

From Insights to Influence:

How Market Research Drives PR
and Content Marketing Success

Placing thought leadership in the media and standing out through original content is crucial for every brand, but breaking through the noise has become increasingly challenging in today's chaotic digital and social media landscape. However, there is a powerful tool that can help brands not only stand out but also achieve key business objectives: market research.

Data has become an indispensable element of brand storytelling today. When rigorously collected, contextualized and presented within a Story Brand Framework, data plays a vital role in helping businesses be heard, engage their audience and substantiate their claims.

By implementing a well-designed, research-driven campaign, brands can unlock a wealth of opportunities, from securing a year or more of media mentions and thought leadership opportunities to fueling strategic content marketing initiatives. Now, let's delve deeper into the myriad of benefits that market research can offer.

Content marketing benefits

Research can be the basis for a variety of content assets like reports, infographics, social media materials and more. Content campaigns with compelling data help build brand awareness, increase share of voice and attract new prospects.

PR benefits

Research can anchor press releases and pitches to garner media coverage. Data can position company executives as thought leaders and be re-purposed for other media content, including bylines, webinars, interviews, etc.

Brand/product benefits

Research is also frequently used to inform brand credibility strategies including brand tracking, reputation management, sales strategy, opinion management and online presence.



However, there are many steps involved in conducting market research for PR and marketing that may feel daunting, even for seasoned PR and marketing experts. If you find yourself overwhelmed about running a research campaign, rest assured that with the right guidance, you can navigate this process successfully. Doing so depends on detailed goal setting, diligent planning and budget-conscious decision-making. We'll help you sort through all these decisions and discover the research project that fits your objectives, capabilities and budget. Read on to get started!

PART #1

Set Strategic Objectives: Why this study?

The first step on your journey is to set strategic objectives for your data. Knowing your endpoint will allow you to work backward to discover the subject and form for your study. You need to understand exactly what you are researching and how you plan to put the data and analysis to use once you have it. Consider these tips for zeroing in on your research topic and scope.



1. What are you studying and why?

Prioritize purpose

Begin by solidifying how the research will help garner media attention and fuel content marketing campaigns that will pique your buyers' interest.

Work backwards

Next, identify exactly what topic you need to study to yield the data required to back the narrative that will support your media relations goals. Here's a tip: start by writing your desired headlines. This will help frame how you create the survey, what questions you need to ask and what type of research will best serve you.

Determine the research direction

Will the data come in the form of a forward-looking market sizing study? A deep dive into an industry-specific trend? A seasonal retail forecast? Decide what will best align with your desired narrative.

Find your white space

Make sure there is room for your study in the market. Would your study bring a new and important perspective to the table?

Seize your moment

Timing is a consideration for any study, especially one with a media relations element. Are you focused on a research topic with a sunset date? Can new data earn you entrance to a hot topic being discussed regularly in the media?

2. What are your research parameters?

Budget

Your options for research partners (or DIY methods) will be largely determined by how much money you're willing to spend. Be specific about your numbers and factor in as many line items as you can (extra internal costs, cost of a partnership, cost of a promotion plan, etc.).

Scope

How broad or narrow is your research topic? Is there room to grow or shrink your study to match your budget?

Timeline

It is worth noting that different research methods and types of partnerships can have vastly different timetables for completion. For example, larger, third-party studies typically take much longer to field and analyze.

Expertise

Do you and your team have experience running a research campaign? Do you have access to a reliable panel of participants?



3. How will you use the data to achieve your goals?

Plan to promote

Determine how you will present and promote your results. How can you package up the findings in different ways to cater to the media, your current customers, potential buyers and other important stakeholders within your industry. More on this later.

Data analysis/data ambassadors

Will you need help sorting, analyzing and presenting the data? Will you need a credible spokesperson to speak about this study as a part of your promotion plan?

Once you have a clear picture of why you're conducting this research, what your research will focus on, how you will use the data once it is collected and the level of resources you can devote to this project, you're ready to reveal the research set up that's right for you. Don't worry. If you've done the work above, you'll be well equipped to tackle the next stage.



PART #2

Set the Table: How to choose the research setup that's right for your business

Now that you have determined your research objectives and parameters, it's time to make one of the most crucial decisions in the process: quantitative research, qualitative research or a combined approach. To determine what direction will best serve your business, you need a firm understanding of both research types.

Finding what works for your business

The reality is that both quantitative and qualitative research have strengths and limitations depending on your unique goals. Quantitative data offers valuable insights into the bigger picture and helps identify trends. In contrast, qualitative data introduces a human element to your findings, providing deeper context by addressing the underlying "why" behind the numbers. Below we outline what to consider before deciding.

Quantitative vs. Qualitative: Advantages and Disadvantages

Quantitative

ADVANTAGES

Objectivity: Numerical data from a study with a large enough sample size to be statistically representative generates objective and reliable results.

Generate results quickly and easily: Data can be collected quickly and at scale, enabling you to conduct thousands of interviews simultaneously across geographies. Plus, it's easier to draw quick conclusions from numerical data.

You can replicate it: It's possible to build on or replicate the study because the data is measurable.

Data lends itself to both PR and marketing: Numerical findings can be both newsworthy and helpful for generating interest and engagement from a marketing perspective.

DISADVANTAGES

Reliability: If the sample size is too small, your results won't be statistically representative, meaning they are less credible and likely not of interest to the media.

Limited viewpoints: Numerical data alone can overlook broader themes and gives limited insights into participants' thoughts.

Budget considerations: With a larger sample pool the data is often more expensive to collect.



Qualitative

ADVANTAGES

Explore topics in-depth: The exploratory structure allows you to analyze and better understand attitudes, behaviors and concepts, providing the context often lacking with quantitative data.

Flexible: You can adjust the questions in real-time depending on the information you receive from respondents, allowing you to probe further into a topic or shift to a new direction as needed.

Target niche audiences: Research can be more concentrated, allowing you to gain valuable insights from your target audience.

Marketing and product insights: Qualitative market research provides brands with valuable insights into how consumers think, enabling them to make product improvements or implement more effective marketing tactics.

DISADVANTAGES

Difficult to quantify: Qualitative research doesn't limit the parameters of a respondent's answer, so it can't yield numbers-based data. This means you can't use qualitative research to make assertions or predictions about the wider population with any degree of confidence.

Reliance on the researcher: The researcher needs strong interviewing skills and deep industry expertise to generate quality results.

Time-consuming: The response collection and interpretation process can be more time-consuming and resource intensive as it demands a hands-on approach with close attention required throughout.

The benefits of a combined approach

Many companies opt for a combined research approach that uses elements of both research methods. Doing so can generate robust results with actionable and insightful findings. However, there is no one-size-fits-all to putting a combined approach into practice. What works for your business will depend on your goals, timeframe and budget. There are a couple of common strategies, though, to help you get the ball rolling:

- Use qualitative research as a starting point to discover insights, problems and opportunities from your audience. You can use those qualitative findings to develop some desired headlines for a quantitative research campaign that generates numerical data around that topic.
- Incorporate open-ended questions into your quantitative survey. Those qualitative responses can provide context around any unexpected results that you gather in your quantitative research.

By analyzing both types of data, you can yield deeper insights, identify emerging themes and enhance research validity.

Finding the right partner

Most businesses pursuing market research will engage a partner to conduct, package and present the study. The trick is that getting the most out of your research depends on selecting the right partner. While a wide variety of partners are available to you, most fall into one of three categories: 1.) third-party market research firms, 2.) industry analysts and 3.) media/trade outlets with research capabilities. It's imperative that you align your goals and strategy with a partner who offers what you need (and won't charge you for things you don't).



Media outlets

Working with a media outlet allows you to closely align your study to your target audience, assuming the outlet you partner with knows your industry well. These partnerships usually come with public-facing deliverables like whitepapers and infographics, which your media partner will leverage for brand awareness and lead generation. Media partners also work to promote your research (dedicated articles, social media posts), leading to greater brand awareness.

Tip: Know that your research will be co-branded with your media partner, which can hamper the possibility of broader coverage with competing trade media.

Third party market research firms

Working with an independent market research firm lends your study credibility. These firms have the expertise and experience to align your research with your desired outcomes and help you form a hypothesis and research plan. Some also boast brand name recognition which can help your study garner media attention.

Tip: Make sure you choose a firm well-versed in your industry that understands your business. If that's not an option, ensure your team plays a key role throughout the entire research process to provide the industry expertise required to meet your goals.

Industry analysts

There are several large industry analyst firms that cover a wide variety of industries with specialty practice areas. Smaller firms typically specialize in one specific industry. Research is often a key component of analysts' service and consultancy offerings, and some will also do research for hire. Often, they will also help promote the study results and findings.

Tip: These engagements tend to be more costly, but you're also paying for the brand credibility and industry clout, which plays well with media. Plus, many firms deliver some level of co-promotion as part of their fees, such as reports authored by their expert analyst, distribution to their subscribers, public appearances, participation in webinars, etc.

The self-serve research model:

Generally, the more you spend on a partner, the broader your study can be, and the more legwork is taken off your plate. However, the high cost of these top-tier research contracts presents a barrier to entry for many, which is why some businesses may opt to run the research in-house. From a bandwidth perspective, it's more common for larger corporations to run research in-house, but smaller marketing teams may also be asked to take this on if they don't have the budget for a partner.



Omnibus survey

An omnibus survey is a questionnaire administered by a professional research organization to a large number of respondents. These organizations have ongoing access to a “panel” of respondents that represent key market audiences, such as a representative sample of US adults. Omnibus surveys include a variety of unrelated topics and are paid for by several survey sponsors. This cost-sharing approach to research is a good fit for companies without a lot of money to spend on a one-to-one research partnership, but you're typically limited to a couple of questions. The survey will still be administered by a third party, but you'll be in charge of analyzing, utilizing and presenting the results.

Polling apps

The DIY approach can involve free online survey platforms like Survey Monkey, TypeForm or Hubspot. Many of these tools have best practices built in to help you conduct a survey with minimal bias. However, there are a couple of obstacles to consider. Firstly, securing an adequate number of respondents for your survey, particularly a representative sample from your target population, can be challenging and sometimes unattainable. Secondly, it is important to recognize that the perceived cost savings of the DIY approach may be less substantial once you factor in the time and effort required for tasks like writing, reviewing, testing and re-reviewing your survey before its launch.

Budget considerations when choosing the right partner:

Budget considerations will likely play a key role in determining what partner you choose, so it's important to be aware of what you can expect with each partner type and whether that helps you achieve your goals. The chart below provides a high-level overview.

Aligning your budget with your goals to pick the right partner



PART #3

Universal Considerations: Your path to valid and credible data

Whether you choose to run your study in-house or partner with a third party, there are some basic research techniques you need to understand to ensure that your data is valid and credible. Using sound sampling, surveying and analysis methods, you can feel confident that your public-facing data (and your brand reputation) will be unimpeachable.



Ensure a representative sample. Make sure the people included in your survey (the “sample”) truly represent the larger population you’re studying. This means polling a sample that is the right size and statistically represents your target population across variables like age, gender, location, etc.

Use a third party’s survey panel. Creating your own panel of survey respondents and hitting the target number of completed surveys can be difficult. However, many third party research partners have their own panels of survey-takers. Accessing this pool of guaranteed respondents can remove much of the leg work involved in sampling and provide you with credible data to help your research stand up to scrutiny. The catch: not all third party panels are created equal. Do your homework to be sure the panel you’re using can reliably represent the population you’re studying.

Ask the right questions to get the best results. How you word the questions in your survey (or even how they’re ordered) will influence the response.

Closed or open: Closed-ended questions have multiple choice or one-word answers and generate quantitative data. Example: Rate your service experience on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. Open-ended questions invite respondents to deliver a unique answer and generate qualitative data. Example: Describe your service experience.

Stay neutral: Keep an objective tone in your question-writing. Be careful of leading questions, or questions that suggest an answer in their wording.

Randomize: Order bias is the tendency for a respondent to answer in a certain way depending on the survey-maker’s planned order of questions. Simple fix: use software to randomize the order of your questions.

Beware of bias. As in any human endeavor, some bias is unavoidable in market research. There are several ways to minimize bias, and a professional research partner can help you implement these strategies, including proper sample sizing, random sampling (giving each member of the population the same chance of being selected), careful question wording and accurate interpretation of the results.

Even when partnering, we recommend you take a hands-on approach in the planning, collection and analyzing processes. After all, no one knows your industry, your target population or your research goals better than you.

PART #4

Data Analysis: Using research (and those who conduct it) to tell your story

Step 1) Craft your narrative

Now that you have the data, it's time to turn those insights into a compelling narrative with actionable insights that showcase your business's unique point of view. A best practice is to create a research report or eBook as the core content piece that tells the research story and anchors the campaign. The tips below will help you shape that story and present the data:

Stay focused: Refer to your research plan and the questions you aimed to solve. Next, evaluate whether your data aligns with the intended narrative. If it does, identify the specific findings that best support the claims you wish to make. Alternatively, if it doesn't, consider how you can tweak the storyline to support the high-level objectives. From there, make strategic choices on what to highlight to bring the data and story together cohesively.

Organize the findings: Focus on what readers care about most, determine the key themes and re-organize the data into key sections. Structure it like a story with a beginning to set the context, a middle with the meat of the report and a conclusion with actionable recommendations.

Emphasize the key points: Craft strong headlines to highlight the key takeaways. Then, use your data to support each headline and section. Remember, not everyone is going to read your report word for word. The headlines will help users digest the findings.



Use the right language: Speak to your audience in a way they understand. Remove unnecessary research jargon and write in simple terms.

Use visuals: Charts, graphs, diagrams, videos and other visual representations will help you simplify the data, illustrate trends and communicate more effectively. Be sure to label everything clearly.

Make it actionable: You've likely identified some challenge or opportunity points that you can link to actionable recommendations or next steps. When applicable, these action items should point users to your solution or product. Make sure your readers understand the link between your research and how they can take action.

Step 2) Create a marketing and PR plan

Your team should have a plan outlining what goals you want to achieve and the content required to execute them. For example, if you have created an anchor piece of content, such as a research report, you can repurpose that report in many different ways. The checklist below outlines various ways to present the findings, depending on your goals. A comprehensive marketing and PR campaign will likely include content assets from each category.

Anchor content asset:

- eBook, whitepaper, or report to present the findings, which can then be repurposed in different ways.

Additional content assets for a cohesive marketing and PR campaign:

FOR PR

- Press release
- Media pitching
- Bylines
- Key messages for media interviews

FOR MARKETING

- Gated report for lead generation
- Social media content (posts, graphics, videos)
- Blog
- Paid social (ads)
- Infographic
- Testimonials
- eBlasts
- Quotes, video clips

Step 3) Amplify your research

While traditional market research is often used to inform product strategy, there are endless ways that your PR and marketing teams can benefit from the data, especially if they work together to create a cohesive campaign.

From a PR perspective, research findings are a tremendous news-making opportunity, particularly in the absence of a strong brand product or news announcement. Reporters are often interested in new and unique data that they can use to frame or support a story. The team can capitalize on this by putting out a press release to announce the news and pitching it. Additionally, they can incorporate thought leadership around the data through articles, speaking engagements, presentations and social media. By doing so, PR teams improve brand credibility and increase their share of voice.

Marketers also have plenty of opportunities to create timely and highly relevant content to improve brand awareness and engage prospects throughout the entire sales cycle. For example, the team can develop content assets like eBooks, infographics, social media content or paid ads to engage their target audiences. They can also collaborate with media partners on sponsored content, leveraging the outlet's targeting capabilities to promote their research assets and generate top-of-funnel leads or reach decision-makers.

Conclusion

Conducting research to meet PR and marketing objectives may seem like an overwhelming task. But remember, research is customizable, and you can find your way to valid and useful data on just about any budget. Assess your options and select the research path that makes the most sense for your PR and marketing goals.

The benefits of using research to enhance your PR and marketing outcomes are undeniable. When you use credible data to help tell your brand story, you position your company as an industry leader, shaping the narrative you're reporting on. This kind of data-driven credentialing is invaluable and enhances not only your standing in the marketplace, but also your bottom line.



About The Fletcher Group

At The Fletcher Group, we're just as passionate about everyone knowing your name as you are. Unlike most PR and content firms claiming knowledge of the Payment and Fintech space, we have 17 years of experience driving measurable results using a mix of positioning, story-telling content, promotional PR and marketing. Our network and expertise extends to every corner of the industry and enables the TFG team to get you the coverage and partnership opportunities you deserve. It's who we are and our only focus.

**Need help managing your next
market research campaign to
drive PR and marketing success?**

Contact us at info@fletchergroupllc.com.

