



Bring a can-do attitude to recruiting out-of-facility focus groups

Lots of focus groups are being conducted outside of, and far away from, the traditional facility room. When a client wants to hold groups outside the normal setting, how does a facility or recruiting service meet this challenge? With willingness and know-how. Stir in a positive attitude, an awareness of pricing and some flexibility, and first-rate focus groups can be done anywhere.

A moderator calls us, asking, "Can you get me eight diagnosed, allergic respondents?" Quickly we reply, "Yes, it will take a bit of work, but it can be done."

Elaborating, the client continues, "We want diagnosed allergic respondents to be willing to go on a picnic field trip. As prerequisite for this group, prior to attendance, all respondents will have to submit an MD-written letter stating they have been diagnosed, they are taking prescription medication, and

that for one day only, it is acceptable for them not take their medication. We want to watch them sneeze, wheeze, blow their snout, then, in their discomfort, tell us how they make their choice of what tissues they purchase. It is vital we get their straightforward responses in an authentic environment. Previously we have frittered away everyone's time and our money doing standard focus groups. We have observed too many respondents do what humans do best: please. We do not need to be charmed, we need to know why they are not buying our brand of tissues."

It is effortless to recruit to a facility. A facility is complete, it can be set up to a client's specifications with phones, video, computers, food and drink service, the works. Contrast that to a picnic field trip. Which would you rather set up? But for an already disappointed

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client, observing non-medicated allergic respondents' discomfort and true tissue choice in the great outdoors may elicit a "eureka" moment.

Out-of-facility focus groups are certainly challenging. But good old-fashioned toil is good for the psyche, the soul and the pocket-book. A tough job here and there can make subsequent jobs effortless.

How about focus groups on busses? Yes, busses. Big, roomy, comfortable busses transporting respondents, moderators and video personnel - and food and drink - to a gambling casino, a senior-citizen facility, or an out-of-town sporting event. This type of recruiting, when done well, is remarkably rewarding; it's gratifying for clients,

recruiters and respondents.

Begin with optimism

As a recruiter, you begin with optimism. Never say, "We don't have those people." If you do not have them, get them. This is the recruiting business. A good recruiter on a bad day should pull together a reasonable amount of new respondents. A database cannot be good unless it is updated and cleansed often, very often. A tenacious work crew can find respondents anywhere. (A depressive on the work crew can bring the team to the depths of despair. While you are cleansing your database, remember to also cleanse your staff.)

While out-of-the-facility recruiting eliminates a room rental fee, it guarantees higher recruiting costs. If you are in the recruiting game this phrase should be at the top of your list: "If the price is right, we can do anything." It's a trickier recruit that also requires higher incentives.

Here's a reality check for anyone who may be under the illusion that qualitative recruiting is done by going door to door: It is not. It is done by telephone. The very best focus group recruiting is done by services that have loyal, smart, creative staff and top-notch quality control to eliminate the unsavory types who try to seep through the smallest crack.

Back to cleansing. Your aim is to make your database impeccable, cleansed of trashy respondents, updated and miniaturized. For quick specialty recruiting, a smaller database is better. Searching through mammoth archives will not work here. It is simple to gather thousands of names; it takes time and labor to customize, downsize and rid your files of the chaff.

Train them

Now that your databank is in remarkable shape, your next chore is to get your recruiters in this same condition. Train them. Do not let them flounder. Encourage them to be speedy, to speak fast, to speak with intonation, to uphold a positive attitude. By example, show recruiters how to rid themselves of skepticism, of negative behavior, of annoyance and a "we can't do that" approach. Think Katie Couric.

Hold a venting meeting for recruiters to vent. Yes, let them vent! On rare occasions, a reward policy for recruiters can be utilized. Verbal and written praise, along with an occasional monetary bonus, are incentives well-given.

Confidence can waver. Recruiters say, "We're slow! Clients are looking for speedy turnaround. They are asking for the impossible!" There is truth to these observations. Work has changed. Clients who once wanted fast work now want ultra-fast performance. Just as reality shows have taken over TV, on-location interviews and focus groups have taken their place in the marketing research arena.

Not every facility or recruiting service has the luxury of having a bilingual staff at their disposal. Bilingual is a good thing; speaking poorly and calling it English is a bad thing. Expressive recruiters are worth their weight in gold; inarticulate recruiters should be dumped before your client dumps you.

Blessed be the recruiters who can pull these projects off. They adapt, are flexible, optimistic, experienced, they can branch out in every direction. First-class recruiters innately network all the time. Their memory, their recall, their ability to go out-of-the-box will supersede the highest level computerized database every time.

Pulling together a quick, atypical recruit in an extraordinary milieu demands out-of-the-ordinary recruiting. The old adage "The best person for the job is a busy one" plays out here. Part-timers, not used to pressure, often disappoint.

Venture forth

So, your database is beatified, your

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recruiters are trained, you are equipped to venture forth. You can readily recruit an in-office visit, you can easily pull together a professional cooking group at a catering establishment to test a client's cookware, you can overnight-recruit teenage basketball players to try out a new youth center, you and your staff are willing and able to recruit as far away from a facility as your client demands. Like scouts everywhere, now you too are prepared. | Q