

Why It's Time You Gave Online Focus Groups A Try

Focus Groups. Online? Really?

Almost everyone is familiar with the focus group - a moderator led discussion that has been a staple of market research for decades. But like every other business practice, technology has been disrupting the focus group, and this time-tested tool used by researchers around the world is now increasingly moving from the physical world into the online world, with great benefits for everyone interested in better, faster customer insights.



Called online bulletin boards, online discussions, or even just online focus groups, we strongly believe this methodology should be considered by any company that has used focus groups to develop customer insights.

How It Works

Using specialized web-based software offered by a number of innovative vendors, research participants can be recruited to meet the specific requirements of any study, and engaged in an online discussion - using text and/or video - that is moderated by a professional moderator, just like an in-person focus group. And while participants can log in to take part in a one or two hour discussion that happens at a specific date and time (called a "synchronous discussion"), more often than not the

discussion takes place over three to five days, with participants logging in a few times each day, responding to posted questions and probes from the moderator, reacting to responses from fellow participants, and creating an enormously rich "asynchronous discussion" that blows away what most people think can be accomplished online. In the end, the insights that can be developed from online focus groups, particularly the longer duration, multi-day, asynchronous ones described above, can go well beyond what might be developed through in person focus groups. And the benefits don't stop there.



Get More Engagement From Each Participant

Traditional focus groups are often touted as a way to get lots of participant input in a short amount of time. But in a 90 minute focus group with 10 participants, each participants usually speaks, on average, for about six to seven minutes. In contrast, during a multi-day online discussion, each participant will generally spend between 60 and 90 minutes engaged in the study, providing far more commentary than they could during a traditional in person group.

Eliminate Groupthink and Dominant Participants

It's a fact that in any group discussion someone has to speak first. It's also true that when humans get together in groups, a pecking order is established,

and more powerful and influential people naturally influence others in the group. While a good moderator will do their best to encourage independent thinking and keep dominant participants in check, it's virtually impossible to do so entirely. As a result, participants in in-person focus groups are always influenced by



those who speak before them, and also by people they perceive to be superior to them in some fashion. In contrast, online focus groups eliminate both of these problems. First, online focus groups put an end to groupthink by preventing participants from seeing each other's responses until they have posted their own response. And because there is virtually unlimited discussion time, and no way to intimidate fellow participants, participants who might attempt to dominate an in person discussion, either by monopolizing the air time or through their personalities, are neutralized so that all participants can contribute equally to the discussion.

Give Everyone - Participants And The Moderator - More Time To Think

As a short duration live event, an in-person focus group puts unique pressures on both the participant and the moderator. Participants feel compelled to have something interesting to say - even when they don't - since they have been hand-chosen to participate in the study

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and are being compensated for their opinion. Similarly, moderators are under pressure to think very quickly on their feet given that they only have so much time with the participants.

Online discussions, however, address both of these problems, by eliminating the pressure that comes from a short duration live event. For participants, this means they can take their time to think about the questions being asked, and respond in a more thoughtful way



than they can in a live session. In fact, questions can even be posed in the morning, with instructions to think about the question and respond later in the day. Similarly, moderators have the benefit of carefully studying participants' responses and thinking more deeply about where and when to probe. The result is simply better data and richer insights because everyone - the participant and the moderator - have time to think.

Eliminate Travel and Move Faster

Most focus group programs are multi-city affairs that put the client and moderator on the road for the better part of a few weeks. In contrast, online focus group programs can be structured with multiple sessions covering multiple cities, all occurring very quickly back-to-back or even simultaneously. Just like in person focus group, clients can log in to observe each discussion from a virtual back room. In the end, you get

powerful insights, all with no travel, and with significant savings for the client and no time spent out of the office.

Let's Talk

Get in touch with us for an engaging conversation about the opportunities and challenges you face and how ThirdSlice's novel approaches to consumer research can give you faster access to insights you've never had before.

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About ThirdSlice Research

ThirdSlice Research uses innovative mobile, social and online tools to provide our clients with faster access to better insights than they've ever had before. We bring together top-tier research professionals with these innovative tools and methods - sometimes in combination with more traditional approaches - to help our clients answer critical business question and drive improved business performance.

