

**INTERNET RESEARCH: THE TECHNOLOGY
OF THE FUTURE**

by

Carl McDaniel
Professor and Chair
Department of Marketing
The University of Texas at Arlington
Box 19469
Arlington, TX 76019-0469
email: mcdaniel@uta.edu

In many ways, the Internet has turned the world of marketing research upside-down. Old ways of conducting some types of research may soon seem as quaint as a steam-engine train. New techniques and new ways of conducting traditional marketing research are coming online in increasing numbers everyday. By 2005, Internet marketing research will account for about 50 percent of all marketing research revenue in the United States.

Some growth drivers of Internet Research are that the Internet:

- Allows for better and faster decision making through much more rapid access to business intelligence,
- Improves the ability to respond quickly to customer needs and market shifts,
- Makes the conducting of follow-up studies and longitudinal research easier and more fruitful,
- Slashes labor- and time-intensive research activities (and associated costs), including mailing, telephone solicitation, data entry, data tabulation, and reporting.

THE INTERNET IMPACT

The Internet has brought forth new cyber marketing research companies and research service firms. The Web has also changed the way some old-line marketing research support firms deliver their products.

Marketing Research Firms

Many new marketing research firms only conduct research via the Internet. A pioneer in this area is Greenfield Online, www.greenfieldonline.com, that conducts both quantitative and qualitative research (research not subject to quantitative analysis).

Greenfield claims to have the world's largest Internet-based marketing research panel. A **research panel** consists of a group of individuals who agree to participate in a series of research studies over time. Often participants receive cash or gifts.

Another Internet-bred marketing research firm is Vividence, www.vividence.com. The company specializes in evaluating the effectiveness of Web sites. The firm has customers go to target Web sites and then, using its proprietary software, evaluates the success of customers performing tasks at the site and overall customer experience at the site. The site may be the client's own live site, a beta site, or a competitor's site. For example, Drugstore.com had been debating adding a new feature to its site. Suddenly, a competitor added the proposed feature. Drugstore.com wanted to know the effectiveness of the feature before it added its own version. Vividence conducted marketing research to determine the effectiveness of the competitor's feature and also developed feedback from drugstore.com's target customers on how the feature could be improved.

Vividence's home page is shown in Figure One.

Some cyber research firms focus on tracking the popularity of Web sites. Media Metrix was the pioneer in this area. Now, the firm is being challenged by two newcomers: Relevant Knowledge and Net Ratings, Incorporated. Nielsen Media Research, which has been rating television programs for decades, has also joined the battle.

Cyber Support Firms

A number of cyber firms have been created to support the marketing research function. Most of these companies provide support in conducting Internet surveys. Perhaps the most popular is WebSurveyor, www.websurveyor.com, which we make available to you, our readers. WebSurveyor enables the user to create a questionnaire using either the site's standardized questions or those you create for your customized needs. The responses to the questionnaire are collected by WebSurveyor. The researcher then is offered a variety of statistical tools that can be used to analyze the data.

Designing questionnaires and analyzing data has never been easier!

The Internet is Changing the Way Old-Line Marketing Research Support Organizations Deliver Their Product

Survey Sampling, Incorporated (SSI), founded in 1997, is the most cost-effective and reliable source of samples of all types. Now with SSI-SNAP software, a marketing research company can order a very specific type of sample; i.e., males, 25-35 years of age, living in Florida, with a college degree, online. The names and addresses are then delivered electronically to the research firm over the Internet.

Claritas, one of the world's largest providers of segmentation research information, also maintains one of the largest databases on American consumers and businesses. The company now offers Internet user-oriented software for clients which enables a researcher to access and analyze Claritas's databases and then apply that information to business decisions.

Other Organizations and Individuals

Various other organizations and individuals, although not truly part of the marketing research industry, make a special contribution to it. Included here are various

government agencies at the federal, state, and local levels; university bureaus of business and economic research; individual university professors that serve as marketing research consultants; and research units associated with various industry groups and others. In the case of all but the university professors, these institutions serve primarily as sources of extremely valuable and useful data for the marketing research industry. University professors, primarily those in marketing departments, who also are marketing research consultants, provide a pool of sophisticated talent that is tapped on an as-needed basis by corporate marketing research departments, companies with no internal marketing research capabilities, custom research firms, and others.

The role of various government agencies is important, though they serve primarily as providers of secondary data.

THE NEW AGE OF SECONDARY INFORMATION: THE INTERNET AND WORLD WIDE WEB

Gathering secondary data, while necessary in almost any research project, has traditionally been a tedious and boring job. The researcher often had to write to government agencies, trade associations, or other secondary data providers and then wait days or weeks for a reply that might never come. Often, one or more trips to the library were required and the researcher might find that needed reports were checked out or missing. In the last few years, the rapid development of the Internet and World Wide Web promise to eliminate the drudgery associated with the collection of secondary data.

Finding Secondary Data on the Internet

If you know the address of a particular Web site that contains the secondary data that you are searching for, you can type a description of what you are looking for into

your Web browser (Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer are the dominant browsers) directly. A Web address or URL (Uniform Reference Locator) is similar to a street address in that it identifies a particular location (Web server and file on that server) on the Web.

Search Engines

Sites such as AltaVista, Excite, and Google have become popular for Web users looking for information on the Web. These organizations offer what are called *search engines* that crawl the Web looking for sites that you are researching. Each uses its own indexing system to help you locate information for which you are looking. All of them allow you to enter one or more keywords and search their databases of Web sites for all occurrences of those words. They then return listings that you can click on to go immediately to the site described.

Finding the information that you need on the Web can be very easy, or it can require some work and some trial and error. Your Web connection provides access to over 100 million Web sites throughout the world, more information than any library can offer. It doesn't matter where you are, whether you are in New York City, or Whitefish, Montana, or any other place on the globe. As long as you have an Internet connection, you have access to all this information. There are basically two ways to find the information you need. First, as mentioned above, if you know the URL of the site where the information you need is located, you can simply enter the URL for that site in the search window of your Web browser and go directly to that site.

Remember that the Internet is a self-publishing medium. Your visits to search engines will yield files with a wide range of quality from a variety of sources. Try out multiple sites when you are investigating a topic.

Directories

In addition to search engines, you can use subject directories on the Web to explore a subject. There are two basic types of directories: *academic and professional directories* often created and maintained by subject experts to support the needs of researchers, and *commercial portals* that cater to the general public and are competing for traffic. Directories depend upon people to compile their listings.

- *Academic and professional directories* are created by librarians or subject experts and tend to be associated with libraries and academic institutions. These collections are created in order to enhance the research process and help users find high quality sites of interest. A careful selection process is applied, and links to the selected resources are usually annotated. These collections are often created to serve an institution's constituency but may be useful to any researcher. As a rule, these sites do not generate income or carry advertising. INFOMINE, from the University of California, is an example of an academic directory.
- *Commercial portals* are created to generate income and serve the general public. These services link to a wide range of topics and often emphasize entertainment, commerce, hobbies, sports, travel and other interests not necessarily covered by academic directories. These sites seek to draw traffic in order to support advertising. As a part of this goal, the directory

is offered in conjunction with a number of additional customer services.

Yahoo! is an example of a commercial portal.

The lines between directories and search engines are blurring. Directories are present at some search engine sites, and sometimes their contents are searched along with content from the general Web. For example, AltaVista offers the LookSmart directory; Infoseek shares the screen with the directory at the Go Network; Excite has its own directory; and Lycos offers the directory contents from the Netscape Open Directory. Directory results are sometimes placed before search results in order to steer users to the directory's content. This can be a useful way of getting at substantive content relating to your query. Most subject directories offer a search engine mechanism to query the database. A list of popular search engines and directories is shown in Table Two.

Table Two

Popular Search Engines and Directories

AOL Search

<http://search.aol.com/>

AOL Search allows its members to search across the Web and AOL's own content from one place. The "external" version, listed above, does not list AOL content. The main listings for categories and Web sites come from the Open Directory (see below). Inktomi (see below) also provides crawler-based results, as backup to the directory information.

AltaVista

<http://www.altavista.com/>

AltaVista is consistently one of the largest search engines on the Web, in terms of pages indexed. Its comprehensive coverage and wide range of power searching commands makes it a particular favorite among researchers. It also offers a number of features designed to appeal to basic users, such as "Ask AltaVista" results, which come from Ask Jeeves (see below), and directory listings primarily from the Open Directory.

Ask Jeeves

<http://www.askjeeves.com/>

Ask Jeeves is a human-powered search service that aims to direct you to the exact page that answers your question. If it fails to find a match within its own database, then it will provide matching Web pages from various search engines.

Direct Hit

<http://www.directhit.com/>

Direct Hit is a company that works with other search engines to refine their results. It does this by monitoring what users click on from the results they see. Sites that get clicked on more than others rise higher in Direct Hit's rankings. Thus, the service dubs itself a "popularity engine." Direct Hit's technology is currently best seen at HotBot. It also refines results at Lycos and is available as an option at LookSmart and MSN Search. The company also crawls the Web and refines this database, which can be viewed via the link above.

Excite

<http://www.excite.com/>

Excite is one of the most popular search services on the Web. It offers a medium-sized index and integrates non-Web material such as company information and sports scores into its results, when appropriate.

FAST Search

<http://www.alltheweb.com/>

Formerly called All The Web, FAST Search aims to index the entire Web. It was the first search engine to break the 200 million Web page index milestone.

Go / Infoseek

<http://www.go.com/>

Go is a portal site produced by Infoseek and Disney. It offers portal features such as personalization and free e-mail, plus the search capabilities of the former Infoseek search service, which has now been folded into Go. Searchers will find that Go consistently provides quality results in response to many general and broad searches. It also has an impressive human-compiled directory of Web sites.

GoTo

<http://www.goto.com/>

Unlike the other major search engines, GoTo sells its main listings. Companies can pay money to be placed higher in the search results, which GoTo feels improves relevancy. Non-paid results come from Inktomi.

Google

<http://www.google.com/>

Google is a search engine that makes heavy use of link popularity as a primary way to rank Web sites. This can be especially helpful in finding good sites in response to general searches such as “cars” and “travel,” because users across the Web have in essence voted for good sites by linking to them.

HotBot

<http://www.hotbot.com/>

Like AltaVista, HotBot is another favorite among researchers due to its large index of the Web and many power searching features. In most cases, HotBot’s first page of results comes from the Direct Hit service (see above), and then secondary results come from the Inktomi search engine, which is also used by other services. It gets its directory information from the Open Directory project (see below).

IWON

<http://www.iwon.com>

Backed by US television network CBS, iWon has a directory of Web sites generated automatically by Inktomi, which also provides its more traditional crawler-based results. iWon gives away daily, weekly and monthly prizes in a marketing model unique among the major services.

Inktomi

<http://www.inktomi.com/>

Originally, there was an Inktomi search engine at UC Berkeley. The creators then formed their own company with the same name and created a new Inktomi index, which was first used to power HotBot. Now the Inktomi index also powers several other services. All of them tap into the same index, though results may be slightly different. This is because Inktomi provides ways for its partners to use a common index yet distinguish themselves. There is no way to query the Inktomi index directly, as it is only made available through Inktomi’s partners with whatever filters and ranking tweaks they may apply.

LookSmart

<http://www.looksmart.com/>

LookSmart is a human-compiled directory of Web sites. In addition to being a stand-alone service, LookSmart provides directory results to MSN Search, Excite and many other partners. AltaVista provides LookSmart with search results when a search fails to find a match from among LookSmart's reviews.

Lycos

<http://www.lycos.com/>

Lycos started out as a search engine, depending on listings that came from spidering the Web. In April 1999, it shifted to a directory model similar to Yahoo. Its main listings come from the Open Directory project, and then secondary results come from either Direct Hit or Lycos' own spidering of the Web.

MSN Search

<http://search.msn.com/>

Microsoft's MSN Search service is a LookSmart-powered directory of Web sites, with secondary results that come from AltaVista. RealNames and Direct Hit data are also made available. MSN Search also offers a unique way for Internet Explorer 5 users to save past searches.

Netscape Search

<http://search.netscape.com/>

Netscape Search's results come primarily from the Open Directory and Netscape's own "Smart Browsing" database, which does an excellent job of listing "official" Web sites. Secondary results come from Google. At the Netscape Netcenter portal site, other search engines are also featured.

Northern Light

<http://www.northernlight.com/>

Northern Light is another favorite search engine among researchers. It features one of the largest indexes of the Web, along with the ability to cluster documents by topic. Northern Light also has a set of "special collection" documents that are not readily accessible to search engine spiders. There are documents from thousands of sources, including newswires, magazines and databases. Searching these documents is free, but there is a charge of up to \$4 to view them. There is no charge to view documents on the public Web—only for those within the special collection.

Open Directory

<http://dmoz.org/>

The Open Directory uses volunteer editors to catalog the Web. It was acquired by Netscape in November 1998, and the company pledged that anyone would be able to use information from the directory through an open license arrangement. Netscape itself was the first licensee. Lycos and AOL Search also make heavy use of Open Directory data, while AltaVista and HotBot prominently feature Open Directory categories within their results pages.

RealNames

<http://www.realnames.com/>

The RealNames system is meant to be easier-to-use alternative to the current Web site addressing system. Those with RealNames-enabled browsers can enter a word like “Nike” to reach the Nike Web site. To date, RealNames has had its biggest success through search engine partnerships. In particular, it is strongly featured in results at AltaVista, Go and MSN Search.

Snap

<http://www.snap.com/>

Snap is a human-compiled directory of Web sites, supplemented by search results from Inktomi. Like LookSmart, it aims to challenge Yahoo as the champion of categorizing the Web.

WebCrawler

<http://www.webcrawler.com/>

WebCrawler has the smallest index of any major search engine on the Web—think of it as Excite Lite. The small index means WebCrawler is not the place to go when seeking obscure or unusual material. However, some people may feel that by having indexed fewer pages, WebCrawler provides less overwhelming results in response to general searches.

Yahoo

<http://www.yahoo.com/>

Yahoo is the Web’s most popular search service and has a well-deserved reputation for helping people find information easily. The secret to Yahoo’s success is human beings. It is the largest human-compiled guide to the Web, employing about 150 editors in an effort to categorize the Web. Yahoo has over 1 million sites listed. Yahoo also supplements its results with those from Inktomi. If a search fails to find a match within Yahoo’s own listings, then matches from Inktomi are displayed. Inktomi matches also

appear after all Yahoo matches have first been shown. Yahoo is the oldest major Web site directory, having launched in late 1994.

Source: searchenginewatch.com

Sites of Interest to Marketing Researchers

There are a number of Web sites that are accessed daily by marketing researchers in search of information. These sites offer an incredible variety of information. A list of those used most often is shown in Table Three.

Table Three

Some Sources of Secondary Data for Marketing Researchers on the Web

Organization	URL	Description
American Demographics/ Marketing Tools	http://www.marketingtools.com	Searches the full text of all of American Demographics and Marketing Tools
American Marketing Association	http://www.ama.org	Enables you to search all of the AMA's publications by using keywords.
BLS Consumer Expenditure Surveys	http://stats.bls.gov/esxprod.htm	Provides information on the buying habits of consumers, including data on their expenditures, income and consumer credit.
Bureau of Economic Analysis	http://www.bea.doc.gov	Wide range of economic statistics.
Bureau of Transportation Statistics	http://www.bts.gov	Comprehensive source for a wide range of statistics on transportation.
CACI	http://www.demographics.caci.com	On CACI Marketing Systems' site, users can type in their zip codes to get a snapshot of the dominant profile type in their town. Population figures are available for the zips, as are percentages for race and sex. Median household income, average home values, and average rent are also presented.
Center for Disease Control	www.cdc.gov/nchswww/default.html	As the federal government's principal vital and health statistical agency, the National Center for Health Statistics has a lot to offer. The NCHS, a subdivision of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, maintains data on vital events, health status, lifestyle and exposure to unhealthy influences, the onset and diagnosis of illness and disability, and the use of health care.
Cyberatlas	www.cyberatlas.com	At cyberatlas.com, viewers can browse the latest research compiled from several reputable firms, including Media Metrix, Greenfield Online, Intelliquest, and Inteco. The geography page fills you in on surveys about online populations around the world. There's also a generous section on e-commerce that breaks out research in different markets,

		like advertising, finance and retail. Peek into the stats toolbox for a mother lode of lists on everything from weekly usage data to the top-ten banner ads.
The Dismal Scientist	http://www.dismal.com	The Dismal Scientist is an authoritative site for timely economic information, with comprehensive data and analysis at the metro, state, and national levels. There's also data and analyses of global issues, including situations facing Asia, South America and Europe. Visitors can rank states and metro areas on more than 100 economic, socioeconomic, and demographic categories.
Easy Analytic Software	www.easidemographics.com	Easy Analytic Software, Inc., a New York City-based developer and marketer of demographic data, offers demographic site reports, or three-ring studies, including current estimates for population and households. Each three-ring study offers Census estimates for race, ethnicity, age distribution, income distribution, and weather data. The site also offers one million pages of demographic reports for all Zip codes, counties, metropolitan areas, cities, sectional centers, television markets, states and other geographies.
EconData	www.econdata.net	A premier site for researchers interested in economics and demographics. There is a tremendous number of links to government, private, and academic data sources. Check out their top ten data sources list.
Economic Research Service, Department of Agriculture	http://www.econ.ag.gov	Wide range of agricultural statistics.
Encyclopedia Britannica	www.britannica.com	Entire 32-volume encyclopedia is available free online.
Equifax National Decision Systems	http://www.ends.com	Provides access to wide range of secondary data on many topics. Most must be purchased.
Find/SVP	http://www.findsvp.com	Offers consulting and research services. Claims to offer access to the largest private information center in the U.S.

Harris Info Service	www.harrisinfo.com	Offers business-to-business data on American manufacturers and key decision makers.
Marketing Research Association	www.MRA-net.org	Causes and solutions of “declining respondent cooperation.” Links to research suppliers.
Mediamark Research	http://www.mediamark.com/mri/docs/toplinereports.html	Marketers and researchers looking for demographic data on magazines, cable TV or 53 different product or service categories can find it at Top-Line Reports site. Top-Line Reports breaks down cable TV networks according to viewers’ age, sex, median age, and income. Magazines are listed by total audience, circulation, readers per copy, median age, and income.
Nielsen Media Research	www.nielsen-netratings.com	A course of Internet audience information. Researchers can find data and Internet growth and user patterns.
Office of Research & Statistics, SSA	http://www.ssa.gov/statistics/ores_home.html	Another source of a range of government statistics.
Pcensus for Windows	http://www.tetrad.com	Provides detailed information about the population of metropolitan areas.
Population Reference Bureau	http://www.prb.org/prb/	Source of demographic information on population issues.
Service Intelligence	www.serviceintelligence.com/	The site has an area devoted to customer stories of unpleasant experiences with airlines, banks, restaurants, and other service businesses. It’s not all bad news, though—“hero” stories are also included.
Strategic Mapping	http://www.stratmap.com	Offers extensive selection of geographic files, includes detailed geography for entire U.S.
U.S. Census Bureau	http://www.census.gov	Very useful source of virtually all census data.
U.S. Demography	http://www.ciesin.org	Excellent source of demographic information concerning the U.S.
USA Data	http://www.usadata.com	Provides access to consumer lifestyle data on a local, regional or national basis.
World Opinion	http://www.worldopinion.com	Perhaps the premier site for the marketing research industry. Thousands of marketing research reports available.

FINDING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DATA ON THE INTERNET

Several sites for finding government statistics are listed in Table Three. However, there are some 70 federal agencies that publish data, and diligent searchers are hard-pressed to wade through all the results. In the past two years, federal agencies have posted a rich array of current information on the Internet, from the latest press releases to a wide range of historical results. The issue is finding what you need.

Several new hubs have been created to help solve the problems. The Statistical Universe was created by the Congressional Information Services (CIS) and is available to the public from Lexis-Nexis. The Statistical Universe is available either as a Web-based service (www.cispubs.com) or through the Lexis-Nexis STATIS library.

Statistical Universe builds on the CIS American Statistics Index (ASI), which researchers have used for decades. But unlike the ASI, which is a catalog of materials, the Statistical Universe displays the actual results from about 60 percent of the reports available. Earlier material, dating back to the 1970s, is catalogued but only about 2,000 of these reports from 1995 to 1997 can be accessed directly.

Using the Statistical Universe is like having a library card catalog that gets inside the books to take you to the page or table you are looking for. Once there, users can display the specific material or download the entire report. Statistical Universe provides the most comprehensive and fully indexed source for federal stats online. Users looking for a particular recent report or those who know which agency issued the data they are looking for might be better served by first checking with the free government Web sites.

A good place to start is FEDSTATS (www.fedstats.gov), which has links to the 70 federal agencies recognized by the Office of Management and Budget as issuing

statistical data. This site's search engine covers reports from the 14 major statistical agencies, including the U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, and Bureau of Labor Statistics, and provides links to all the other agencies.

If you're looking for information related to subjects in the news, try the White House Briefing Room (www.whitehouse.gov/WH/html/briefroom.html). On the page are two choices, one for economic issues (www.whitehouse.gov/fsbr/esbr.html) and one for social issues and statistics (www.whitehouse.gov/fsbr/ssbr.html). These sites provide an overview of the most newsworthy trends.

Periodical, Newspaper and Book Databases

Several excellent periodical, newspaper and book databases are available to researchers. Some can be directly accessed via the Internet and others through your local library's Website. A list of these databases is shown in Table Four.

Table Four

Full Text Periodical, Newspaper and Book Databases Used by Marketing Researchers

ABI/Inform Global

Updated monthly. Provides bibliographic information and abstracts for approximately 1,000 journals in business and management. Includes full-text entries for approximately 520 journals. Includes full-text entries for approximately 520 journals.

Examples of major marketing journals now included in full-text format are: *Journal of Marketing*, *JMR: Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*.

Dow Jones Interactive

Includes full-text news and articles from over 3,400 sources including newspapers from around the world, as well as information on companies, industries, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and foreign exchange rates. Updated daily.

Electric Library

Contains over 5 million full-text documents in all subject areas. Content is updated daily and includes an archive of up to 12 years. Covers six separate media types: newspapers and news wires, periodicals, TV & radio program transcripts, literature and reference book, photos, and maps.

Lexis-Nexis

The Lexis-Nexis database contains 2.5 billion searchable documents. Each week, 14.7 million new documents are added. It includes 18,871 news and business sources. Lexis-Nexis is the largest business information services. It offers access to thousands of worldwide newspapers, magazines, trade journals, industry newsletters, tax and accounting information, financial data, public records, legislative data, and company information.

Periodical Abstracts Research II (PAR)

Covers current affairs, business, industry news, cultural events editorial material, and general interest topics from more than 1,800 general and academic periodicals. Includes full-text articles from more than 600 journals. Full-text coverage began in 1992. Updated monthly.

Marketing journals are not heavily indexed in this database, but **examples** of the few which are available full-text are: *Direct Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, and *Sales & Marketing Management*.

Internet Discussion Groups and Special Interest Groups as Sources of Secondary Data

A primary means of communicating with other professionals and special interest groups on the Internet is through newsgroups. With an Internet connection and newsreader software, you can visit any newsgroup supported by your service provider. If your service provider does not offer newsgroups or does not carry the group in which you are interested, you can find one of the publicly available newsgroup servers that does carry the group you'd like to read.

Newsgroups function much like bulletin boards for a particular topic or interest. A newsgroup is established to focus on a particular topic. Readers stop by that newsgroup to read messages left by other people, post responses to others' questions, and send rebuttals to comments with which they disagree. Generally, there is some management of

the messages to keep discussions within the topic area and to remove offensive material. However, readers of a newsgroup are free to discuss any issue and communicate with anyone in the world that visits that newsgroup. Images and data files can be exchanged in newsgroups, just as they can be exchanged via e-mail.

With over 250,000 newsgroups currently in existence and more being added every day, there is a newsgroup for nearly every hobby, profession, and lifestyle. Both Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer, as well as other browsers, come with newsgroup readers. If you do not already have a newsgroup reader, you can go to one of the search engines and search for one of the freeware or shareware newsgroup readers. These newsgroup readers function much like e-mail programs. To find a particular newsgroup:

- Connect to the Internet in your usual way.
- Open your newsreader program.
- Search for the topic of interest. Most newsreaders allow you to search the names of the newsgroups for any keywords or topics you are interested in. Some newsreaders, like Microsoft Internet Explorer, also allow you to search the brief descriptions that accompany most newsgroups.
- Select the newsgroup in which you are interested.
- Begin scanning messages. The title of each message generally gives an indication about the subject matter.

Newsgroup messages look like e-mail messages. They contain a subject title, author, and a message body. Unlike normal e-mail messages, newsgroup messages are threaded discussions. This means that any reply to a previous message will appear linked

to that message. Therefore, you can follow a discussion between two or more people by starting at the original message and following the links (or threads) to each successive reply. You can send images, sound files, and video clips attached to your message for anyone to download and examine.

DATABASES ON CD-ROM

A number of companies offer database packages on CD-ROM for personal computers. For example, the Claritas Corporation has created a package called Compass/Agency designed for advertising agencies and Compass/Newspapers for newspapers to do segmentation and demographic studies and mapping. Claritas recently added Arbitron ratings and data from Simmons Marketing Research Bureau and Mediamark on product usage to Compass/Agency. The Compass/Newspaper system contains more than 200 preformatted reports and maps. Users can also import data on subscribers, readership, or advertisers and display them as reports and maps, or export data into other standard software packages, such as spreadsheets, word processing, and graphics applications.

InfoUSA, a large secondary information provider, offers the following on CD-ROM:

BusinessUSA—Covers 10 million businesses in the U.S. Search by Company, SIC

Code, Major Industries, Employee Size, Sales Volume, Headquarters/Branch and much more! Package includes CD-ROM and printed directory.

HouseholdsUSA—When your business relies on home consumers, this CD-ROM

provides key information on 100 million U.S. households: names, addresses,

estimated home value, length of residence, homeowner vs. apartment dweller, estimated household income.

Physicians & Surgeons—Search by Name of Physician, Specialty or even by Computer Use. Listings include over 575,000 physicians in 105 specialties. Package includes CD-ROM and printed directory.

Big Businesses—Printed directory and CD-ROM include information on 177,000 top firms and 581,000 key executives. You can even search by Executive Name. Plus, you'll find fax numbers.

Manufacturers—All 612,000 manufacturers broken down by 6-digit SIC Code. Printed directory lists all manufacturers with 25 or more employees.

Small Business Owners—Over 4.5 million Businesses with fewer than 100 employees are listed on this CD-ROM and the compatible directory lists over one million successful entrepreneurs. Search by owner's or company name, business size or geographic area.

Geographic Information Systems

A **geographic information system (GIS)** typically includes a demographic database, digitized maps, a computer, and software that enables the user to add corporate data to the mix. Utilities, oil companies, large retailers and government agencies have long used these systems to display and analyze various types of data geographically. Today the technology accounts for several billion dollars a year in hardware, software, and consulting sales. The big change is that the cost of a GIS has fallen so dramatically in recent years that the GIS is now one of the hottest business information tools.

INTERNET FOCUS GROUPS

Perhaps the hottest controversy in qualitative research today is the rapidly growing popularity of online focus groups. Many market researchers, such as Greenfield Online, NFO Interactive, Harris Black International and others, believe that Internet focus groups can replace face-to-face focus groups, although they acknowledge online research has limitations. Others that are moving aggressively into online market research, such as Millward Brown International and Digital Marketing Services (DMS), are avoiding online focus groups.

Advantages of Online Focus Groups. Marketers that have used online focus groups, and market researchers conducting them, say benefits far outweigh limitations. Those benefits include no geographic barriers, much lower costs (about half as much), faster turn-around time and intangibles such as respondents being more open without an interviewer staring them in the face.

“I think [the panelists] were more definite about things they didn’t like [on a new Web site] than they’d be in front of a moderator,” said Lisa Crane, VP-sales and marketing for Universal Studios Online, which used the online focus group to test a redesigned site it’s developing for Captain Morgan Original Spiced Rum, a brand of its parent company Seagram Co. Rudy Nadilo, president and CEO of Greenfield Online, which conducted the online focus group for Universal, said they are meant “to complement, not replace” traditional panels.

Greenfield Product Manager Susan Roth said she received 2,700 responses within one day of sending out a so-called screener e-mail to approximately 6,000 users in Greenfield’s database of 500,000 Internet homes. She then formed two groups of eight

panelists each for the client, which needed to make sure respondents were over 21 and had certain drinking preferences.

During the online focus group, held in a private chat room on Greenfield's site, a moderator fields questions and answers on one side of a split screen, while clients can make suggestions—instantly by typing—on the left side of the screen. “I loved the way I was able to influence what the moderator said instantly,” said Ms. Crane. Greenfield charges about \$6,000 plus incentives for this type of two-group project. A conventional two-group package costs about \$10,000.

Not only are the costs for the focus groups less, but there are substantial travel savings for the client as well. Round trip airline tickets to distant cities, meals, hotels, and taxis are avoided. Clients merely log on in their own office or even at home to observe the research in progress.

Another advantage of online groups lies in getting the hard-to-reach target population. On-line, it's possible to access populations that are traditionally inaccessible due to time or professional constraints—groups such as physicians, lawyers, senior business executives, and other professionals. Changes are higher they will be available to participate, too, since they do not need to take time from their busy schedules to visit a focus group facility but, rather, can participate from the privacy of their own homes.

Online focus group advocates also claim that not seeing a focus group participant doesn't necessarily mean that an observer cannot sense emotion. Because it is not yet easily possible to see those you're talking to on-line, certain non-verbal cues (e.g., the way one is sitting, leaning, smirking, etc.) are sacrificed. Nevertheless, there are numerous non-verbal cues that occur in an on-line chat environment. These “emoticons,”

as they are called among on-line users, are text-based “pictures” that result from the use of punctuation marks which, in combination, appear to look like expression-bearing faces. In addition to emoticons, on-line focus group respondents tend to rely more on words and complete sentences (vs. hand movements or expressions in “real life”) to express their thoughts, and on expressing these thoughts in more concise ways—without depending on pauses and hesitations that occur during spoken communications.

Another advantage claimed for online focus groups is efficient moderator-client interaction. During the traditional focus group, the client observes the discussion from behind a one-way glass; communication with the moderator is impossible without interfering with the discussion. An on-line focus group, though, offers two-way interaction between the moderator and client. The remarkable opportunity for the client to interact directly with the moderator, if necessary, while the moderator conducts the group has become a necessity to operating a fully-effective focus group discussion. Rather than sneaking into the room with a note scribbled on a piece of paper, the client can address the moderator directly, clearly, efficiently, and without interrupting the flow of the group dynamic.

In traditional focus groups there are always the “natural talkers” who dominate the discussion, despite a good moderator’s attempt to equalize participant contributions. Similarly, there are others who are less comfortable voicing opinions in a group and who will express themselves more freely when not face-to-face with their peers. The on-line focus group has a built-in leveling effect in the sense that shy participants can express themselves as freely as more outgoing participants. A participant points out why he likes participating in on-line focus groups, explaining, “I can be honest without the face-to-

face peer pressure of focus groups,” and another offers, “I get to express my opinion without having to hear someone’s reaction.” At least in terms of honesty and willingness to offer genuine ideas and opinions, respondents tend to feel more comfortable participating from the privacy of their own homes.

In fact, the likelihood for distraction is lessened when one must focus on reading a computer screen than when one sits in a focus group room watching the moderator, listening to other respondents, thinking about their answers, wondering what they’ll say next, envisioning what’s going on behind the one-way mirror.

Occasionally, “natural talkers” in off-line focus groups can become domineering or obnoxious. The problem sometimes worsens when people aren’t sitting face-to-face. When Jeff Walkowski began moderating online focus groups, he wasn’t prepared for the “Animal House” behavior of the people involved. Women in a detergent focus group ganged up on each other; college students traded crude comments. “I didn’t realize people would sling mud at each other online,” said Mr. Walkowski, president of group moderator service QualCore.com, who’s moderated offline and online focus groups for clients such as American Honda Motor Co.’s Acura Division, PowerBar and Procter & Gamble Co. “They’d be more civil in a face-to-face environment.”

Then he found the Virtual Research Room, called Vrroom (www.vrroom.com), which has an instant ejection feature for unruly participants. He hasn’t used that feature yet, but likes to know it’s there if needed.

Disadvantages of Online Focus Groups. Critics say that the research community does itself an injustice by calling qualitative research sessions conducted over the Internet “focus groups.” The criticisms are:

- Group dynamics—One of the key reasons to use traditional focus groups is to benefit from the interactions between the group participants, as they can provide excellent insights. In cyberspace, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to create any real group dynamics, particularly when the participants are reading from computer screens rather than interacting verbally.
- Non-verbal inputs—Experienced moderators will use non-verbal inputs from the participants while moderating and analyzing sessions. It is not possible to duplicate the nonverbal input in an on-line environment.
- Client involvement—Many organizations use the focus group methodology because it gives client personnel an opportunity to experience some direct interface with consumers in an objective environment. Nothing can replace the impact of watching focus groups from behind the one-way mirror, no matter how good the videotapes, remote broadcast facilities, or reports written by moderators. With on-line focus groups, the client personnel only can monitor written responses on a computer screen.
- Security—When conducting focus groups, you know who is in the room, assuming appropriate screening has been conducted. With on-line groups, there is no way to be sure who is sitting at the computer. If you cannot see the person, how do you know who he or she really is?
- Attention to the topic—Another important benefit of the traditional focus group process is that the participants in the group understand that they are expected to stay in the room for the full two hours of the session and contribute to the discussion. It is very difficult for a participant in a well-

moderated focus group to do something that could distract him or her from the proceedings. However, in an on-line environment, the moderator never knows if the participants are watching TV, reading a book or eating dinner while the session is proceeding.

- Exposure to external stimuli—A key use of focus groups is to present advertising copy, new product concepts, prototypes or other stimuli to the participants in order to get their reactions. In an on-line chat situation, it is almost impossible to duplicate the live focus group environment relative to the participant exposure to external stimuli. As a result, you have to wonder whether the input received is as valuable as it would be in a live environment.
- Role and skill of the moderator—Most marketing professionals agree that the most important factor in the quality of traditional focus group research is the skill of the moderator. Experienced moderators have developed techniques that involve more than simply asking questions of participants. A good moderator understands ways to draw out quiet or shy participants, energize a slow group, and use innovative techniques that will delve a little deeper into the minds of the participants. The techniques available to the moderator sitting at the computer are much more limited due to the lack of face-to-face involvement with the participants.

Table Five summarizes the advantages of and disadvantages of traditional versus on-line focus groups.

Table Five

**Advantages and Disadvantages of On-Line Versus
Traditional Focus Groups**

Characteristics	Traditional Focus Group	On-Line Focus Group
Basic Cost	More Expensive	Cheaper
Participants	Participants are local due to travel time and expense.	Anyone in the world with a computer and modem.
Time Commitment	Approximately 3-1/2 –hour time commitment. Busy respondents less available.	No driving to facility, approximately 60-minute time commitment. Busy respondents more likely to be available.
Respondent Openness	Some respondents are intimidated in a face-to-face group setting.	Lack of face-to-face contact may lead to expressing true feelings in writing.
Group Dynamics	What one person says and does (gestures and expressions) leads to others reacting.	None according to critics.
Nonverbal communication	Can observe body language.	Cannot observe body language; participants can use emoticons to enhance communication.
Transcripts	Transcript time-consuming and expensive to obtain. Often not in complete sentences or thoughts.	Word-for-word transcripts available almost immediately. Usually in complete sentences/thoughts.
Respondent Recruiting	Difficult to recruit certain types of respondents, i.e., physicians, top managers.	Easier to obtain all types of respondents.
Client Travel Costs	Can be very expensive when going to several cities for one or two days each.	None.
Communication with moderator	Observers sent notes into focus group room.	Can communicate privately with a split screen.
Respondent Security	Participant is accurately identified.	More difficult to be certain who is participating
Attention to Topic	Can observe respondents attentiveness.	Respondent may be engaged in other activities.
Client involvement	Client can observe “flesh-and-blood” consumers interacting.	Client can read transcripts.
Exposure to external stimuli	Can show package designs, advertising copy, product prototypes with demonstrations.	Currently only limited ability to show stimuli.

THE INTERNET HAS CHANGED SURVEY RESEARCH

Survey research has changed forever due to the technology of the Internet. From virtually no surveys being conducted on the Web a few years back, it is now projected that by 2005 on-line research will account for 50 percent of all marketing research revenue—over \$3 billion. The reason for this phenomenal growth is straightforward—the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

Advantages of Internet Surveys

Most companies today face shorter product life cycles, increased competition, and a rapidly changing business environment. Management decision-makers are having to make rapid-fire decisions in this complex world of business. Internet research can help by providing timely decision-making information. The specific advantages of Internet surveys include:

- **Rapid Deployment, Real Time Reporting** – Internet surveys can be broadcast to thousands of potential respondents simultaneously. Respondents complete surveys simultaneously, then results are tabulated and posted for corporate clients to view as the returns arrive. The result: Internet surveys results can be in the decision maker's hands in significantly less time than traditional surveys.
- **Dramatically Reduced Costs** – Electronic methods can cut costs by 25% to 40% and provide results as fast as half the time it takes to do traditional telephone surveys. Data-collection costs account for a large proportion of any traditional market research budget. Telephone surveys are labor-intensive efforts incurring training, telecommunications and management costs. Electronic methods eliminate these completely. While costs for traditional survey techniques rise proportionally with the

number of interviews desired, electronic solicitations can grow in volume with little increase in project costs.

- **Readily Personalized** – Internet surveys can be highly personalized for greater relevance to each respondent’s own situation, thus speeding the response process. Respondents enjoy answering only pertinent questions, being able to pause the resume the survey as needed, having the ability to see previous responses and correct inconsistencies.
- **Ease and Convenience Encourage Respondent Participation** – Busy respondents may be growing increasingly intolerant of “snail mail” or telephone-based surveys. Internet surveys take half the time to complete that phone interviews do, can be accomplished at the respondent’s convenience (after work hours) and are much more stimulating and engaging. Graphics, interactivity, links to incentive sites and real-time summary reports make the interview enjoyable. The result? Much higher response rates.
- **Contact the Hard-to-Reach** – Certain groups are among the most surveyed on the planet and the most difficult to reach (doctors, high-income professionals, CIOs in Global 2000 firms). Many of these groups are well represented online. Internet surveys provide convenient anytime/anywhere access that makes it easy for busy professionals to participate.
- **Simplified and Enhanced Panel Management** – Internet panels are electronic communities (large or small; syndicated or proprietary) of customers, potential customers, partners, employees linked via the Internet that are committed to providing feedback and counsel to research firms and their clients. Internet panels

can be built and maintained in a fraction of the cost and time required with traditional panels. Once a panel is created, and a questionnaire is finalized, surveys can be deployed, data collected, and top level results reported within days.

A sophisticated database tracks panelist profile data and survey responses, facilitating longitudinal studies and data mining to yield insights into attitudes and behavior over time and across segments. Response rates are higher, typically 30-60%, because respondents have agreed in advance to participate in the survey. Participants tend to provide more detailed and thoughtful answers than in traditional surveys as they don't have to provide demographic and technographic information (it's already been captured), and because they become engaged in the panel community over time.

- **Profitability for Research Firms** – Internet surveys can be very profitable.

Gordon Black, CEO of Harris Interactive, says profit margins can go as high as 90 percent.

Internet panels are already huge. Harris Black has a database of 4 million Internet users. By agreeing to take part in periodic Harris poll on-line surveys, subjects are offered the chance to win various prizes and cash awards. For each survey, the company sends e-mail to target individuals inviting them to visit the Harris poll website and answer questions. Target individuals are given unique passwords to ensure that they respond to the survey one time only. The company hopes to have 6 million potential respondents in its database by the end of 2001. NFO Interactive, NPD Online and Decision Analyst also have large Internet panels. For example, Decision Analyst has over one million in its American Consumer Opinion Online

panel. The firm also has a technology panel of scientists, engineers, and information technology professionals online, a physicians panel and a building contractors panel.

All of these online panels are worldwide.

Disadvantages of Internet Surveys

Despite the advantages of Internet surveys, there are still drawbacks and detractors. The most common complaint is that Internet users are not representative of the population as a whole. One retort, of course, is that most managers aren't interested in the population as a whole. Also, now over 45 percent of the population uses the Internet at home, work, school, or other locations.

Denis Gonier, president of Digital Marketing Services (DMS), a subsidiary of America Online (AOL), offers the following comparison in Table Six of the U.S. Census data, AOL's profile and the demographics of Opinion Place, a opt-in survey research site on AOL managed by DMS. Note that AOL's profile is not that different from the U.S. Census. And Opinion Place is becoming more like AOL and the U.S. Census. More importantly, DMS developed an extensive body of comparability work between Opinion Place results and the same survey administered by mall intercept or telephone. According to Gonier, the comparability study documented the consistent business direction finding. In other words, the same strategies were developed using data from mall intercept or telephone surveys versus data from the Opinion Place.

Table Six

**A Demographic Comparison Between U.S. Census Data,
American On Line Users, and Participants
in the Opinion Place**

	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>AOL</u>	<u>OP</u>
Gender			
• Male	48%	48%	46%
• Female	52	52	54
Age			
• 18-24	12%	19%	12%
• 25-34	20	25	25
• 35-44	21	28	28
• 45-54	15	19	20
• 55+	32	9	11
Income			
• Less Than \$50K	71%	42%	56%
• More Than \$50K	29	58	44
Marital Status			
• Married	61%	69%	57%
Children in HH			
• Yes	35%	53%	45%

Source: Dennis Gonier, "The Research Emperor Gets New Clothes," *CASRO Marketing Research Journal* (1999), p. 111.

A second problem is security on the Internet. Users today are quite understandably worried about privacy issues. This fear has been fueled by sensational media accounts of “cyberstalkers” and con artists who prey on Internet users. A solution to the security issue already exists in the form of SSL (secure socket layer) technology. Most responsible organizations collecting sensitive information over the Internet use this technology. The major problem is that consumers do not understand that this type of 128-bit encryption provides an extremely high level of security for all their sensitive information. It is up to the industry to communicate this fact to potential users.

A third problem is when an unrestricted Internet sample is set up on the Internet. This means anyone who wishes to complete the questionnaire can do so. It is fully self-selecting and probably representative of no one except Web surfers. The problem gets worse if the same Internet user can access the questionnaire over and over. For example, *InfoWorld*, a computer user magazine, decided to conduct its Readers Choice survey for the first time on the Internet. The results were so skewed by repeat voting for one product that the entire survey was publicly abandoned and the editor asked for readers’ help to avoid the problem again. All responsible organizations conducting surveys over the Internet easily guard against this problem by providing unique passwords to those individuals they invite to participate. These passwords permit one-time access to the survey.

Internet Samples

Internet samples are classified as unrestricted, screened, or recruited. We discussed unrestricted samples above. Screened Internet samples adjust for the unrepresentativeness of the self-selected respondents by imposing quotas based on some

desired sample characteristics. These are often demographic characteristics, such as gender, income, and geographic region; or product-related criteria, such as past purchase behavior, job responsibilities, or current product use. The applications for screened samples are generally similar to those for unrestricted samples.

Screened sample questionnaires typically use a branching or skip pattern for asking screening questions to determine whether or not the full questionnaire should be presented to respondents. Some Web survey systems can make immediate market segment calculations that assign a respondent to a particular segment based on screening questions, then select the appropriate questionnaire to match the respondent's segment.

Alternatively, some Internet research providers maintain a "panel house" that recruits respondents who fill out a preliminary classification questionnaire. This information is used to classify respondents into demographic segments. Clients specify the desired segments, and the respondents who match the desired demographics are permitted to fill out the questionnaires of all clients who specify that segment.

Recruited Internet samples are used for target populations in surveys that require more control over the makeup of the sample. Respondents are recruited by telephone, mail, e-mail, or in person. After qualification, they are sent the questionnaire by e-mail or are directed to a website that contains a link to the questionnaire. At websites, passwords are normally used to restrict access to the questionnaire only to recruited sample members. Since the makeup of the sample is known, completions can be monitored and, to improve the participation rate, follow-up messages can be sent to those who have not completed the questionnaire.

Recruited samples are ideal in applications that already have a database from which to recruit the sample. For example, a good application would be a survey that used a customer database to recruit respondents for a purchaser satisfaction study.

Recruiting Sources for Online Surveys

Developing a good questionnaire is only half the battle in conducting Internet surveys. The researcher must also have respondents. Most of the choices for recruiting respondents have been alluded to above. We would like, however, to discuss these in more depth. Choices include: recruited panels, opt-in e-mail list rentals, numerous Web-based incentive marketing programs (some already discussed Chapter 4), random intercepts of Web site visitors, and Web sites that have collected personal information about their visitors. There are advantages and disadvantages of each as discussed below.

Recruited panels. In the early days of Internet recruiting, panels were created using Web-based advertising, or postings, that offered compensation for participation in on-line studies. This method allowed a market research firm to build large pools of individuals available to respond quickly to the demands of on-line market research.

It soon proved that these specially constructed panels had certain drawbacks. Advertising to recruit the panel and a system to collect, store, and update this information were unavoidable expenses. To keep the panel members satisfied, it was essential to provide them with enough studies, or they were likely to drop out of the program. Many panels experienced rapid growth, but also massive churn rates, as unmotivated prospective respondents moved on to other panels for compensation, or changed e-mail addresses. Some recruited panelists were “professional” survey takers, and would supply

whatever information they thought would make them more attractive for studies.

Personal Web sites and newsletters promoted these panels as a way to earn easy money.

To prevent oversensitizing panel members, it became important to limit the number or frequency of studies, even if it resulted in higher attrition. The use of contests offering cash awards or prizes instead of paying for a completed study helped establish a fixed incentive cost for a study. However, this reduced the numbers of people willing to participate for a chance to earn something instead of the instant gratification for their time invested.

A number of panels created specifically for market research studies exist. It is important to have a good understanding of how often they update member data, remove duplicate listings, and how it is validated for accuracy of supplied information.

Opt-in List Rental. As the Internet population increased, a new opportunity for recruiting emerged with widespread use of e-mail. E-mail is a way to reach the on-line user, but unsolicited e-mail, or spam, has proved to be a very negative method of recruiting. The acceptable alternative method to reach on-line users is opt-in lists of e-mail users who sign up for various Web-based services and agree to receive selective e-mails from the provider as they register. A number of highly targeted opt-in e-mail lists are available which can provide individuals willing to participate in on-line studies. The cost to rent the list adds to the basic costs of recruiting, and may increase the time required for both screening and validation. Due to the privacy agreements associated with these lists, there are usually strict limitations on their usage, and access to personal information is restricted.

A researcher planning to use such a list for recruiting should investigate the company carefully, find out how long they have been doing this, and verify they are using only opt-in individuals.

Opt-in Panels. The emergence of Internet-based loyalty marketing or incentive programs (see Chapter 4) has resulted in large databases that are rich in personal information making it easy to locate highly targeted individuals. In these programs, users earn points, frequent flier mileage, credits, and other types of Internet currency by visiting Web sites, reading targeted e-mails, and purchasing from participating sponsors. These rapidly growing, self-sustaining programs featuring built-in incentive programs are potential sources of highly targeted on-line users. Incentives for market research study participation can provide members with additional point-earning opportunities, and a new revenue stream for the programs. Many of these individuals would be difficult and time-consuming to recruit using other methods.

It is important to determine how reliable these database are, and how fast providers can respond for studies requiring fast turnaround. There is usually a set-up charge to use the panel, and the conversion rate for dollars to incentive points will vary widely. Another consideration is the time and effort required to establish the relationship and negotiate terms for use in market research studies. It is also more complicated to conduct longitudinal studies (same respondents are re-interviewed over time) unless the researcher is able to capture personal information from the respondent.

Random Web Site Intercepts. A valuable way to provide research from existing Web site traffic evolved with the use of random intercept banners inviting visitors to participate in surveys. These banners pop up for the user who visits the site in a preset

random pattern. This banner asks if the visitor would like to participate in a short survey. If they accept, they are linked to a page where the user fills out screening questions that can be used to identify and qualify potential respondents from existing Web site traffic. The survey has to be short since most people will not be motivated to participate without compensation. An exception to this is when the individual feels strongly enough about the subject and wants to provide their input. A number of methods exist for capturing this information on an ongoing basis for a variety of applications.

This may not be an effective way to recruit certain types of studies. Unless the site traffic is sufficient, it may not be possible to determine the time required to locate adequate sample sizes. It differs from placing an ongoing invitation on the site to participate in a survey, where there is not random sampling. It is also important to determine where the visitors are in a site when presenting the banner, as people come to the Web site for a variety of reasons that may be important in the design of the study.

One recent study using banner ads on Yahoo and several other search engines generated approximately 63,000 exposures. The ads posed two different appeals. The first was an intrinsic appeal (“Your opportunity to contribute to an important study”) and the second was extrinsic (“Your opportunity to win valuable prizes”). On all four servers the intrinsic appeal had a higher “click through” rate to the questionnaire than the extrinsic ad. If this could be generalized to the entire Internet population, marketing researchers could save a lot of money in prizes and incentives. However, both types of banner ads produced extremely low “click through” rates. The intrinsic appeal rate was .28% and .20 “click-through” for the extrinsic appeal. Given the cost of banner ads, either approach can be an expensive way to generate a sample.

Web Data Capture of Visitors. As Web sites grow more sophisticated and valuable for a company, an increasingly important source for individuals to study is their site's visitors. These visitors can be organized and utilized to study a variety of issues including customer service, consumer needs, customer satisfaction, proposed site redesign and developments, core customer concerns, and a multitude of others. Methods exist that will help a Web site better serve its visitors while at the same time building a variety of prospective panels for future studies. These panels will grow ever more important for companies to increase their understanding of these customers in the digital age.

Creating Internet Questionnaires

By far the simplest way to create Internet surveys are to use a survey design Web site such as WebSurveyor or to use Internet survey research software such as Survey Assistant, The Survey System, Stat Pac, Inquisite, and others.

In order to achieve a good response to your survey, it needs to load as quickly as possible. People won't wait; they'll move on to another Web site. Graphics increase the time it takes the survey to load. Although it's tempting to make your backgrounds beautiful, all those graphics can be a problem. What will the background and font look like on different browsers and at different font sizes? Best to choose something that will look good and load quickly no matter what kind of computer set-up the respondent has.

“Our own reaction at the beginning was to design a fairly fancy questionnaire,” says Bob Tortora, chief methodologist at The Gallup Organization. “You're much better off using a very plain questionnaire—something that looks like a mail questionnaire. When you start getting fancy, you start slowing down transmission times.”

Make it easy to respond as well. It's a lot easier to click on a response than it is to type one in. Match the entry mechanism to the question. Use buttons or drop-down menus for a single response, check boxes for multiple answers. It's useful to include an option for "other" responses, but few people will use it, so it needs to be supplemental, not part of your core data.

Buttons are best with five or fewer answers to choose from. More than that, and a drop-down menu is easier to use. For really lengthy lists with short identifiers, such as the 50 states, it's wise to allow respondents the option of typing in the two-letter abbreviation rather than forcing them to scroll through the list all the way down to Wyoming.

Make sure you're aware of any default answers (No Opinion, Don't Know, None of the Above). A common mistake for inexperienced Internet survey programmers is to unintentionally have the first response in a list become the default answer. This can seriously skew the results. It isn't a problem if you use survey design software that avoids such errors automatically, but if you're doing the programming yourself, you'll need to test for this on Internet surveys.

The Interactive Marketing Research Organization

In 2000, a new organization was formed entitled the **Interactive Marketing Research Organization (IMRO)**. The first objective of IMRO is to be "a confederation of world leaders among firms involved in new technology marketing research, to lead in the development, dissemination and implementation of interactive marketing research concepts, practice and information." Representatives from 13 Internet marketing research suppliers including Modalis Research Technologies, Greenfield Online, Market

Facts, NPD Online, NFO Interactive and Cyber Dialogue, along with eight client companies, including Dell Computer, IBM, Intel and Time Warner, helped in founding the new organization.

IMRO's initial efforts will focus on discussing spamming for respondents and misuse of personal data. The organization expects to host conferences, debates, and workshops. It is also planning a quarterly newsletter and eventually a journal.

Contact the Hard-to-Reach

Certain groups are among the most surveyed on the planet and the most difficult to reach (doctors, high-income professionals, top management in Global 2000 firms). Many of these groups are well represented online. Internet surveys provide convenient anytime/anywhere access that makes it easy for busy professionals to participate.

The rapid growth of Internet survey research is the result of mushrooming number of Americans online. The current estimate is approximately 40 percent. This, in turn, has meant that researchers are finding online and offline research results are the same. For example, America OnLine's (AOL) Digital Marketing Services (DMS), an online research organization, has done a number of surveys with both online and offline samples. DMS's clients include IBM, Eastman Kodak, and Procter and Gamble. In well over 100 side-by-side comparisons of online and offline studies, both techniques led clients to the same business decisions. The guidance one gets from both sets of data was the same.

Other Uses of the Internet by Marketing Researchers

Conducting surveys is not all of the Internet revolution in marketing research. The management of the research process and the dissemination of information have also

been greatly enhanced by the Internet. Several key areas that have been impacted by the Internet are:

- The virtual replacement of libraries and various printed materials as sources of information. On their website, the Bureau of Census (www.census.gov) indicates that they plan to gradually make the Internet the major means of distributing census data. The same is true for a number of other government agencies. Information is available from countless databases both governmental and nongovernmental on the user's desktop or notebook PC almost instantaneously.
- The distribution of requests for proposals (RFPs) and proposals. Companies can now quickly and efficiently send RFPs to a select email list of research suppliers. In turn, research suppliers can develop proposals and email them back to clients. A process that used to take days using snail mail now occurs in a matter of hours.
- Collaboration between the client and the research supplier in the management of a research project. A researcher and client might both be looking at a proposal, RFP, report, some type of statistical analysis, etc. at the same time on their computer screens while discussing it over the telephone. This is very powerful and efficient. Changes in the sample size, quotas, and other aspects of the research plan can be discussed and made immediately.
- Data management and on-line analysis. Clients can access their survey via the research supplier's secure website and monitor the data gathering in real time. The client can use sophisticated tools to actually do data analysis as the survey develops. This real time analysis may result in changes in the questionnaire,

sample size, or the types of respondents being interviewed. The research supplier and the client become partners in “just-in-time” marketing research!

- Publishing and distribution of reports. Reports can be published to the Web directly from programs such as PowerPoint and all the latest versions of leading word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software packages. This means that results are available to appropriate managers worldwide on an almost instantaneous basis. Reports can be searched for content of interest using the same Web browser used to view the report.
- Oral presentations of marketing research surveys can be viewed by widely scattered audiences. By placing oral presentations on password protected websites, managers throughout the world can see and hear the actual client presentations. This saves time and money by avoiding the need for the managers to travel to a central meeting site.