

How to get from Business Objectives to Research Objectives and Questions

What do business objectives look like?

Even if you are not in the business sector you will have business objectives. Typically these are going to be about *increasing usage, acceptability or value* of something that you own or are responsible for. For example:

- Getting more students to use the library facilities – or the same students, but more often or more effectively
- Upgrading a business service to better meet the needs of its users, who represent different segments
- Increasing the market share of a deodorant
- Increasing donations to a charity by creating events for people to participate in
- Building a broader-based healthcare business by launching a new product in wound care
- Educating children about healthy eating to avoid health problems in the future

Some business objectives will be about *reducing cost, waste or behaviour*, or will be set in a *competitive context*. You might want to stop anti-social behaviour or react to a competitor in the market. Some will be about *developing new products, services, ideas or behaviours*.

You know it's a business objective when you can see the financial implications for the organisation – even if they are a long way down the road!

How do you get to research objectives?

You have to ask

- What decisions have to be made in order to achieve the business objective?
- What information will be useful to support those decisions?

Examples of qualitative research objectives would be:

- *Understanding* what affects library usage behaviour
- *How can we* segment smaller business prospects by factors that influence their ambitions?
- *Exploring* how to reposition a deodorant brand to appeal to teenage boys without alienating older male users
- *Examining reactions* to other charity events to see what would work
- *Assessing* the reactions of healthcare professionals in order to understand how best to market the wound care product
- *Understanding* how children learn about healthy eating and what are the most effective influences?

Notice these are quite high level objectives, and each of them can be broken down into more detailed research questions.

"A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another."

Seth Godin

Taking a step back helps with creating insight.

Accidents Waiting to Happen, by Gordon Pincott (MRS Conference 2005) describes how the famous Oxo campaign was created after commissioning research that explored, not family meals or gravy making, but how women felt about their lives as mothers, providers and income earners in a changing society.



the emotional benefits or consequences of what you are proposing?

- How much do they believe what you are saying?
- How do you best communicate with them – what channels, what strategies? How do you best engage?
- What are the longer term implications for the organisation or brand?

Notice you can now move onto thinking about techniques and methods by asking two more questions:

1. How can I discover this information in the most robust manner? Will people be able to tell me, or should I observe behaviour?
2. What can people tell me, and will I need special techniques to help them access and express the information I need?

How do you develop the more detailed research questions?

Those high level objectives are not questions that could usefully be asked directly of a respondent. Can you imagine asking a 16 year old boy 'how should we reposition L'Oreal Men Expert to appeal more to you without upsetting our core market?'

The qualitative approach is all about exploring and understanding from different perspectives. Some of the things you would consider are:

- What is the relevant behaviour and what drives it?
- Is it rational, emotional, social or cultural?
- How habitual is it? How could it be changed?
- What is the context for the behaviour?
- What conscious and unconscious cues might affect it
- What cognitive biases might be in operation?
- What is the competitive context? What alternatives are there?
- What are the needs and ambitions, personal and social?
- What are their fears and anxieties – what pushes them away?
- What are their beliefs and understanding about the product area, your organisation / product / service? What are these founded on? What is accurate and what is hearsay or myth? Where does this information come from?
- What sources of information do people have?
- How trustworthy or influential are they? In what ways?
- How does your offer map out in terms of rewards/gains versus effort/ drawbacks/ potential losses? This would include pricing and value for money, if relevant.
- What in your offer are people drawn to and why? What are