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Report preparation and presentation

Managers should find reports easy to understand, be confident in the findings, and be clear about the action they should take, based on the researcher's approach, insight and integrity.

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1 discuss the basic requirements of report preparation, including report format, report writing, graphs and tables;

2 discuss the nature and scope of the oral presentation;

3 describe the approach to the marketing research report from the client's perspective;

4 explain the reason for follow-up with the client and describe the assistance that should be given to the client and the evaluation of the research project;

5 understand the report preparation and presentation process in international marketing research;

6 identify the ethical issues related to the interpretation and reporting of the research process and findings to the client and the use of these results by the client.

STAGE 1 Problem definition → STAGE 2 Research approach developed → STAGE 3 Research design developed → STAGE 4 Fieldwork or data collection → STAGE 5 Data preparation and analysis → STAGE 6 Report preparation and presentation

Overview

This chapter describes the importance of report preparation and presentation and outlines the process of producing written and oral presentations. We provide guidelines for report preparation, including report writing and preparing tables and graphs, and we discuss oral presentation of the report. Research follow-up, including assisting the client and evaluating the research process, is described. The special considerations for report preparation and presentation in international marketing research are discussed, and relevant ethical issues are identified. We begin with an example of a report based upon an ongoing customer satisfaction survey that is fed to different levels of an organisation, helping it to maintain its customer orientation. This is followed with an example of a very creative means to present findings to a study that is primarily presenting qualitative findings. Both examples illustrate the different styles and means to present marketing research reports.

Example

Reporting the friendly skies[1]

United Airlines conducts an ongoing in-flight customer satisfaction tracking survey. Each month, 192,000 passengers on 900 flights are selected and surveyed using a four-page scannable form. The survey covers the satisfaction of passengers on both 'on-the-ground' services (flight reservation, airport service) and 'in-the-air' services (flight attendants, meals, aircraft). Each month a report is produced, summarising customer satisfaction. The report is also posted on the Internet and available online to managers all over the world. Because of the large size of the sample, the data are very reliable and all departments of the company use the report, such as:

- *Marketing department* uses it for strategic planning, product positioning and target marketing decisions.
- *Finance department* uses it to measure the success of its product investments.
- *Airport* uses it to evaluate ground services, including speed and efficiency of check-in.
- *Executive board* evaluate the corporate performance of United, both internally in achieving its goals and externally compared with the competition.

The result of this report is that it enables a coordinated and integrated approach to United's customer orientation. This helps United to differentiate itself in an environment where all companies have the same schedules, the same service and the same prices.

Example

Meet Matthias, Stephanie, Seb, Justine and Stan[2]

Allied Domecq Spirits and Wines (ADSW) commissioned an innovative study to understand the factors of brand adoption of young emergent adult drinkers. The innovative approach to gathering data continued into communicating the findings. ADSW managers were invited to spend a day of 'discovery'. The day started by holding breakout sessions to gauge current assumptions about young drinkers. They then 'met' a set of fictional characters that represented the adult emergent drinker generation that had been the focus of the study. The idea behind this was to allow ADSW managers to be able to visualise their consumers when developing new products or communications strategies. Personalities were created and brought to life using actors. In France, for example, the clients were able to meet Matthias, Stephanie, Seb, Justine and Stan. These five characters symbolised the richness and the diversity of the generation. Each of the characters engaged with the manager audience via dialogue, discussing for exam-

ple their lifestyle, behaviours, what's 'in' or 'out', values, concerns and expectations for the future, as well as their current attitudes towards alcohol. In addition, the audience were presented with workshop 'souvenirs' and notebooks with pictures and biographies of the character types where they could take notes during the presentation. The effect was immediate; with a bar as a cue, managers were able to step into a new world and easily meet and interact with their consumers. Moreover, their 'consumers' were eager to explain what was and wasn't important to them. This multimedia/multi-layered presentation of findings allowed information to be assimilated visually, audibly and kinesthetically.

Importance of the report and presentation

For the following reasons, the report and its presentation are important parts of the marketing research project:

1 They are the tangible products of the research effort. After the project is complete and management have made the decision, there is little documentary evidence of the project other than the written report. The report serves as a historical record of the project.
2 Management decisions are guided by the report and the presentation. If the first five steps in the project are carefully conducted but inadequate attention is paid to the sixth step, the value of the project to management will be greatly diminished.
3 The involvement of many marketing managers in the project is limited to the written report and the oral presentation. These managers evaluate the quality of the entire project on the quality of the report and presentation.
4 Management's decision to undertake marketing research in the future or to use the particular research supplier again will be influenced by the perceived usefulness of the report and the presentation.

Preparation and presentation process

Figure 25.1 illustrates report preparation and presentation.

The process begins by interpreting the results of data analysis in the light of the marketing research problem, approach, research design and fieldwork. Instead of merely summarising the quantitative and/or qualitative analyses, the researcher should present the findings in such a way that they can be used directly as input into decision making. Wherever appropriate, conclusions should be drawn and recommendations made. The researcher should aim to make the recommendations actionable. Before writing the report, the researcher should discuss the major findings, conclusions and recommendations with the key decision-makers. These discussions play a major role in ensuring that the report meets the client's needs and is ultimately accepted. These discussions should confirm specific dates for the delivery of the written report and other data.

The entire marketing research project should be summarised in a single written report or in several reports addressed to different readers. Generally, an oral presentation supplements the written documents. The client should be given an opportunity to read the report. After that, the researcher should take the necessary follow-up actions. The researcher should assist the client in understanding the report, help in interpretations of the findings that can affect their implementation, offer to undertake further research and reflect upon the research process to evaluate its overall worth.

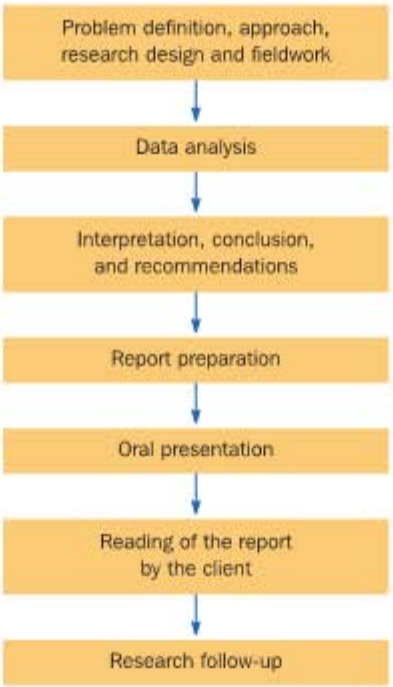

Figure 25.1
The report preparation and presentation process

Report preparation

Researchers differ in the way they prepare a research report. The personality, background, expertise and responsibility of the researcher, along with the marketing decision-maker to whom the report is addressed, interact to give each report a unique character. Yet there are guidelines for formatting and writing reports and designing tables and graphs.[3]

Report format

Report formats are likely to vary with the researcher or the marketing research firm conducting the project, the client for whom the project is being conducted, and the nature of the project itself. Hence, the following is intended as a guide from which the researcher can develop a format for the research project at hand. Most research reports include the following elements:

1 **Submission letter**
2 **Title page**
3 **Table of contents**
   a Main sections
   b List of tables
   c List of graphs
   d List of appendices
   e List of exhibits
4 Executive summary
   a Summary of prime objectives
   b Major findings
   c Conclusions and recommendations

5 **Problem definition**
   a Background to the problem
   b Statement of the marketing problem
   c Statement of the research objectives – information needs
6 **Approach to the problem and research design**
   a Type of research design
   b Data collection from secondary sources
   c Data collection from primary sources
7 **Data analysis**
   a Research design
   b Plan of data analysis and means of interpreting results
8 **Results**
9 **Conclusions and recommendations**
10 **Limitations and caveats**
11 **Appendices**
   a Letter of authorisation
   b Questionnaire development and pretesting
   c Questionnaires, forms, interview guides
   d Sampling techniques, including error and confidence levels
   e Fieldwork
   f Lists including contact individuals and organisations.

This format closely follows the earlier steps of the marketing research process. The results may be presented in several chapters of the report. For example, in a national survey, data analysis may be conducted for the overall sample and then the data for each geographical region may be analysed separately. If so, the results from each analysis may be presented in a separate chapter.

Submission letter. A formal report generally contains a letter of submission that delivers the report to the client and summarises the researcher's overall experience with the project, without mentioning the findings. The letter should also identify the need for further action on the part of the client, such as implementation of the findings or further research that should be undertaken.

Title page. The title page should include the title of the report, information (name, address and telephone number) about the researcher or organisation conducting the research, the name of the client for whom the report was prepared, and the date of release. The title should encapsulate the nature of the project with a tone that is meaningful to the target managers, not one of technical 'research-speak'.

Table of contents. The table of contents should list the topics covered and the appropriate page numbers. In most reports, only the major headings and subheadings are included. The table of contents is followed by a list of tables, a list of graphs, a list of appendices and a list of exhibits.

Executive summary. The executive summary is an extremely important part of the report, because this is often the only portion of the report that executives read. The summary should concisely describe the problem, approach and research design that were adopted. A summary section should be devoted to the major results, conclusions and recommendations. The executive summary should be written after the rest of the report has been written.

Problem definition. The problem definition section of the report gives the background to the problem. This part summarises elements of the marketing and research problem

diagnosis. Key elements of any discussions with decision-makers, industry experts and initial secondary data analyses are presented. Having set this context for the whole project, a clear statement of the marketing decision problem(s) and the marketing research problem(s) should be presented.

Approach to the problem and research design. The approach to the problem section should discuss the broad approach that was adopted in addressing the problem. This section should summarise the theoretical foundations that guided the research, any analytical models formulated, research questions, hypotheses and the factors that influenced the research design. The research design should specify the details of how the research was conducted, preferably with a graphical presentation of the stages undertaken, showing the relationships between stages. This should detail the methods undertaken in the data collection from secondary and primary sources. These topics should be presented in a non-technical, easy-to-understand manner. The technical details should be included in an appendix. This section of the report should justify the specific methods selected.

Data analysis. The section on data analysis, be it quantitative or qualitative, should describe the plan of data analysis and justify the data analysis strategy and techniques used. The techniques used for analysis should be described in simple, non-technical terms, with examples to guide the reader through the interpretations.

Results. The results section is normally the longest part of the report and may entail several chapters. It may be presented in any of the following ways:

1 *Forms of analysis.* For example, in a health care marketing survey of hospitals, the results were presented in four chapters. One chapter presented the overall results, another examined the differences between geographical regions, a third presented the differences between for-profit and non-profit hospitals, and a fourth presented the differences according to bed capacity. Often, results are presented not only at the aggregate level but also at the subgroup (market segment, geographical area, etc.) level.
2 *Forms of data collection.* For example, a study may contain significant elements of secondary data collection and analyses, a series of focus group interviews and a survey. The results in such circumstances may be best presented by drawing conclusions from one method before moving on to another method. The conclusions derived from focus groups, for example, may need to be established to show the link to a sample design and questions used in a survey.
3 *Objectives.* There may be a series of research objectives whose fulfilment may incorporate a variety of data collection methods and levels of analysis. In these circumstances the results combine methods and levels of analyses to show connections and to develop and illustrate emerging issues.

The results should be organised in a coherent and logical way. Choosing whether to present by *forms of analysis, forms of data collection,* or *objectives* helps to build that coherence and logic. The presentation of the results should be geared directly to the components of the marketing research problem and the information needs that were diagnosed in the initial research brief and proposal. The nature of the information needs and characteristics of the recipients of the report ultimately determine the best way to present results.

Conclusions and recommendations. Presenting a mere summary of the quantitative or qualitative findings is not enough for most marketing research users. The researcher should interpret the results in light of the problem being addressed to arrive at major conclusions. Based on the results and conclusions, the researcher may make recommendations to the decision-makers. Sometimes, marketing researchers are not asked to make recommenda-

tions because they research only one area and do not understand the bigger picture at the client firm. The researcher may not have been fully involved in the diagnosis of the marketing and research problems, in which case the researcher's interpretations may not fit into the context that the marketer understands.

In any research project there are many approaches that can be taken to analyse the data. This can result in a potential overabundance of data (quantitative and/or qualitative), and distilling the 'meaning' from the data and presenting this in a clear report can result in much of the original meaning or richness being lost.[4] To maintain the meaning or richness, the researcher should strive to understand the nature of the decision-making process that is being supported. Only then can sound interpretations of the collected data be made. This is illustrated in the following example, where the main factor in selecting a research agency to work with is an understanding of the decision-making process that is being supported.

Example

French marketing research looks abroad[5]

Mark Whiting, Research Director at Hennessy, is quite content with the support he gets from French marketing research agencies. He points out that 99% of the cognac brand's business is conducted outside France, and he therefore cannot expect to find everything he needs amongst French agencies. What drives his desire to work with a particular agency?

> *Above all, I'm looking to work with agencies who understand the business issues which concern us and who can make recommendations as to how to solve those issues, based on the research data that they have collected. This means searching near and far, so sometimes I find what I'm looking for in France, and sometimes I use agencies in the UK, the US and Asia.*

Limitations and caveats. All marketing research projects have limitations caused by time, budget and other organisational constraints. Furthermore, the research design adopted may be limited in terms of the various types of errors, and some of these may be serious enough to warrant discussion. This section should be written with great care and a balanced perspective. On the one hand, the researcher must make sure that management do not rely too heavily on the results or use them for unintended purposes, such as projecting them to unintended populations. On the other hand, this section should not erode management's confidence in the research or unduly minimise its importance.

Appendices. At the end of the report, documents can be compiled that may be used by different readers to help them to understand characteristics of the research project in more detail. These should include the letter of authorisation to conduct the research; this authorisation could include the agreed research proposal. Details that relate to individual techniques should be included relating to questionnaires, interview guides, sampling and fieldwork activities. The final part of the appendix should include lists of contacts, references used and further sources of reference.

Report writing

Readers. A report should be written for a specific reader or readers: namely, the marketing decision-makers who will use the results. The report should take into account the readers' technical sophistication and interest in the project as well as the circumstances under which they will read the report and how they will use it.[6]

Technical jargon should be avoided. As expressed by one expert, 'The readers of your reports are busy people; and very few of them can balance a research report, a cup of

coffee, and a dictionary at one time.'[7] Instead of technical terms such as maximum likelihood, heteroscedasticity and non-parametric, use descriptive explanations. If some technical terms cannot be avoided, briefly define them in an appendix. When it comes to marketing research, decision-makers would rather live with a problem they cannot solve than accept a solution they cannot understand.

Often the researcher must cater to the needs of several audiences with different levels of technical sophistication and interest in the project. Such conflicting needs may be met by including different sections in the report for different readers or separate reports entirely.

Easy to follow. The report should be easy to follow.[8] It should be structured logically and written clearly. The material, particularly the body of the report, should be structured in a logical manner so that the reader can easily see the inherent connections and linkages. Headings should be used for different topics and subheadings for subtopics.

A logical organisation also leads to a coherent report. Clarity can be enhanced by using well-constructed sentences that are short and to the point. The words used should express precisely what the researcher wants to communicate. Difficult words, slang and clichés should be avoided. An excellent check on the clarity of a report is to have two or three people who are unfamiliar with the project read it and offer critical comments. Several revisions of the report may be needed before the final document emerges.

Presentable and professional appearance. The look of a report is important. The report should be professionally reproduced with quality paper, typing and binding. The typography should be varied. Variation in type size and skilful use of white space can greatly contribute to the appearance and readability of the report. However, a balance should be sought with styles of variation. Too much variation can lead to confusion; variation is only useful if it aids understanding.

Objective. Objectivity is a virtue that should guide report writing. Researchers can become so fascinated with their project that they overlook their 'objective' role. The report should accurately present the research design, results and conclusions of the project, without slanting the findings to conform to the expectations of management. Decision-makers are unlikely to receive with enthusiasm a report that reflects unfavourably on their judgement or actions. Yet the researcher must have the courage to present and defend the results objectively.

Reinforce text with tables and graphs. It is important to reinforce key information in the text with tables, graphs, pictures, maps and other visual devices. Visual aids can greatly facilitate communication and add to the clarity and impact of the report. Guidelines for tabular and graphical presentation are discussed later.

Reinforce tables and graphs with text. Conversely it is important to illustrate tables and graphs with verbatim quotes from questionnaires and interviews. Quotes can bring to life the meaning in tables and graphs and, used carefully, can make the reading of the report far more interesting than a solid body of statistics.

Terse. A report should be terse and concise. Anything unnecessary should be omitted. If too much information is included, important points may be lost. Avoid lengthy discussions of common procedures. Yet brevity should not be achieved at the expense of completeness.

Guidelines for tables

Statistical tables are a vital part of the report and deserve special attention. We illustrate the guidelines for tables using data from the Racetrack study. Table 25.1 presents the findings from three questions. The rows in Table 25.1 show groupings of Formula One viewing habits. The columns in Table 25.1 present gender and age groupings of the respondents.

Table 25.1 Formula One viewing groups – analysed by gender and age

(1a) (1b) (2a) (3a) (5a)

	Overall	*Male*	*Female*	*18–29*	*30–39*	*40 and over*
(4a) Base	2,050	1,420	630	768	575	705
(5b) Occasional	51%	45%	65%	54%	49%	49%
Regular	25%	26%	21%	24%	27%	24%
Avid	24%	29%	14%	22%	24%	27%

(5c) Occasional = watched 4 or less Grands Prix
Regular = watched between 5 and 9 Grands Prix
Avid = watched 10 or more Grands Prix

Note: Column %

(6a) Source: Formula One World Championship, Racetrack 2003, January 2004, p.4

The numbers in parentheses in the following paragraphs refer to the numbered sections of the table.

Title and number. Every table should have a number (1a) and title (1b). The title should be brief yet clearly descriptive of the information provided. Arabic numbers are used to identify tables so that they can be referenced in the text.[9]

Arrangement of data items. The arrangement of data items in a table should emphasise the most significant aspect of the data. For example, when the data pertain to time, the items should be arranged by appropriate time period. When order of magnitude is most important, the data items should be arranged in that order (2a). If ease of locating items is critical, an alphabetical arrangement is most appropriate.

Basis of measurement. The basis or unit of measurement should be clearly stated (3a). In Table 25.1, the total sample size is shown and the subsample sizes of the different ways of classifying respondents. The main body of data is shown in percentages. The % signs would normally be removed, with a note to tell the reader that the main body is based upon column percentages or row percentages, or percentages related to the total sample size.

Leaders, rulings and spaces. The reader's eye should be guided to be able to read across the table clearly. This can be achieved with ruled lines (4a), alternate shaded rows, or white spaces with dotted lines leading from the row headings to the data.

Explanations and comments: headings, stubs and footnotes. Explanations and comments clarifying the table can be provided in the form of captions, stubs and footnotes.

Designations placed over the vertical columns are called headings (5a). Designations placed in the left-hand column are called stubs (5b). Information that cannot be incorporated in the table should be explained by footnotes (5c). Letters or symbols should be used for footnotes rather than numbers. The footnotes that are part of the original source should come after the main table, but before the source note.

Sources of the data. If the data contained in the table are secondary, the source of data should be cited (6a).

Guidelines for graphs

As a general rule, graphical aids should be employed whenever practical. Graphical display of information can effectively complement the text and tables to enhance clarity of communication and impact.[10] As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. The guidelines for preparing graphs are similar to those for tables. Therefore, this section focuses on the different types of graphical aids.[11] We illustrate several of these using the Racetrack data from Table 25.1.

Geographic and other maps. Geographic and other maps, such as product positioning maps, can communicate relative location and other comparative information. Geographic maps form the bases of presentations in geodemographic analyses as discussed in Chapter 5. The maps used in geodemographic analyses can portray customer locations and types, potential consumers, location of competitors, road networks to show consumer flows, and other facilities that may attract consumers to certain locations.

Pie chart
A round chart divided into sections.

Round or pie charts. In a **pie chart**, the area of each section, as a percentage of the total area of a circle, reflects the percentage associated with the value of a specific variable. Pie charts are very useful in presenting simple relative frequencies in numbers or percentages. A pie chart is not useful for displaying relationships over time or relationships among several variables. As a general guide, a pie chart should not require more than seven sections.[12] Figure 25.2 shows the percentages of Formula One viewing groups. Great care must be taken with 3D pie charts as the relative sizes of the pie segments become distorted.

Line chart
A chart that connects a series of data points using continuous lines.

Line charts. A **line chart** connects a series of data points using continuous lines. This is an attractive way of illustrating trends and changes over time. Several series can be compared on the same chart, and forecasts, interpolations and extrapolations can be shown. If several series are displayed simultaneously, each line should have a distinctive colour or form (see Figure 25.3).[13]

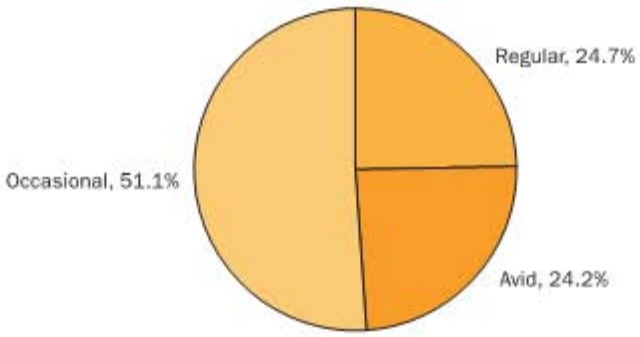

Figure 25.2
Pie chart that shows the percentage of Formula One viewing groups

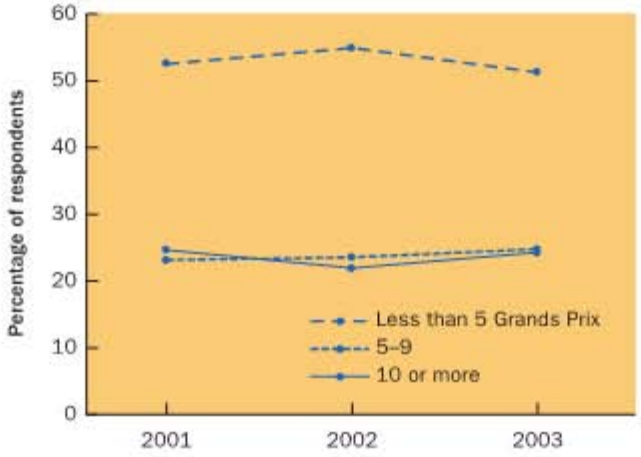

Figure 25.3
Line chart of the number of Formula One races watched in a season

Bar chart
A chart that displays data in bars positioned horizontally or vertically.

Histogram
A vertical bar chart in which the height of the bar represents the relative or cumulative frequency of occurrence.

Histograms and bar charts. A **bar chart** displays data in various bars that may be positioned horizontally or vertically. Bar charts can be used to present absolute and relative magnitudes, differences and change. A **histogram** is a vertical bar chart in which the height of the bar represents the relative or cumulative frequency of occurrence of a specific variable (see Figure 25.4). Other variations on the basic bar chart include the stacked bar chart (Figure 25.5) and the cluster bar chart (Figure 25.6). Stacked and cluster bar charts can work well with a few data items presented, to represent differences qualitatively between groups. As noted with pie charts, 3D charts should be used with great caution as they can distort the message and confuse an audience. Most graphics packages have a great array of 3D options; however, there are few circumstances where they can be used to present data in a clear and unbiased manner.

Schematic figures and flow charts. Schematic figures and flow charts take on a number of different forms. They can be used to display the steps or components of a process, as in Figure 25.1. They can also be of great value in presenting qualitative data analyses by representing the nature and interconnection of ideas that have been uncovered (see Chapter 9). Another useful form of these charts is classification diagrams. Examples of classification charts for classifying secondary data were provided in Chapter 4 (Figures 4.1 to 4.4). An example of a flow chart for questionnaire design was given in Chapter 13 (Figure 13.3).[14]

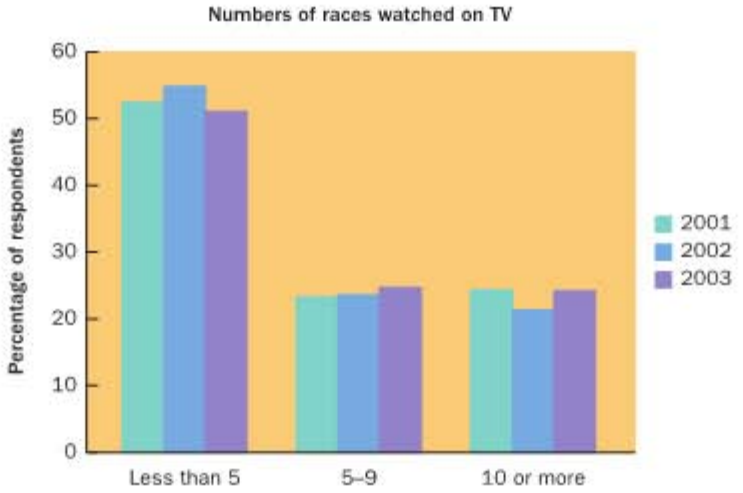

Figure 25.4
Bar chart of the number of Grand Prix races watched on TV in the 2001–2003 seasons

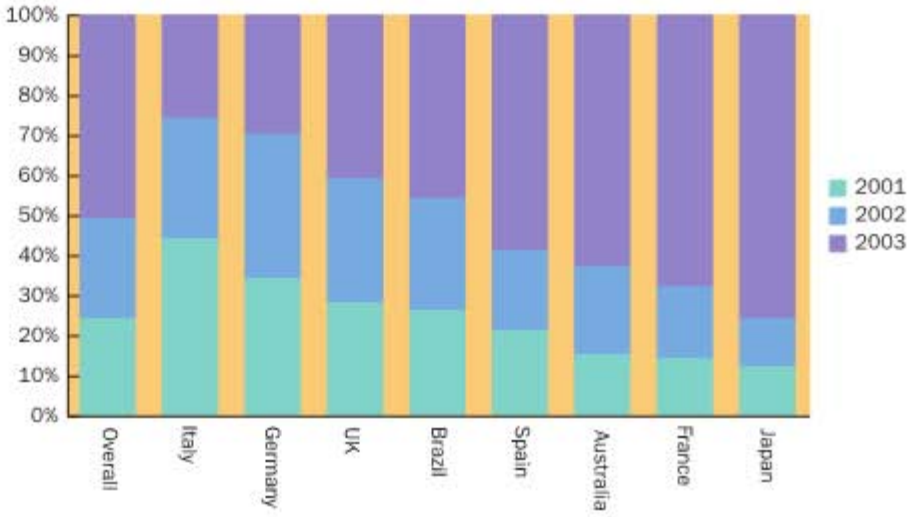

Figure 25.5
Stacked bar chart of the viewing frequency by country

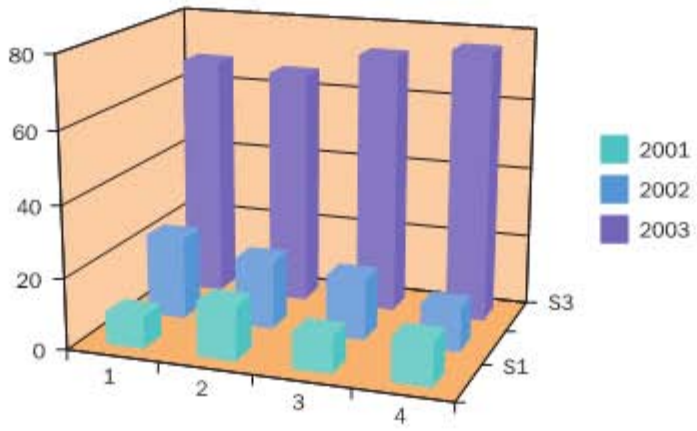

Figure 25.6
The 3D cluster bar chart of Japanese respondents' viewing frequency, 1999–2003

Oral presentation

The entire marketing research project should be presented to the management of the client firm. This presentation will help management understand and accept the written report. Any preliminary questions that management may have can be addressed in the presentation. Because many executives form their first and lasting impressions about the project based on the oral presentation, its importance cannot be overemphasised.[15]

The key to an effective presentation is preparation. A written script or detailed outline should be prepared following the format of the written report. The presentation must be geared to the audience. For this purpose, the researcher should determine the backgrounds, interests and involvement of those in the project, as well as the extent to which they are likely to be affected by it. The presentation should be rehearsed several times before it is made to management.

Visual aids such as tables and graphs should be displayed with a variety of media. Flip charts of large pads of blank paper mounted on an easel enable the researcher to manipulate numbers. They are particularly useful in communicating answers to technical questions. Visual aids can also be drawn on the pages in advance, and the speaker flips through the pages during the presentation. Although not as flexible, magnetic boards and felt boards allow for rapid presentation of previously prepared material. Overhead projec-

tors can present simple charts as well as complex overlays produced by the successive additions of new images to the screen. The use of computer packages such as Microsoft's PowerPoint can also be of immense help. They can be used for making computer-controlled presentations or for presenting technical information such as analytical models. However, the presenter must not lose sight of the message, as illustrated in the following two examples.

Example

Bridging the gap[16]

The following summarises the views of Cristina Stuart, Managing Director of SpeakEasy Training, and Khalid Aziz, Chairman of the Aziz Corporation. In essence they argue that the oral presentation is not about the slick use of technology – the presenter should add something to the visual presentation.

Actors understand that there is a gap between the speaker and the audience and that you have to do a certain amount of work to bridge that gap. Actors spend their lives at interviews and are constantly having to present themselves to new people. Like actors, some speakers use props to enhance their performance, but these need to be handled with care. It is the person that must be persuasive, not the PC. People often hide behind their visuals, but if that is all that you are presenting, you might as well have sent them in the post. Technology may be used where it is appropriate, but too often people overdo the visuals to the detriment of the message. Even at Microsoft, where with its PowerPoint software the medium is the message, the presenter presides over the technology, not the other way around.

Example

Screen saviours[17]

Phillip Redding, Deputy Managing Director of The Presentation Company, emphasises that technology is only part of the presentation picture. For him, it is just as important to get the content and structure of the argument right, and to create designs that put them over in a powerful way:

> *If the content and structure are not clear, the presentation is not going to stand a chance. People think that by adding 3D animation the audience will be impressed. They will, but they still won't think the argument is very good.*

Video recorders (VCRs) and large-screen projectors are particularly effective in presenting focus groups and other aspects of fieldwork that are dynamic in nature. It is important to maintain eye contact and to interact with the audience during the presentation. Sufficient opportunity should be provided for questions, both during and after the presentation. The presentation should be made interesting and convincing with the use of appropriate stories, examples, experiences and quotations. Filler words like 'uh', 'y'know' and 'all right' should not be used.

Body language should be employed. Descriptive gestures are used to clarify or enhance verbal communication. Emphatic gestures are used to emphasise what is being said. Suggestive gestures are symbols of ideas and emotions. Prompting gestures are used to elicit a desired response from the audience. The speaker should vary the volume, pitch, voice quality, articulation and rate while speaking. The presentation should terminate with a strong closing. To stress its importance, the presentation should be sponsored by a top-level manager in the client's organisation.

After the presentation, key executives in the client firm should be given time to read the report in detail.

Research follow-up

The researcher's task does not end with the oral presentation. Two other tasks remain. The researcher should help the client understand and implement the findings and take follow-up action. Second, while it is still fresh in the researcher's mind, the entire marketing research project should be evaluated.

Assisting the client

After the client has read the report in detail, several questions may arise. Parts of the report, particularly those dealing with technical matters, may not be understood and the researcher should provide the help needed. Sometimes the researcher helps implement the findings. Often, the client retains the researcher to help with the selection of a new product or advertising agency, development of a pricing policy, market segmentation or other marketing actions. An important reason for client follow-up is to discuss further research projects. For example, the researcher and management may agree to repeat the study after two years. Where possible, the researcher should also aim to make links between the findings of a project and other studies. By reviewing 'historical' findings in the context of current issues, project findings can be seen as more valid and decision-makers may increase their trust in the process.[18] Finally, the researcher should help the client firm make the information generated in the marketing research project a part of the firm's marketing or management information system. Ad hoc marketing research should be seen as a significant component of an ongoing link and understanding of target consumers. A key element of researchers being able to assist marketing decision-makers is the level of trust that exists between the two parties. The nature of personal interaction between managers and researchers is very important in creating trust in the researcher and consequently in the results of the research. The quality of personal interaction affects managers' perceptions of the overall quality of the report itself.[19] Trust between the decision-maker and the researcher has been found to influence the perceived quality of user–researcher interactions, the level of researcher involvement, the level of user commitment to the relationship and the level of market research utilisation.[20]

Evaluation of the research project

Although marketing research is scientific, which may seem to imply a rigid, systematic process, it clearly involves creativity, intuition and personal judgement. Hence, every marketing research project provides an opportunity for learning, and the researcher should critically evaluate the entire project to obtain new insights and knowledge. The key question to ask is: 'Could this project have been conducted more effectively or efficiently?' This question, of course, raises several more specific questions. Could the problem have been defined differently so as to enhance the value of the project to the client or reduce the costs? Could a different approach have yielded better results? Was the research design that was used the best? How about the method of data collection? Should street interviews have been used instead of telephone interviews? Was the sampling plan employed the most appropriate? Were the sources of possible design error correctly anticipated and kept under control, at least in a qualitative sense? If not, what changes could have been made? How could the selection, training and supervision of fieldworkers be altered to improve data collection? Was the data analysis strategy effective in yielding information useful for decision making? Were the conclusions and recommendations appropriate and useful to the client? Was the report adequately written and presented? Was the project completed within the time and budget allocated? If not, what went wrong? The insights gained from such an evaluation will benefit the researcher and the subsequent projects conducted.

International marketing research

The guidelines presented earlier in this chapter apply to international marketing research as well, although report preparation may be complicated by the need to prepare reports for management in different countries and in different languages. In such a case, the researcher should prepare different versions of the report, each geared to specific readers. The different reports should be comparable, although the formats may differ. The guidelines for oral presentation are also similar to those given earlier, with the added proviso that the presenter should be sensitive to cultural norms. For example, making jokes, which is frequently done in many countries, is not appropriate in all cultures (which may also include particular organisational cultures). The potential impact of cultural variations in humour is illustrated in the following example.

Example

Camry chicken fries Ford[21]

The advertising campaign designed for the Toyota Camry in Australia was very different from the one used in Japan. 'Why did the chicken cross the road?' Toyota asked in a continuing series of TV commercials in Australia. The answer: 'To sell more Toyota Camry's of course.' The adverts, showing an animated chicken trying to cross the road and getting its feathers blown off by a passing Camry, were created by Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising. When Bob Miller, Toyota's General Manager, tried to explain the advertisement to colleagues in Japan, they thought he was insane. The humour was offensive to the Japanese but it clearly worked well with the Australians. As a continuing series, the next advertisement sees a chicken sitting on a pile of eggs in the middle of the road and hatching chicks as the Camry speeds past. The advertisements helped Toyota topple Ford's dominance in Australia.

Most marketing decisions are made from facts and figures arising out of marketing research. But these figures and how they have been arrived at have to be credible to decision-makers. The subjective experience and gut feeling of managers could vary widely across countries, necessitating that different recommendations be made for implementing the research findings in different countries. This is particularly important when making innovative or creative recommendations such as in advertising campaigns.

Ethics in marketing research

Many issues pertaining to research integrity arise during report preparation and presentation. A survey of 254 marketing researchers found that 33% believed that the most difficult ethical problems they face pertain to issues of research integrity. These issues included ignoring pertinent data, compromising the research design, deliberately misusing statistics, falsifying figures, altering research results, misinterpreting the results with the objective of supporting a personal or corporate point of view, and withholding information.[22] It is important that researchers deal with these issues in a satisfactory manner and prepare a report which accurately and fully discloses the details of all the procedures and findings.

Objectivity should be maintained throughout the research process. For example, when data are analysed and no meaningful results are found, researchers are tempted to see findings which are not supported by the analysis. One example is meaningfully

interpreting a regression equation when all the independent variables turn out to be non-significant (Chapter 20). Ethical dilemmas can arise in these instances. The researchers are being paid for their expert interpretation of data, and can nothing meaningful be said?

> *To arrive at some rational, logical, and convincing conclusion is so much more satisfying intellectually than to admit that the findings are inconsistent and inconclusive. No wonder we find ourselves mentally selecting and shaping what might otherwise be shapeless into a coherent, well-defined story.*[23]

Such temptations must be resisted to avoid unethical conduct.

Like researchers, clients also have the responsibility for full and accurate disclosure of the research findings and are obligated to employ these findings honourably. For example, the public can be negatively affected by a client who distorts the research findings to develop a more favourable TV advertising campaign. Ethical issues also arise when client firms, such as tobacco companies, use marketing research findings to formulate questionable marketing programmes.

Internet and computer applications

Marketing research reports are being published or posted directly on the Internet or on intranets. Reports on the Internet are not located in publicly accessible areas but in locations protected by passwords or corporate intranets. The various word-processing, spreadsheet and presentation packages have the capability to produce material in a format that can be posted directly on the Web, thus facilitating the process.

There are a number of advantages to publishing marketing research reports on the Web. These reports can incorporate all kinds of multimedia presentations, including graphs, pictures, animation, audio and full-motion video. The dissemination is immediate and the reports can be accessed by authorised persons online on a worldwide basis. These reports can be electronically searched to identify materials of specific interest. For example, a manager in Kuala Lumpur can electronically locate the portions of a report that pertain to Malaysia or South East Asia. Storage or future retrieval is efficient and effortless. It is easy to integrate these reports to become part of a decision support system. The main disadvantage is that the readers may not have permanent access to the reports, as websites may change periodically.

Given the ability to search electronically and tailor reports on the Internet, information published on websites is now becoming more 'pull' oriented, as opposed to the 'push' orientation of a printed report. The standard analysis that the researcher generates can continue to be written, but can now be accessed as a result of a search, instigation of a link, or even just rolling the mouse pointer over an icon. In addition, using database-driven technology it is possible to have a completely interactive website that allows data interrogation through the specification of questions, filters, cross-tabulations and even applied weighting.

The basic structure of a website, and the ease with which it is possible to navigate around a large amount of information, ensures that managers can quickly find exactly what they want. It is also possible to have index areas constantly visible on the screen to ensure that areas of information contained within a single report, or indeed multiple reports, can be accessed quickly.

Examples of how marketing research reports on the Internet are making decision-makers' lives easier are as follows:[24]

- Reporting and interrogating real-time data (not just from web interviews but from CATI and CAPI data).
- Linking different research projects' reports together to create a more detailed overview.
- Building charts and tables by adding different elements (such as confidence limits and explanation of chart movements).
- Applying rules to the reporting to ensure the robustness of the presented results.
- Applying complex modelling calculations and processes to data as they are made available.

Though these benefits are clear, the use of the Web to publish marketing research findings is still primarily 'locked' into static presentations, and there is some way to go to realise these benefits as illustrated in the following example.

Example

The missing off-ramp[25]

Before embarking upon an online marketing research project, a vital issue to bear in mind is how the results are presented. Research buyers are looking for their results to be delivered online virtually instantaneously, through individual stakeholder-centric reporting portals. These need to allow a hierarchy of managers to log in and see their own cut of the data, compared with norms or aggregate totals for other divisions, and all presented as easy-to-follow charts and with exceptions highlighted. Some would even like to be able to drill down from the high-level data to the underlying results and even perform some extra calculations. There is little doubt that the e-delivery of marketing research findings can transform the relationship between research user and research findings. In most web survey packages, this is still extremely difficult to achieve without a dedicated team of technicians and web programmers. A few packages provide integrated tools to allow the building of integrative reports, but most are still tricky to use.

Viewing marketing research reports using the Internet is effectively the same as conducting a search for secondary data as detailed in Chapter 4. In order to get a feel for the different styles of report presentation, based upon the types of research technique used, the country in which it was conducted and the industry supported, visit the websites of leading marketing research agencies. Click on **www.tnsofres.com**, the web address of Taylor Nelson Sofres, and **www.gfk.de**, the web address of the German marketing research company GfK. On both sites (which cover the many countries they operate in, with different languages) you will see case studies, descriptions of special studies related to specific industry sectors and examples of reports that they produce.

Summary

Report preparation and presentation is the final step in the marketing research project. This process begins with interpretation of data analysis results and leads to conclusions and recommendations. Next, the formal report is written and an oral presentation made. After management have read the report, the researcher should conduct a follow-up, assisting management and undertaking a thorough evaluation of the marketing research project.

In international marketing research, report preparation may be complicated by the need to prepare reports for management in different countries and in different languages. Several ethical issues are pertinent, particularly those related to the interpretation and reporting of the research process and findings to the client and the use of these results by the client.

The final example presents a metaphor of the use of the guitar in supporting presentations. It is a final reminder that the power of computing software can never replace the creative skills of conveying the story and impact of a piece of research upon a decision-making situation.

Example

My paradigm is the guitar[26]

Developments in modern technology have had a profound impact on the art of business presentation, most notably through PC-driven presentations. There is no doubt that the standard of visualisation in presentations has improved immeasurably, but has the presentation itself? Technically good presentations are becoming commonplace, perhaps even predictable. Predictability precedes boredom.

Source: © Jim Craigmyle/CORBIS

Presenters spend too much time at the PC creating a slide show and not enough on their performance. Presenters have forgotten to plan their personal involvement and the involvement of their audience.

My paradigm is the guitar. The guitar represents a tool that supports presentation, rather like a PC, but that can never do the performance for you. From my own experience as a guitarist, presentations and gigs have many parallels. You have to prepare diligently, and have a good plan for the progress of the performance. You should know your material. You must be able to excite the audience and get them involved. You must be able to improvise and respond to requests. You should have a good guitar, but the good guitar on its own won't carry the day. You will.

Questions

1. Describe the process of report preparation.
2. Why is the quality of report presentation vital to the success of a marketing research project?
3. Describe a commonly used format for writing marketing research reports.
4. Describe the following parts of a report: title page, table of contents, executive summary, problem definition, research design, data analysis, conclusions and recommendations.
5. Why is the 'limitations and caveats' section included in the report?
6. Discuss the importance of objectivity in writing a marketing research report.
7. Describe the guidelines for report writing.
8. How should the data items be arranged in a table?
9. What is a pie chart? For what type of information is it suitable? For what type of information is it not suitable?
10. Describe a line chart. What kind of information is commonly displayed using such charts?
11. What are the advantages and disadvantages of presenting data using 3D charts?
12. What is the purpose of an oral presentation? What guidelines should be followed in an oral presentation?
13. To what extent should marketing researchers interpret the information they present in a report?
14. Describe the evaluation of a marketing research project in retrospect.
15. Graphically represent the consumer decision-making process described in the following paragraph:

    The consumer first becomes aware of the need. Then the consumer simultaneously searches for information from several sources: retailers, advertising, word of mouth, and independent publications. After that a criterion is developed for evaluating the available brands in the marketplace. Based on this evaluation, the most preferred brand is selected.

Exercises

1. Obtain a copy of an old marketing research report (many marketing research agencies or companies that have commissioned research will provide copies of old reports for educational purposes). Evaluate the ways in which you could improve the structure and style of presentation in this report.
2. Prepare an oral presentation of the report above, to be targeted at senior marketing managers. Deliver your presentation to a group of fellow students (role playing the managers) and ask them to critique the presentation.
3. Visit **www.gallup.com** to identify a recent report prepared by this company. How does the format of this report compare to the one in this book?
4. You are a researcher preparing a report for a high-tech firm on 'The demand potential for digital cameras in Europe'. Develop a format for your report. How is that format different from the one given in this book? Discuss the format and purposes of each section with your boss (role played by a student in your class).
5. In a small group discuss the following issues: 'Writing reports is an art. Presenting reports is an art. Reading reports is an art. It is all a matter of art.' and 'Writing a report that is concise and yet complete is virtually impossible as these two objectives are conflicting'.

Video Case Exercise: Burke Inc.

Burke describe how they communicate marketing research findings to their clients. What factors of success do you see in their approach to reporting? Are there any other factors not mentioned that you feel could create more successful reporting?

video case

download from www.pearsoned.co.uk/malhotra_euro

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Visit the *Marketing Research* Companion Website at www.pearsoned.co.uk/malhotra_euro for additional learning resources including annotated weblinks, an online glossary and a suite of downloadable video cases.