

10 TIPS FOR SAVING MONEY ON FOCUS GROUPS



Some marketers seem to think that the best reasons for conducting focus groups is that they are fast and cheap. So is it any wonder that they have sticker shock when they learn how much their project will cost and how long it will take to do it right? Those types of misconceptions can lead to marketers not conducting marketing research at all, which ironically, can have a much bigger cost in terms of poor decisions or lost opportunities.

Whether these perceptions are correct or not, marketing researchers still have to address them and there are ways to save money in conducting focus groups. Here are ten tips that may help you better manage your research budget:

- 1. SAVE MONEY ON FOOD.** This may sound trivial, but focus group facilities will tell you that client food often goes to waste. Part of the cost comes in trying to plan for and please a diverse group of observers. Ten people tell you they are coming and only two show for the groups. Moreover, one of those is a vegetarian. The meal you ordered is completely wasted. Next time, order pizza! Or better yet, have everyone order their own take-out meals, in the interest of getting exactly what they want and accommodating their dietary requirements. It is also very common for colleagues to eat together at a restaurant after the group, so maybe you just need snacks or a fruit or veggie tray. All of these suggestions minimize the food tab and keep the expense out of the marketing research budget.
- 2. DON'T TRAVEL.** In the post-9/11 era, travel is more difficult, more uncertain, and more expensive than ever. Save everyone the hassle by arranging for video-streaming of your groups. If you look at the costs of a couple people taking the time away from their jobs to travel to the groups, there is simply no comparison. Take advantage of this substantial time- and money-saver, and you'll be a hero.
- 3. RECRUIT FEWER BUT BETTER (#1).** Don't limit the number of respondents in your group to the point where you jeopardize information quality. However, if you can get away with 8 respondents instead of 10 or 12, you can shave costs a bit – especially if you are doing multiple groups. Regardless of the number of respondents you have, make sure that each and every one counts. Include a security question in your screener. Typically, security screeners were included to eliminate anyone who worked in your industry, in marketing research or advertising. Nowadays, you need to think a little more creatively about whom you want to avoid recruiting. For example, if you're looking for women's clothing shoppers, you might want to exclude anyone who works for a women's clothing retailer or their family. (Those employee discounts are hard to argue with and probably make their shopping habits less than typical!) Similarly, what about people who use your competitor's products? Will they contribute to the discussion or detract from it? Better to think about these things before you begin recruiting.
- 4. RECRUIT FEWER BUT BETTER (#2).** And while we are on the subject of recruiting, is there anything worse than a focus group participant with nothing to say? You can test how well-spoken a participant is likely to be by including an open-ended question in the screener that asks the potential participant to talk about a subject related to the topic of the focus groups. Imagine you are conducting a parents group to screen a new video game concept targeted at kids. You might ask recruits to talk about whether videogames are good or bad for kids and how they handle their kids' requests to play videogames. You might even get some good information!

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5. **SKIP THE TOPLINE REPORT.** Reports cost money, so if you can minimize the amount of reporting you need, you will save money. However, don't try to save money by eliminating all reporting! You need an objective overview of the group discussion. Moreover, it is much better to have a final report than to let everyone just remember what they heard on their own.
6. **CONSIDER SMALLER OR SUBURBAN MARKETS.** Holding your focus group in the heart of large urban markets may be preferred by your colleagues. But you can save money on travel expenses, hotels, food and even parking by looking into smaller urban and suburban locations. If all of your respondents have to be reimbursed for parking, that can add up!
7. **SKIP THE VIDEO.** (Or get only the video that is standard in the facility.) How often have you ever gone back to review the videos of earlier groups? Videotaping is an expense you can avoid if you don't really need it for reporting or other purposes. No one wants to be in the position of wishing you had videotaped a group, so think carefully about this because once the group is done that opportunity is lost forever. But this might be an expense you can forgo.
8. **FOCUS.** They are called focus groups for a reason. It's because you are focusing on a single topic. So how long will it take to thoroughly cover your research objectives – and only your research objectives? Conducting 1.5-hour groups instead of 2-hour groups can save on incentives, and may also let you complete more groups per day to minimize facility charges. So trim your moderator's guide ruthlessly and avoid those "as long as we've got them here" questions.
9. **AVOID LAST MINUTE CHANGES AND RUSH ORDERS.** Be thorough and detail oriented and give yourself enough time to think through the groups and what you are trying to accomplish. Rushing the project leads to forgotten details and last minute changes. And that ends up costing you money!
10. **RIGHT-SIZE THE PROJECT.** How many groups do you need? And how many geographies do you need to cover? The right-sized project includes the fewest groups in the fewest cities to meet the research objectives. Think hard about adding more groups and more locations, because this is without a doubt the biggest cost you can incur.



By strictly adhering to your research objectives, you can avoid cost over-runs and unnecessary expenses. Moreover, brainstorm with your moderator about the appropriate design for the project. Dig into the fine print of your moderator's proposal to find places where you can save. And be creative! Focus groups may never be cheap, but the insight and information they deliver can be priceless.

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