

Market Research for Sport Participation Products and Experiences Tip Sheet

This resource contains tips on conducting market research with potential participants for sport participation products and experiences. This could be done at the concept development stage of a new product or when refining a product to reach a new audience.



What is market research?

Market research is the process of gathering information about target audience. A target audience is a group of people who you define and who you want to sell your products or experiences to. The group you define as your target audience may have shared characteristics, such as: motivation, ability, income, location, customs or habits. Understanding these characteristics will help you make sure your product aligns with their desires and constraints and increases your product's appeal to them.

How do I prepare?

Consider the following questions for market research:

- How does the market research fit with your organisation's current strategy? E.g. have you identified a need to conduct research into specific cohorts?
- What do you already know about the target audience based on available research, insights or the products and experiences offered by other sports?
- What assumptions do you have about the target audience? It is always important to write a list of your current assumptions so that you can test them during your research.
- What do you want to know? Generally speaking, questions might be designed to uncover the size and characteristics of your target audience, the target audience's interests, motivations and barriers as they relate to the type of sport or physical activity you plan to offer.
- Can you take a co-design approach and ask someone from your target audience to help you design your research?
- Where will you recruit survey participants? If you are targeting an audience that is separate from your current membership, participants could be recruited through these free methods:
 - Partnerships – e.g. using the database of a partner organisation
 - Friends, family, or colleagues who fit the target market
 - People who represent the target audience. E.g. if the target audience was youth aged 13-17, you might be able to work with someone from that group to recruit others
- If you have a budget, there are companies that specialise in recruiting a 'panel' of target market participants for a fee.

Planning tip: Avoid making generalisations about groups of people. While there are similar traits and characteristics applicable to groups of people, at the individual level people have varying experiences, beliefs and habits. Market research allows you to test your general assumptions and drill down into the motivations and barriers of individuals/groups within a specific group of people.





What market research method should I use?

There are several market research methods which have different benefits. In the context of community sport, there are four key methods you might use to gain a deeper understanding of your target market. Depending on your budget, you might engage a consulting agency to undertake some, or all, of these activities for you.

1. Surveys



Surveys are a key method for doing market research with a new potential audience and/or obtaining customer feedback on an existing product or service. A survey is:

- A tool to gain quantitative and/or qualitative data
- A set of questions which can be paper based, or online via a computer, laptop or smart phone
- A useful way to engage a large number of people

Online surveys can be created through several different platforms. While there are free services available, some will require a monthly fee.

Here are the benefits and constraints of surveys:

Benefits

- People can respond anonymously, which encourages more honest responses
- Questions can be designed various formats such as yes/no, multiple choice and open-ended comments
- Responses can be sorted in a spreadsheet for analysis (most online platforms provide auto-generated graphic summaries)

Constraints

- It can be a challenge to recruit the right people to respond, especially if you are engaging a new target market
- Responses to open-ended questions are often brief and/or time consuming to analyse
- You don't have ability to immediately follow up and prompt for deeper insights

2. Conversations or Interviews



Having one-on-one conversations with the target market is a great way to get to know them better. Conversations could range from 15 to 60 minutes depending on the information you want to collect. When developing a plan to hold some market research conversations you might consider:

- How many people do you want to speak to, so that your target market is well represented?
- Which questions do you want to ask?
- How will the conversations take place? (e.g., face to face, online or by phone).

Perhaps you identify that yoga is a popular activity for women aged 30-45. In a conversation, you can ask **why** they chose yoga over other sport products. This will provide rich information to help you design a competitive product and experiences for this market.

Developing a short conversation guide is a useful way to ensure the people conducting interviews have a plan for their conversations and ensures consistency. This can be a 1-2 page document outlining the key questions and prompting questions you will ask and how you want the conversation to flow. As the interviewer, your job is to learn about the interviewee, so avoid inserting your own views into the conversation.

Consider the following as a guide:

Benefits

- Provide a personal feedback loop and allow people to feel heard
- Great for delving deeper into themes identified through existing research
- Speaking to people and collecting quotes is a great way to 'humanise' your data
- Conversations held face to face are great ways to observe non-verbal behaviour that can help clarify responses

Constraints

- You may need a second person to record the insights, or record the conversation and spend time re-watching it to take notes
- The process is more time consuming and therefore you can't interview large numbers of people
- Views and opinions obtained in interviews are often highly subjective (representative of an individual)
- You will need a large number of people to obtain a representative sample, which will be costly

DO – ask open-ended questions. Always ask people to explain their reasoning and follow up with "why" to get to underlying meanings.

DO – paraphrase the response, to help clarify your understanding and provide them an opportunity to correct and/or explain further.

DO NOT – correct, refute or challenge the response.

DO – allow for pauses. Give the interviewee time to consider their response.

DO – remain unbiased.

DO NOT – ask yes/no questions. The goal is to get people talking, not provide single word responses which will not tell you anything useful.



3. Focus groups



Like conversations, focus groups are a great way to delve deeper into the motivations, barriers, or habits of a target market. A focus group will generally be a small group (e.g. 6-8 people) with a moderator asking a series of questions designed to get feedback about a new product, service or campaign. The aim of a focus group is to gather useful information such as quotes, reactions, perspectives and even body language, all of which can be used to build a picture of your target market.

When planning to hold some focus groups you might consider:

- What do you want to know?
- Which people do you want to speak to as a group? (e.g. a new target audience, potential participants, participants, deliverers)
- Are you seeking to build on themes identified in a survey and develop a deeper understanding of the barriers and motivations of the group? Or are you seeking to test some more concrete ideas? This will inform the type of questions you ask.

Benefits

- You can get responses formed through group interaction, participants supporting or building on each other's ideas, which may be desirable
- Great for delving deeper into themes identified through existing research

Constraints

- Depending on the individuals and the group, some people may not open up as much as in a one-to-one conversation
- Focus groups can take more time to plan and execute
- Running a focus group, particularly on a difficult topic or with difficult people, requires skill and expertise, especially in order to provide everyone with the opportunity to be heard in an inclusive and safe space

Recruitment tip: Conduct an online survey first and give people the option to add their contact details if they would like to participate in an interview or focus group. This can provide an additional database of people who are willing to participate.



4. Observations

Observing the target market is an important tool to use in market research, because there is a gap between what people say and what people do. Observation allows you to piece together details and information that might not be clear through surveys, conversations or focus groups. In a sporting context this could mean attending an existing product or service that is popular for your target market (as a participant or observer). This could be an existing product or experience from your sport that you are looking to refresh, or attending another sport product or experience aimed at the same target market.

When observing an existing sport product or experience you might aim to capture notes about the environment provided for participants. This might be things like:

- Body language of participants, such as facial expressions made in response to the activities
- How participants respond to the deliverer, such as their facilitation style and how they provide feedback
- How the physical environment is set up, such as the venue and equipment
- How the social and emotional environment is set up, such as how people are welcomed, how the deliverer facilitates social interaction between participants, and how participants react to others in the group

Make sure you develop a plan first and consider: who do you want to observe, which existing product or experiences will you attend and what specific notes are you aiming to capture?

What do you do with the information?

Collecting information through the methods above can result in plenty of information in the form of insights, quotes and observations. It is important to take the time to synthesis the data so that you can make sense of it.

When analysing your data, consider who will you be presenting the data to and for what purpose? If it is managers in your organisation, reflect on what is important to them so that you can frame the insights in a way that speaks to their aims.

For the process of analysing the data, consider the following:

- Group the data into key themes based on the responses
- Ask yourself “so what does this mean” and develop findings and recommendations for each key theme
- Find some quotes to attach to each key insight statement, which helps to bring the insight to life
- Determine how and when the recommendations could be implemented and what resources are required to make that happen
- Develop an insights report and/or presentation to clearly convey the finding and/or recommendations.

Benefits

- Observation can take place anytime at existing sport products and experiences

Constraints

- The observation process may be time consuming and will require approval
- You don't hear from the target market – observation should never be the only market research method you use

Child safety: if you are engaging children (under 18) through any of these market research activities, use the following as a guide:

- Consider engaging qualified experts (who hold background checks like a Working With Children Check), with the skills and experiences to provide a safe space and ask appropriate questions, to interview children.
- Never hold a one-to-one conversation with a child who is not your own away from a public space. Always have a parent or guardian present.
- When running focus groups involving children, ensure the parent/guardian is also present, or that you have parent/guardian permission and there are multiple adults in the room.
- Surveys targeting children should be answered by a parent or guardian.

Case Study – This Girl Can – Victoria



Here is an example of insights from the market research conducted as part of VicHealth’s This Girl Can campaign. The La Trobe University Centre for Sport and Social Impact conducted market research on the barriers and motivations affecting women’s participation in sport and recreation. Here is how they presented the insight to sport and recreation organisations:

Key insight statement	Women can be put off by marketing that focuses on weight loss	
Theme and supporting information	<p>Women are more motivated by how exercise makes them feel than losing weight. Motivating factors for the sport products are experiences are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-stress • ‘Me-time’ • Having fun • Feeling energised. 	<p>What does this mean?</p> <p>In your marketing or promotions don’t focus on weight loss, or assume that’s why women want to get or stay active.</p> <p>Women get a lot of pressure from society to look a certain way, but that still doesn’t mean they always want to lose weight.</p> <p>If the goal is about feeling good, its easier to achieve than weight loss.</p>
Example of a supporting quote gained from market research	“I stopped going there because of this woman who was one of the trainers she was awful. I remember her saying to me that I hadn’t lost much weight... after that I thought, ‘I can’t go back in’. I had six months left on that membership”	