

DOING MARKET RESEARCH BY TALKING TO PEOPLE:

A BOOTSTRAPPER'S GUIDE

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WHAT IS “BOOTSTRAP MARKETING”?

“Bootstrap marketing” refers to any systematic marketing approach that is feasible for enterprises with extremely limited resources of time, money, and technical expertise. It is based on the saying, “He pulled himself up by his bootstraps”, a widely-known image in the 1800’s, when men wore boots that served as a piece of transportation equipment, equally useful for walking long distances or for riding horses. Clearly, a horse could take a person further, faster, than would walking.

Wealthy individuals had valets or coachmen to assist them in mounting a horse or climbing into a carriage. Others with less resources would hoist themselves onto a horse or atop a wagon by leveraging the straps on their boots, together with the harness and stirrups, in order to swing a leg over the side and gain balance. This required energy, strength, and individual effort.

The phrase “he pulled himself up by his bootstraps” evolved to refer to a situation in which a person completed an activity, such as mounting a horse, by applying energy, strength, and individual initiative, rather than either relying on the support and assistance of others to “get a leg up”, or choosing the less ambitious alternative of simply walking. A bootstrap marketer uses intelligence and know-how to muster the energy, strength, and individual initiative to employ proven marketing techniques that will enable the enterprise to go faster and further than it possibly could otherwise.

Thus, a bootstrap marketer thinks like the best, even if he spends like the smallest.

This note provides guidelines to help you think like a bootstrapper. It will teach you how to investigate your market by doing research most efficiently, and how to ensure that the results of this research are successful.

WHY DOES A BOOTSTRAPPER NEED MARKET RESEARCH?

Good market research can help increase your venture's chances of success by:

- **Giving your enterprise credibility**, because you learn what you know, and what you don't know. Entrepreneurs can't be omniscient, but the marketplace expects them to understand what answers are needed, and to learn as much critical information as possible.
- **Giving you credibility** because your honesty and consistency of purpose and approach are more important to an investor than the actual product or service. Investors back individuals first, ideas second.
- **Giving your products or services** credibility because future customers will recognize, intuitively that the choices you've made are based on their wants and desires.

DOING MARKET RESEARCH BY TALKING TO PEOPLE

Methods of doing market research range from informal interviews to complex simulation experiments. To select a market research method that's right for an entrepreneur, ask:

- Will this method be **quick**? Can I learn what I need to know in a few days or weeks?
- Will this method be **inexpensive** or free? Can I successfully complete this research on a limited or non-existent budget?

Ten tips to conduct market research for free

1. Use free databases, such as industry or census lists, to select respondents.
 2. Call 800#'s or use email to reach company executives around the country.
 3. Obtain media kits, which are free, from important trade publications. Ask the sales representative to include back issues and annual directories.
 4. Hold focus groups outdoors or in a quiet part of an indoor public space, such as a mall or hotel lobby.
 5. Find out when experts will be in your area and meet with them then.
 6. Hand out surveys where groups of respondents congregate, such as a college, company cafeteria, shopping center (enlist friendly store managers to allow you inside), trade show, or industry conference.
 7. Contact local college career centers to find student interns to assist you.
 8. Suggest a trade: you'll share your findings if a company/organization/group of individuals will provide space, supplies, or resources.
 9. Ask industry experts, "What would you do to find out this information if you had just \$100 to spend?"
 10. Ask a graduate student in psychology, anthropology, or communications to serve as your focus group moderator, rather than hiring a firm.
- Will this method deliver **useful information**? Will the information be of sufficiently high quality and detail to enable me to make important operating decisions? Here are six ways to ensure that your market research tells you the truth:

Go where the data leads you.

Don't second-guess market responses -- even if they are not what you had hoped. The best research is the most truthful, clear description of what you've learned.

Choose a logical method of collecting data, one that is easily explained to potential clients and investors alike.

Remember that "KISS" (Keep it simple, stupid), applies here. You should be able to explain your approach in a sentence: "I spoke with 20 of the largest architectural firms in the country, as listed by the Architects' Council of America according to average project size, in order to learn what kinds of software drafting tools they'd like to have."

3. Select an appropriate number of respondents. . .

To continue with the architect example, talking to the top 20 firms makes sense if their revenues collectively represent a large portion of the marketplace, if their profile is representative of the industry, or if they are likely to be early adopters of new products.

4. . . . And query them for an appropriate level of response detail.

Many entrepreneurs miss their biggest opportunity to gather great information -- even when they have reached the right person -- because their questions are not pitched at the right level of specificity? Continuing the example, if you were developing a new software product for architecture firms, and had obtained interviews with managing partners at 20 top firms, what ONE question could ensure that your product would find a receptive audience? Choose one of the following:

- "What kind of software do you need?"
(Much too vague -- it is unlikely that you'll get a sufficiently detailed answer to inform your marketing efforts)
- "Should the instruction manual be 40 pages long in 4-color print, or would a shorter manual with a long appendix be better?"
(Much too specific -- it is unlikely that a respondent will have thought much about individual features)
- "If you could change one thing about your drafting software, what would it be?"
(Ideal question! -- it focuses the respondent on what benefit is most important and most lacking).

1. Know where possible sources of bias lie and their potential effects. Since you can't remove all bias, decide which types you can best live with, and be prepared to explain why to investors, clients, or colleagues.

For example, "Since architectural partners are really busy, we had to call the top 50 firms in order to get 20 interviews. It's possible that the ones we didn't reach might need the software more, since it would help manage their project time. So, our findings about demand for the product may be skewed a little conservatively."

2. Don't confuse collecting data with pitching your idea.

You wear two marketing hats -- researcher and salesperson. It's human nature to reply as we think we are expected to, so the answers to your questions will differ quite a bit if you are in selling mode rather than inquiring mode. For example, consider how you would answer the following:

- "Now that you've seen the demonstration, which of these three types of software do you like most? Why?"
- "Now that you've seen our demonstration, what do you like most about our new product? Why?"

Perhaps the scariest moment in doing your own market research is the pause before hearing a respondent's true answer to a neutral question. But no doubt that the scariest moment for entrepreneurs overall is the pause before hearing the market's response to their new product introduction. Wouldn't you rather know the truth sooner -- positive or negative? Two market research methods that bootstrappers can use which meet these criteria are expert interviews and focus groups.

I. Expert Interviews

Expert interviews are a series of in-depth individual discussions with people who are very knowledgeable about a particular field or marketplace. An expert can be anybody from the editor of an important trade journal to a retailer whose stores cater to an important consumer base. When Laura Groppe started Girl Games, an interactive software company that develops and markets computer games for girls, she spoke with attendees of computer games trade shows to learn first, whether there was a market need, and second, what criteria she needed to succeed. According to Ms. Groppe, "I learned how people in the industry think, and what I could do differently to succeed."

Selection

The first step in doing expert interviews is deciding which experts to select! Start by brainstorming a list of the top 30 people from whom you'd most like to learn more. Consider people from the following list of possibilities:

- Editors, journalists, publishers of trade periodicals and websites.
- Bankers, backers, angels, investors for similar ventures.
- Financial and stock analysts who follow the marketplace.
- Lawyers and accountants working with similar industries.
- Heads of trade associations, consumer interest groups, professional networks, collectors' groups, or specialty clubs.
- Suppliers and distributors to your marketplace.
- Major buyers or retailers of products or services similar to your own.
- Well-known, often-quoted, or very vocal consumers or end users.
- Consultants, advisors, researchers to the field.
- Entrepreneurs from a similar field (currently working or retired).
- Government officials covering your industry or the small business area.

- Competitors, either large or small, whose business you admire.
- Inventors, engineers, designers whose work built the market.

Next, narrow down the list to under a dozen names using the following guidelines:

1. Will this person provide me with information about the field that I couldn't get from published sources (print, Internet, or multimedia)?
2. Will this person's background, credentials, or expertise render his opinions credible to my colleagues, my investors, and me?
3. Will this person help me to think more clearly about the decisions that I need to make?
4. Will this person be able to introduce me to other significant players in this marketplace, if she chooses to do so? Will her introduction open doors for me as I learn further about this field?

If you respond "Yes" to all four questions, put that name on a priority list to interview. Develop a database to track your progress in speaking with and learning from each expert. Many entrepreneurs have found keeping a journal to be helpful. Since a journal is arranged chronologically, it can provide an ongoing guide to your progress and questions at each stage of inquiry. Collect phone and fax numbers and addresses for each expert on your list.

Gaining an Introduction

Decide whether each person on the list will respond most positively to a phone call, letter, fax, or email. Make your initial contact accordingly. In some cases this will be a "cold call". Since many entrepreneurs find "cold calling" to be a daunting prospect, here are ten steps to transform cold calling into a pleasurable, successful, market research activity.

THE FOOLPROOF GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL COLD CALLING for INFORMATION

Step One: Choose two names from your priority list each day.

Step Two: Tell yourself that your goal is to speak with just one of the persons. The other name is simply a backup.

Step Three: Remind yourself why this person is on your priority list. Write down the Answer. In one sentence, what do you hope to learn from speaking with this individual? Write down this one sentence.

Step Four: Now, take a deep breath, and tell yourself the following: "This person's phone number is available because she is willing to talk to people interested in her industry. I am one of those people. This person will be happy to speak with me for at least one, and probably more, of the following reasons:

- I am a potential industry contact, and she may want to call on me in the future;
- She's clearly very involved and knowledgeable. Like most people, she's probably willing to talk about this topic because it's interesting to her.
- When I tell her that I consider her an expert, she will be flattered. When I tell her that I am a newcomer, she will want to be helpful in introducing me to her field.
- She'll want to communicate her point of view on a controversial or important topic to as many people as possible, in order to build industry support for her position.
- She's got a free minute or two and figures that talking to me now is easier than trying to avoid me or delay speaking with me in the future.

Step Five: Look at the above list again, and say it out loud to yourself at least three times.

Step Six: Think of cold calling in terms of a batting average: No baseball player gets a hit every time at bat. Instead, it's consistency over time that matters. The same is true for cold calling. **DO NOT EXPECT 100% SUCCESS!! DO NOT EXPECT 50% SUCCESS!!** Instead, when calling for information, try for 1 out of 3. Tell yourself, "If one person out of three individuals on my list will speak to me, I'm doing great. .333 is an outstanding batting average for major leaguers, and I'm new to this game!" This is the truth! What's important is to keep up the volume of attempts.

Step Seven: Pick up the phone, and place the call. While the phone is ringing, review your two sentences from #3 above. One of four possibilities will now occur:

- There will be no answer or a wrong number recording;
- A voicemail message will come on;
- An assistant, secretary, or colleague will answer the phone;
- Your target expert will answer the phone.

Step Eight: Here's what you do for each possibility:

B) No answer or wrong number: Make a note to find another way to reach the person (new number, email, fax, US mail)

C) Voicemail message: In a clear, confident, relaxed voice, say:

"Hello. This is George Jetson. I'm calling because I {*saw your name in Chewing Gum Weekly.*} and I'm starting a business to {*produce a new kind of gum.*}. Since you're an expert, I was hoping to take a few minutes of your time and ask for some advice about the {*gum*}business. I'll call back {*tomorrow at 4 pm*} to try and set a phone appointment, since I don't want to take up your time with more voicemail messages. If you want to contact me to suggest a good time to talk, my phone # is {(617) 111-4444} and my email is jetson@aol.com. Thanks, and I really appreciate your help.

The bracketed portions of this speech will vary depending on your particular situation. Do not vary the other parts of the message. Saying this should take approximately 30 seconds. Write out your version of the speech in advance and practice saying it to friends over the phone. If someone other than the expert answers, modify the speech as indicated:

“Hello. This is George Jetson. I’m {*trying to reach William Wrigley*} because I {*saw {his} name in Chewing Gum Weekly, and I’m starting a business to produce a new kind of gum..*} Since {*Mr. Wrigley is*} an expert, I was hoping to take a few minutes of his time and ask for some advice about the {*gum*} business. {*What would be a better time to reach Mr. Wrigley or to try and set a phone appointment?*}. (Wait for response. If the person is willing to take a message, say, My phone # is {(617) 111-4444} and my email is jetson@aol.com. Can you also let {*Mr. Wrigley*} know that I’m happy to try reaching him again if I don’t hear from him in a few days? I don’t want to put him to any trouble.) Thanks, and I really appreciate your help.”

Take down that person’s name. If the person answers the next time, say the name after “hello”.

D) Your target expert answers the phone: Modify the original speech where bracketed:

“Hello. This is George Jetson. I’m calling because I {*saw your name in Chewing Gum Weekly,*} and I’m starting a business {*to produce a new kind of gum..*} Since you’re an expert, I was hoping to take a few minutes of your time and ask for some advice about the {*gum*} business. Would this be a good time to talk, or would it be more convenient to set up an appointment?”

George Jetson will now give you one of the following five responses:

- A) “Why don’t you ask me your questions now. I’ve got just two minutes before I have to go.”
- B) “Who did you say you were again? Why are you calling?”
- C) “Umm. . . I’m very busy right now. Can you call back later?”
- D) “Sure. How does Friday morning at 7 sound? Why don’t you call me then?”
- E) “I’m not the right person / I’m very busy/I don’t give interviews.”

Step Nine: For responses A) and B), it’s now time either to use the sentences that you created in Step 3, and launch into an interview. For responses C) and D) repeat the scheduling speech from Step Eight to set up an appointment. For response E), simply say, “I am sorry to have bothered you. Can you please tell me who is a more appropriate person for me to talk to? Thank you very much”, and then contact that individual, mentioning that George Jetson suggested that you call.

Remember, the batting average that you are hoping to attain is 33%. By implementing these nine steps, you will be able to achieve this goal and collect excellent information. While you are organizing your interview schedule, develop a list of questions to ask each expert. The questions should be open-ended (not answerable with “yes” or “no” or other one-word responses), thoughtful, and focused. Plan to do at least some of the interviews by phone or email. Be honest and circumspect at the same time.

Conducting the Interview

1. Now that you’ve got the interview, thank the interviewee for sharing her time and expertise.
2. Explain why you believe this person is an expert and how her insights will be helpful to your business, to the industry, and if possible, to the expert herself. Be concise and factual in describing the reasons for your visit.
3. It is neither necessary nor advisable to share in-depth your complete business plan. Be honest and circumspect at the same time.
4. Set the expert’s expectations by stating the expected length of the interview (“I’d like to take just 15 minutes of your time”), or the number of key questions that you have (“While I’d like to ask you many different questions, four are really topmost in my mind, and I’d love your insights on them”).
5. If the person seems animated and interested in speaking further, you can delve into some of the less crucial questions to extend the interview.

Capturing the Information

Decide ahead of time how you want to capture the information that you receive. Each approach carries particular advantages and disadvantages, and you will want to consider the tradeoff’s involved. The most popular options are:

- Using a tape recorder,
- Taking notes, and
- Remembering recollections.

The **tape recorder** will provide the most accurate and comprehensive record of the interview. It is also the most time consuming, since you will need to listen to the tape afterwards and transcribe or summarize the key points. Doing so, however, is an excellent way to cement your understanding of a new subject. Always ask permission to use the tape recorder first, and do not be surprised if the interviewee refuses, preferring to make detailed remarks “off the record”. It is not necessary to obtain written permission to tape record, UNLESS you are planning to use the remarks in format that others will see AND which clearly identifies the individual. If you do not obtain written permission at the time, and then you decide later to quote the interviewee in a circulating document, you should first ask for permission before including the quote. Otherwise, you could expose yourself to potential misunderstanding or even legal liability if an expert is not happy about being mentioned.

Note taking is another excellent way to record insights, provided that you are a careful listener -- and that you will be able to read hastily scrawled notations later on! Its major advantage, and a disadvantage, are in the immediacy of the insights that you will record:

The expert's body language and tone of voice may help you see right away what the truly central issues are. Conversely, what seems important during the interview may not be as salient upon reflection. The actual mechanics of note taking provide another pair of advantages and disadvantages. Scribing can be very reassuring to the interviewee. She will see that you are noting her comments and taking them down as she speaks, thus indicating that you consider her remarks worthy of serious consideration. On the other hand, note taking can disrupt eye contact and actual comprehension, since you may be writing down an important point while the expert has moved on to discuss the next idea. And maintaining eye contact and an attitude of deep concentration may be more crucial to obtaining good data than is the act of writing.

In certain cases, an expert may prohibit any method of on-site recording. He may be concerned about being quoted without his permission, of having his remarks taken out of context, or of having his ideas circulated at all! In these situations, your best option is to hold the interview anyway, and to bring a clear list of questions with you. Use those questions as a guide to reconstruct the remarks immediately upon leaving the interview. However, relying on **remembered recollections** can be tricky -- and it will certainly be imprecise. Thus, it is best to concentrate on capturing the key themes or viewpoints and to forego smaller details. For example, if the interviewee holds a very unpopular position on a key topic, remember what that position is, and, more importantly, the reason for the position. Writing down the expert's argument is an excellent way both to test your understanding of the ideas, and to develop your own point of view regarding the topic.

What is the correct number of interviews? The answer depends on what you are trying to learn. In general, you will have completed enough interviews when your questions are answered consistently, clearly, and comprehensively. Only you will know when this happens!

Following up the Interview

Whatever method you choose, get the most from your interview efforts by taking these five follow-up steps:

5. Write out the major themes or insights from the interview, in order of their importance;
6. Develop a list of questions which occur to you based on the new knowledge that you've received, for use in future interviews;
7. Check contradictory or confusing information with at least one independent source, to ensure that you understand what you've heard;
8. Keep confidentiality! Do not share interview notes or quote a source if the expert has told you not to do so. If you are concerned that communicating information will make the expert uncomfortable, by all means, call and check with the expert first! Maintaining discretion will help you to build goodwill in the field and will make experts more willing to speak with you again and to refer you to others.

9. Send a thank you note promptly, via email or US mail, whichever seems more appropriate. Be specific and complimentary. Tell the expert how and why he was helpful. Thank him for taking the time from his busy schedule to meet with you. If applicable, indicate that you might want to contact him with future questions, if he's willing to accommodate you.

II. Focus Groups

A good focus group is more than simply an interesting conversation. It is a moderated discussion held with six to twelve people who share something in common. This shared topic is the theme of the discussion. Because focus groups are most appropriately used to learn views and opinions, in order to generate hypotheses for further investigation, there is no right or wrong answer, no need to arrive at group consensus, and no requirement for perfect recollection.

Focus groups generally run about sixty minutes, plus fifteen minutes for arrival, greetings, and concluding "thank you"s, but the length of time is dependent on the group's appetite for attacking a topic with gusto. Once interest and enthusiasm wane, the group should conclude. Similarly, if a group is deeply involved in sharing various points of view and specific examples, then two hours of sustained discussion is not unheard of.

Focus groups are an excellent way to explore complex ideas and to generate hypotheses about a particular subject. They should be used to help decide what themes and concerns are important to a particular audience. They are not an appropriate way to collect statistically significant data or to make sweeping assertions about an entire audience, group, or population. They are also not an appropriate method to promote or communicate an organization's views. Rather, they allow a guided opportunity for an organization to listen and learn from its constituents. An organization's role in a focus group is to listen attentively and non-defensively to the group's comments, in order to better understand what its customers want and how they think. These comments can then inform and shape marketing plans and programs.

Organizing focus groups

The first step in organizing a focus group is to determine which types of customers to ask to participate. Focus groups should include an equal number of people, chosen at random, from each of the important segments of a marketplace. If you expect important differences in responses to emerge from each segment, conduct separate groups for each segment. The best way to gather sufficient customers to participate is to gather a wide variety of mailing lists, including current and potential customers, and work the phones! Ask volunteers to call people from each segment at random until they obtain twelve to fifteen "yes's" for each focus group. Send "follow-up"s to the phone call with thanks and directions. Expect 20% attrition, so that the actual group will likely have between eight and twelve people. Groups of less than six people tend to inhibit the discussion flow, and groups of more than twelve tend to be unwieldy to guide.

A good rule of thumb is to hold a minimum of three focus groups for each market segment. Since holding more than three groups a day is not practical, because of respondent scheduling constraints and because of moderator fatigue, many professional research firms will arrange three focus groups per geographic area, so that the moderator and accompanying managers can efficiently cover a number of markets. Usually, a second segmenting variable, and quite often a third, are used to delineate between focus groups.

The space in which to hold the focus groups should include the following items:

- a table and chairs around which thirteen people can comfortably sit;
- cardboard namecards and magic markers on which to write first names;
- a flipchart or blackboard to write notes and comments;
- a good, non-reverberating tape recorder and mike, stocked with a two-hour tape;
- soft drinks and light refreshments, sufficient to keep energy and alertness levels high;
- a door which can be closed to prevent interruptions and provide a quiet atmosphere;
- any props which will help generate participant responses, such as product samples, brochures, ad slicks, color charts, video, or audio materials from the organization and its key competitors.

Conducting focus groups

Determining the types of questions to ask is straightforward. Make a list of questions, grouped by category from most general (“Tell us what you enjoy about your computer”) to the most specific and potentially sensitive (“What two things would you most like to change about the product?”). This list, called an interview protocol, will guide the moderator. It’s helpful to obtain lots of input on the question list from colleagues, since the variety of questions will help determine the range of the discussions. Questions should be open-ended, neutrally presented, clear, and concise.

It is inadvisable to ask focus group members about their personal finances (unless the product is a financial one!), about personal relationships (unless that is the stated purpose of the focus group), or about factual data in a “quiz” format, since these types of questions may make participants uncomfortable and thus reluctant to share their views. Phrase questions in a casual, yet respectful style. Avoid obscure vocabulary or industry-specific jargon. Participants should feel competent to respond to any question put to them. Good protocol questions stimulate participants to think hard about a meaningful answer, not about the meaning of the question.

A focus group moderator need not be professionally trained. Indeed, while professional moderators may have backgrounds in psychology or communications, these experiences are more an indicator of interest and aptitude than a guarantor of quality or fit is. A successful moderator should be conversational, genial, and dispassionate about the material being discussed, and firm in moving discussion along. He will assist all participants in taking their turn to speak, and will not allow one or two people to monopolize the conversation or to insist on acquiescence to their viewpoint. A moderator need not be an “expert” in the material at hand, and, in fact, will generate more textured responses by indicating that the participants are more knowledgeable about the topic, whether they are or not. (For example, the moderator might say something like “Can you

explain your answer more? I'm not really familiar with these products", in order to prompt a detailed explanation.)

Managers are sometimes concerned that their organization will run the risk of biasing the results if participants know who convened the group. In focus group research, one of many possible types of bias occurs when participants, knowing the sponsor of the focus groups, then feel awkward providing truthful criticisms or negative responses to their host. It is true that hiring an outside research firm eliminates much (not all) of this particular bias. (Some bias based on participants' knowledge of the sponsoring organization is inevitable if the question protocol becomes at all specific to the organization at hand, if participants try to identify the organization, if the industry has a small number of players, or if prototypes used as props have a recognizable design aesthetic even with logos and brand names removed.)

While it is more ideal to hold focus groups anonymously, this is not always realistic for an organization doing research on a shoestring. One way to mitigate the bias that may result is to select a moderator who can credibly announce to the group that he/she is not a member of the staff or board, with no particular axe to grind, and that his/her only requirement is to generate truthful, thoughtful responses to communicate to the staff or board, regardless of what those responses might be.

Remember too, that all types of market research have bias of some sort embedded within them. The issue is not whether the bias exists, but how significant it may be in influencing the data collected. Thus, other components, such as the interview protocol the demeanor of the moderator, and the room itself will go a far way toward ensuring that participants feel comfortable accurately and honestly expressing their views. In fact, if participants are highly involved with or loyal to an organization or product, they may be even more willing to provide critical feedback and insights as a "trusted advisor" to a familiar organization than as an anonymous respondent to a market research firm. Thus, knowing the sponsoring organization does not in itself generate bias. Rather, it is the atmosphere created by this knowledge which has the potential to put a damper on candor.

The best way to keep a record of a session is with a tape recorder. In general, video cameras are perceived as too invasive, unless they can be easily hidden in the ceiling or wall, and in which case they must be pointed out to participants in advance. Each recording should be transcribed into a full and complete account of moderator questions and participant responses. As a supplement, an unobtrusive, anonymous staff member may sit in a corner of the room and keep notes. The moderator's assessment is also useful as one piece of the puzzle. Because these latter methods will be incomplete and impressionistic, they should not take the place of a completed transcript.

Analyzing focus groups

To analyze and explain the data, a minimum of three individuals (three takes on the same data set will smooth out any extreme interpretations) should sit down with typed copies of the transcripts and individually highlight sections which suggest important themes. They should then give each a theme a title or name for easy reference. With possible ideas in hand, the three convene to compare notes, and to agree on an overall list of key themes. Each person should then return to the transcripts and code each response or phrase for its

fit with a given theme. In doing this latter step, additional, minor, themes may emerge, for quotes which do not fit any of the key themes. With long lists of themes and their accompanying respondent quotations as support, the analysts then can reconvene and compare patterns in the data. The process should be iterative -- textual analysis is an inductive rather than a deductive skill. From these patterns, the three analysts can draw conclusions about what is important, and can articulate any connections or links between the various themes.

Next, the analysts develop a report which details representative responses by theme. The report should organize the themes in priority order. Summaries of key supporting points, as expressed by participants, and followed by actual focus group quotes, should fill out each theme. Key supporting points may be consistent and in agreement, or they may illustrate a large degree of controversy about the theme itself. Add quotes which give specific detail and add texture to the individual points, without being repetitive. Choosing quotes that cover the gamut of opinion and types of customers is an art, not a science. The idea is to give a human dimension by adding voices of actual consumers.

Overall, the report should clearly express the depth and range of responses. In choosing themes, supporting points, and individual quotes, managers should keep in mind the overarching purpose of this research method: Focus groups are intended to generate hypotheses about the opinions or ideas held by a consumer group. Thus, it is neither necessary nor advisable to choose themes and ideas based solely on the frequency with which they appear. Instead, analysts should consider three criteria in deciding which themes to include in the report. They should ask themselves if the theme:

- Is mentioned frequently, both across focus groups, and within a group?
- Is salient to the marketing issues at hand?
- Provides new information, is intriguing, or novel?

A good focus group summary should cover clearly and objectively the sense and flavor of the respondent opinions. It should stop short of evaluating current marketing practices, commenting on the feasibility of respondent suggestions, or recommending marketing strategies to address topics. These last three are the purview of a marketing plan.

IN CONCLUSION...

Once you have completed your market research, consider the five questions on this checklist to determine if your bootstrapping efforts at conducting market research have been a success:

IS MY MARKET RESEARCH SUCCESSFUL?

1. Do I now have a clear, complete description of the customer who is most likely to want my product or service? Does this description encompass psychographic as well as demographic data? Does this description include all customers in the value chain?
2. Do I have a clear understanding of my market, its size, its recent growth curve, and trends, and the greatest threats to its continued growth?
3. Do I understand clearly who is not the customer? In other words, do I now have a clear idea of the various segments in this market and an idea of which to pursue?
4. What don't I know? What are the five most important questions that remain to be answered about the marketplace and my potential to succeed within it?
5. Have I amassed useful, useable information that I couldn't have gotten otherwise, and that enables me to make important business decisions?