types of images.

Problems

PowerPoint is used inappropriately if too much information is put on a slide. Not only will the slide be difficult to read, it will also distract the audience from what is being said by the presenter. If a presenter gives an audience time to read a slide before a presentation resumes, it wastes time in that presentation. It will also mean the presenter will have to reestablish the

connection with the audience when the presentation resumes. In fact inexperienced presenters sometimes use PowerPoint slides as a shield to hide behind. While providing an audience with factual information is important, it is the persuasive ability of a speaker that 'sells' an idea.

Summary

1 Marketing research is conducted to find answers to questions which will lead to recommendations for future action. This information is usually communicated through a written report and oral presentation. Reasons for the written report include the need to explain the research methodology, to preserve the knowledge for future employees, to document the actionable ideas that resulted from the research and to provide clarification in case of future misunderstandings. A researcher may wish to prepare reports of different lengths for other researchers, management, staff and participants.

2 A research report will consist of an introduction that will identify those involved in the research and provide a brief overview of the contents. The methodology section of a report will explain the research question, the objectives and the methodology. The third section, which is the most important part of the report, will discuss the research findings and recommendations. The appendices will provide background information that will more fully explain the report's contents.

3 A professional report is readable, interesting and concise. If this is not the case, the report will not be read and, therefore, the recommendations will not be implemented. Numerical data should be communicated using tables and charts. These will help readers visualize the relationship between groups of data.

4 An oral presentation is needed to explain the methodology, the relationship between the findings and the recommendation, and to provide an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings. The presentation will include an introduction, methodology and findings, recommendations and a conclusion. A presentation should be interesting, organized and brief. Both low-tech and high-tech visuals should be used to better communicate information.

Key Terms

executive summary quickly states the research question, the methodology, findings and conclusions

management report shorter report that leaves out most of the methodological details but provides more information on the findings and recommendations

participant report a short summary of the findings sent to participants or posted on the organization's website

preliminary report   written to assure management that the research is proceeding as planned

visuals   graphic representation of numerical data that helps the reader understand the relationship between numbers

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Discussion Questions

1   What types of reports would need to be prepared as the result of a survey study of students' sports preferences?
2   Why is the recommendations section considered the most important component of a written report?
3   If you had conducted a quantitative survey study on students' plans for their summer holiday, what type of information would you include in the appendices?
4   Why should the writer of a report be concerned that the report is readable, interesting and concise?
5   Why should quantitative information be presented using tables and charts?
6   Why should a researcher take the time to prepare an oral presentation when the audience can read the written report at a time and place of their choosing?
7   What type of confusion or misunderstandings could an oral presentation address in a research report with a controversial recommendation that students should have more holiday time?
8   Why should either low-tech or high-tech information be used when making an oral presentation?

Recommended Reading

Brown, Michael (2003) *Making Presentations Happen: A Simple and Effective Guide to Speaking with Confidence and Power*. London: Allan and Unwin. A book that provides advice on how to remove stress from the presentation process. It includes information on building audience rapport, persuading an audience and using technology.

Harvard Business School (2004) *The Results Driven Manager: Presentations that Persuade and Motivate*. Harvard: Harvard Business School Press. An excellent resource on all aspects of making presentations with helpful hints and problems to avoid.

Harvard Business School (2006) *Written Communications That Inform and Influence*. Harvard: Harvard Business School Press. Another excellent resource that covers all types of writing, including proposals and reports.

O'Hair, Dan, Rubenstein, Hannah and Stewart, Rob (2007) *A Pocket Guide to Public Speaking*. Bedford: St Martin's Publishing. A short, basic book that covers the steps involved in preparing and delivering a presentation.

Patten, Mildred (2001) *Questionnaire Research: A Practical Guide*. Los Angeles, CA: Pyrczak. Provides information not only on preparing questionnaires but also on the presentation of statistical findings and writing final reports.

Rea, Louis M. and Parker, Richard A. (2005) *Designing and Conducting Survey Research: A Comprehensive Guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. A book on survey research written for the nonprofit and public sector. Includes information on writing reports that increase accountability.

Wolcott, Harry (2001) *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE. Exactly what the title states, this book focuses exclusively on writing up research findings and recommendations.