chapter twelve

visitor research
How can you develop and grow your event audience if you don’t know anything about it? Building a picture of who attended the event, where they came from, how they found out about it, what they enjoyed and if they will return is essential when developing marketing strategies. In addition, if your event is funded by public money or commercial sponsorship it is likely that this kind of information will be required as a condition of support – and often you’ll need it to make your case in the first place.

Research needn’t be a complicated, expensive or scary undertaking. The key is to focus on what you actually want to find out (i.e. what is the research question?). Next, ask yourself if the skills required to carry out the research exist ‘in-house’ or if you need to commission an external organisation or consultant. Bear in mind that the result of ‘independent research’ is generally thought to be more reliable by external parties than that carried out by the organisation itself. Professional consultancy is worth considering but if your budget is too tight and you don’t have the necessary ‘in-house’ skills think about approaching a local college or university. Relevant departments may be able to incorporate the project into student’s coursework under the guidance of their lecturer.

If you plan to undertake or commission the research yourself, make sure you seek appropriate advice to ensure that your methodology and questionnaire will provide reliable results. Some things to think about:

- What do you want to find out and why?
- Who will use the information (e.g. yourself and the management team, funders, sponsors, etc)?
What research has been done already?
Is there any secondary data that could inform your research? (Note: ‘primary data’ is your own data collected from attendees, individuals, groups, etc; ‘secondary data’ is data collected by someone else e.g. population statistics, etc).
What methodology will you use to collect the data? (Think about sample size and reliability).
Sample size – the statistical principles informing probability calculations are outwith the remit of this book. However, as a rule of thumb, the sample should be no less than 100 and there’s often little need to exceed 500 (of course depending on the size and range of the event).
Reliability of sample – how will the sample be drawn and will it provide a balanced representation of the audience?
Closed questions provide ‘quantitative’ data – i.e. information that you can count and easily process ‘in-house’. This includes numbers and percentages of attendance, demographics, patterns of attendance, etc.
Open questions provide ‘qualitative’ data – i.e. information that elicits more personal responses, yet can be difficult to process and interpret ‘in-house’. This includes opinions, thoughts and recommendations.

The most common way to find out about event audiences is to carry out face-to-face interviews or self-completion questionnaires at the event itself. To give you an example, below is a basic questionnaire designed to be implemented ‘face-to-face’. WARNING: your questionnaire should be specific to your research question and situation – it is not suggested that the following questionnaire format is appropriate to your event.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Interview: ________________</th>
<th>Date of Interview: ________________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer Name: __________________</td>
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Enter prompt – “Hello, my name is..., I work for the [insert name] event. Can you spare 5 minutes to help us develop the event further? All respondents will be entered into a prize drawn to win [insert prize].

1. Where do you live? (please tick)
   - [insert host town] – go to Q6
   - Other [insert host region] – go to Q6
   - Other Scotland
   - England
   - Wales
   - Overseas (please state) ______________________
   - N. Ireland
   - Please state your postcode: ______________________

2. Is the Festival the main reason for your visit to (state town) today?
   - Yes?
   - No?
3. Describe the nature of your visit

- I’m a day visitor (i.e. returning home today) – go to Q6
- I’m on holiday

4. If on holiday, tell us about your holiday length and type

   a) State the number of nights: _____
   
   b) State where you are staying (tick):
      - [ ] (insert host town)
      - [ ] Other (insert host region)
      - [ ] Other Scotland

   c) State type of accommodation (tick):
      - [ ] B&B/Guest House
      - [ ] Hotel
      - [ ] Self catering
      - [ ] Camping
      - [ ] Friends and family

5. If on holiday, did the festival play a part in your decision to holiday in this area?

   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

6. Tell us about your party/group

   a) Including yourself, how many adults are in your party:
      - [ ] M _____
      - [ ] F _____

   b) How many children (under 16s) are in your party:
      - [ ] M _____
      - [ ] F _____

   c) Who is in your group?
      - [ ] Friends
      - [ ] Family
      - [ ] Work colleagues
      - [ ] Other

   d) What age are you?
      - [ ] 17–24
      - [ ] 25–34
      - [ ] 35–44
      - [ ] 45–54
      - [ ] 55–64
      - [ ] 65+

   e) Gender of respondent (don’t ask!, just tick):
      - [ ] Male
      - [ ] Female

7. How much do you estimate that your PARTY has spent in total today on

   - Event admission fees £ ____ . ____
   - Shopping and gifts £ ____ . ____
   - Food and drink £ ____ . ____
   - Other local activities £ ____ . ____

8. How did you travel to the festival today? (tick all that apply)

   - [ ] On foot
   - [ ] Hired car
   - [ ] Chartered coach
   - [ ] Bus
   - [ ] Ferry
   - [ ] Air
   - [ ] Other, please specify __________________________

9. How did you hear about the festival (tick all that apply)

   - [ ] Newspaper advertising
   - [ ] Newspaper editorial
   - [ ] Magazine advertising
   - [ ] Magazine editorial
   - [ ] Distribution racks
   - [ ] Posters
   - [ ] Mailing
   - [ ] Radio
   - [ ] TV
   - [ ] Internet search/links
   - [ ] Festival website
   - [ ] Tourist office
   - [ ] Word of mouth

10. Attendance Patterns

    How many times have you attended previously? (circle) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
    Would you like to return to the event?
      - [ ] Yes
      - [ ] No
    Would you return to the area for a visit or holiday?
      - [ ] Yes
      - [ ] No
      - [ ] I live here
    Will you recommend the festival to friends and family?
      - [ ] Yes
      - [ ] No
11. Tell us how you rate the festival in respect of the following (please tick)

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<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Very Poor</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1. Overall festival experience</td>
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<td>4. Advance publicity</td>
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<td>5. Venue</td>
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<td>6. Time of year</td>
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<td>7. Activities for kids</td>
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<td>8. Value for money</td>
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<td>9. Ticketing</td>
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<td>10. Catering/food</td>
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<td>10. Information at the event</td>
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12. Any other comments:

All respondents will be entered into a PRIZE DRAW to win XXXXX. Please supply your details to enter.

Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Tel:
Email:

If you would like to receive information about next year’s event you can opt in to our Mailing List. Your information will not be passed on to any other organisation and you will only receive information about this event (tick): ☐ Yes ☐ No Thanks
Some More Research Tips

General

- The offer of a Prize Draw can be a useful inducement for respondents to take part.
- Don’t miss a trick: offer all respondents the opportunity to join the event’s mailing list in order that they can be kept up-to-date with future programme announcements and offers, etc.
- Take care over the layout of the questionnaire. For clarity, number questions, use tick boxes as appropriate and leave enough space for any required responses to be stated.
- Leave any personal questions to the end of the questionnaire (e.g. age range, contact details, profession, etc) – some respondents may be put off if they are asked to answer such questions at the outset.
- Ensure that you do not pose ‘leading questions’.
- Ensure that you structure your questionnaire to avoid confused responses. For example, if you are directing some of the questions specifically to visitors to the region, ensure that locals are directed to bypass these questions.
- Make sure you do a test run. Always pilot the questionnaire on a few friends and colleagues to ensure that it’s easy to complete and doesn’t contain any errors or misleading questions. Before you carry out the research ensure that you have thoroughly addressed how the data will be processed. Test your sample responses on the software that you will use to process the data.

For interview-led questionnaires

- Ensure that your interviewers are fully briefed, well-presented and very polite.
- Provide event tee-shirts and/or identity badges for each interviewer to wear so that they can be easily identified.
- Think about where interviewers will be situated within the event site/venue. Attendees should not be approached on entry.
- Don’t start the interviewing until at least an hour or more into the event – otherwise event attendees may not have had the necessary event experience to provide valid responses.
- Think about how you will reach your intended sample size – give the interviewers targets so that they know how many interviews per hour they are aiming for.
Make sure that there is a safe place where all completed questionnaires can be stored throughout the event.
Ensure you have plenty of blank questionnaires ready.

**For self-completion questionnaires**

- Think about timing. When and where will attendees be offered the opportunity to take part – remember you want to maximise reliable responses. Is it appropriate to place the questionnaires on venue seats or in participant packs; should questionnaires be distributed during an interval, in the café area, on exit, etc; should you set up specific ‘research stations’ across the event site where attendees can take part?
- Think about ease of response. Do you need to provide large, well-marked boxes around the event site/venue for questionnaires to be returned; should you provide an envelope with a freepost address?
- Ensure you have plenty of pens available.

**TOP TIP**
Remember, at the very minimum you should be thinking about where your audience/participants come from – a simple request for a postcode at the time of booking, or via a competition mechanism, can provide essential demographic information in terms of the pull of the event and the success of the marketing.