

## Rock Around the MROCs to Navigate the Brave New Research World

by Nancy Pekala

Quantitative research is busted.

So says Ray Poynter, Managing Director, [The Future Place](#) who made a case for a “new marketing research” during a recent webinar on the “[The Case for the NewMR](#)” by recently suggesting two fundamental assumptions simply don’t apply anymore. The first addresses the issue of random probability sampling. “Most people don’t take part in market research anymore,” Poynter said. “An increasing number of people don’t have land lines or cell phones that are reachable. More people say no to surveys than yes. In fact, about 30-40% of quantitative research is now being done online.”

The second assumption gone wrong is that people are willing and able to answer the questions we ask, Poynter said. “We are really bad witnesses to our own views and intentions. There are all sorts of challenges to the questions people are being asked.”



**Ray Poynter**

As a result, enter the NewMR. What is the new marketing research? Poynter explains that the new emerging marketing research revolves around the following premises:

- Taking the world as it is, people as they are and research techniques as they might be.
- A return to theory. A new focus will center on lessons learned from the behavioral sciences.
- Alternative quantitative models. They’re out there and will play a bigger role in quantitative work.
- An increase in ethnographic research. Clients are simply not happy with the results they’re getting from traditional quantitative research. “While still it’s still a bit of the wild west at the moment,” Poynter said, “there are lots of new tools that are becoming available.”

As market researchers move deeper into this brave new world, Poynter suggested that listening will become the key meme for 2010. As a result, more attention will be focused on alternative approaches such as e-ethnography, netnography, virtual ethnography and online ethnography.

“The line between listening and watching will become merged,” he said.

Poynter offered an example of a case study involving The X Factor television talent show. InSites Consulting and RTL Netherlands utilized data mining and web scraping to analyze 71,230 pieces of online discussion about the show's contestants. One of the contestants (Jamal) was able to transition from being someone with little chance of moving forward in the show to being a finalist, all based on what people were saying about him online.

According to Poynter, the real issue is that "most of the time people are just not into your brand enough. Chances are they're not talking about it most of the time or not talking about the issues you need to decide on this week. If they are talking about it, you have to know it and listen. If they're not, you have to find some way of figuring out what's in their head."

Three trends are fast emerging aimed at helping market researchers do just that. The first trend focuses on MROCs, or marketing research online communities. These communities range in size from 50-500 people and are primarily insight driven. The second trend involves online community panels which can be as large as 5,000 people and which are ROI-driven. The third trend involves a move to WE-research, or citizen research.

"MROCs are really exciting because they allow you to ask lots of questions that were never asked before," Poynter said. "With an MROC, you can get an answer today or tomorrow if you really need it and about small issues as well as the big ones."

In addition to just being the next big thing, MROCs are growing in popularity because they fit the listening meme and because brands are looking for something new. "Traditional qualitative research is too slow, too expensive and too boring for some brands today," Poynter said.

MROCs are already bigger than online focus groups, bulletin board focus groups and IDIs, he added. "But if something came along with better ROI that's more sexy, it would take over. Maybe not this year or next year, but it's coming."

What Poynter does project for 2010 is strong client demand for MROCs, growth in the number of software solutions and eventually supply exceeding demand. "The problem with these techniques is that you can't drive it cheaper without affecting the results," he said.

An extension of MROCs and another trend in the market research field is a transition from "me" research to "we" research. "This kind of citizen research is going to play a really important part in where research is going in the future," he said.



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What else does the online research space have in store for researchers this year? Poynter offered the following [predictions](#):

- Whilst MROCs will grow, they' won't likely make a major dent in the number of online access panel surveys and interviews (1% loss for panels).
- Access panels will lose quite a bit of ground to community panels over the next two years, perhaps 10%-15% of their business. They'll also lose ground to new alternatives, such as mobile, social networks and river sampling (5-10%)
- These new entrants will increase the price pressure on online access panels, resulting in stable or declining prices for sample. On the other hand, online access panels will continue to take business from face-to-face and telephone, almost offsetting their losses to community panels and the newer alternatives.
- There'll be growth in the merging of the DIY trend and the online panel trend, with more clients either scripting their own surveys and using panels (perhaps building on the Toluna [QuickSurveys](#) model) or by sending the questionnaire spec to the panel company and asking them to perform a field and tab function (something which has been growing for a while now).

One of the challenges for market researchers going forward will be the ability to gain a better understanding of not only what people are saying to each other in these online formats but also what they mean by it. "Conducting text analysis is not just about word count," Poynter explained. "It's really about what people mean, not their word choice. If I say 'I like football. LOL', that probably means I don't like football, but then again, maybe I do."

Poynter strongly suggested that today's market researchers brush up on their ethnography. "There are alternative ways of pulling samples, of conveying the truth," he said. "It's important to get connected and listen to the authentic voice of the customer."

He added, "The best market research conversations are not happening at conferences or within magazines. They're mostly happening on LinkedIn or Twitter. LinkedIn is indispensable for market researchers in 2010."

Poynter also suggested that while online research activities that took place a couple of years ago were mainly conducted by early adopters or risk takers in the industry, they are now being participated in by the early majority who expect results from day one.

"There are a lot of discussion groups out there but it's important to find people you trust of whom you can ask questions," he said. "Find people who think broadly and get involved in the conversation. Put an idea out there to test it. Information funnels so much more quickly in LinkedIn. Use it to obtain honest opinions about your research techniques."

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