



**The blanket approach used by household surveys is not getting what companies want – sector specific information. Consumers are also bored with them. Step in co-branding** *By Melanie May*

Everything in life is about supply and demand. But when companies want lifestyle data, yet are facing falling survey response rates, the question is: can the data providers supply it?

Increasingly, lifestyle data providers are having to face the very real fact that consumers are no longer impressed by the faceless consumer surveys hitting their doormat. “There’s an element of consumer boredom,” says David Castle, director of databases at Lifecycle Marketing. “They’ve seen them before, done them before and don’t feel they need to do another.”

What’s happening, he says, is that the surveys are repeatedly answered by the same responders, with the resulting data ever more skewed towards particular groups. Even more frustratingly for marketers, these tend not to be the affluent ABC1s they’re after.

#### Partnered survey

One answer to the problem of turned-off consumers is the partnered survey. Lifestyle data providers are joining forces with well-known and respected companies such as Thomas Cook and BA and running co-branded joint surveys. The benefit, they argue, is that consumers will respond to a company they know and are comfortable with. Holiday makers flying home, for example, are much more inclined to fill in satisfaction surveys or questionnaires

# STRENGTH BY ASSOCIATION

– especially if they’re incentivised with something like the chance to win a pair of flights. Holiday surveys are also likely to attract a younger, more affluent audience.

“It means nothing to the responder to get a Millennium-branded survey,” argues Martin Smith, MD of ad agency Millennium, which focuses on the over 50s and runs co-branded surveys with *The Sun* and *The Sunday Times*.

“If you can pair-up with a strong consumer brand, the response rate is typically much better because people see a different purpose to filling them in,” he adds.

For a company producing its own branded questionnaire in partnership with a data provider, the benefits are just as tangible. Instead of sponsoring a few questions on a survey going out to a million people who may or may not

be interested in its products, doing it this way allows it to reach its own customers, or those likely to be interested in the brand. Working with a partner also means the risks and the cost are shared, plus they get the expertise of the data provider.

Consumer Surveys recently chose Thomas Cook as its first partner. Running a partnered survey to the travel agent’s database gave the company access to a different sector compared to the usual responders to household consumer surveys. These were mainly younger consumers with higher incomes and a high proportion of males, interested in travel and leisure, according to Veronica Over, MD of Consumer Surveys.

“Thomas Cook is interested in the travel sector of the marketplace and wants demographic information,” says

### Case study: Highland Distillers

To gather more data on its customers, Highland Distillers' whisky brand Macallan decided to team up with DM agency WWAV Rapp Collins Scotland (WWAV RC Scotland) instead of a lifestyle data provider.

WWAV RC Scotland produced a bespoke questionnaire mailing called The Macallan Census, which was distributed to Macallan's entire customer database of 100,000 people in August this year.

The plan is to send this out on a yearly basis to customers as part of its ongoing relationship marketing programme. It asks a set of questions aimed at checking if name and address details are correct, others aim to establish how dedicated a Macallan customer they are, such as what, when and where they drink.

The results should furnish Macallan with regular customer data, while also providing a platform to collect purchasing and consumption information.

"We want to have a yearly snapshot of Macallan drinkers and the data will act as a benchmark to ensure all communications are relevant," says Ian White, senior account director at WWAV RC Scotland.

The strapline: 'Be part of our history', aims to encourage customers to complete the questionnaire, which has been further incentivised by a competition to win a seven-night break for two at a De Vere lodge.

"The yearly survey gives us key customer data and offers us the opportunity to keep the Macallan brand front of mind and encourage



customers to increase their purchase behaviour, which is the main objective of the relationship marketing programme," explains Jason Craig, direct marketing and internet manager at Highland Distillers.

Over. "Conversely, we want information on how often people travel, and their travel plans for the forthcoming year but also the financial and lifestyle data that our other clients want."

Many lifestyle data providers are teaming up with publishers to target the readership of certain titles. Consumer Surveys also works with *What Car?* magazine. Sending *What Car?* branded surveys to the magazine's customer database has meant that Consumer Surveys has gained a wealth of information from a largely male audience, one traditionally difficult to reach. And, through teaming with *What Car?* and asking similar car-oriented questions in other surveys, it has built up car make and model information on four million people.

Other providers include Claritas, which now has partnerships with more than 50 companies. Many

are through product registration cards. "They give the most consistent flow of data," says Steve Lake, head of Claritas's data division. "You can't turn off the flow. Even if we stopped now, we'd still be getting data in two years time because they're packed with products."

Warranty cards for brown and white goods are a growing source of data for brand and data provider alike. The need for goods such as fridges, TVs and kettles transcends demographic classifications, and all of them come with a warranty or registration card which frequently include a list of questions for

the new owner to fill in along with their name and address details, all of which provides a steady stream of data.

What both parties have to ensure is that they have a consensus over the data that each receive. In addition, no one side wants to take

all the risk or most of the cost. "Before you go into a partnership, you have to work out what both partners want to gain," explains Over.

Some companies are still nervous about committing to a partnership, mainly because they want to protect their brand. Consumer Surveys does not work to a standard partnership model for this reason but, says Over, encourages discussion to make sure the partnership protects the brand as well as both parties' interests.

But partnered surveys are not the only solution. Companies are also taking data collection into their own hands (see box above). Data pooling is proving a good way for retailers to gather information on their own and like-minded companies' customers.

EuroDirect's data pool product is Data Exchange, which sales director Neal Rimay-Muranyi describes as a "quasi-lifestyle database". Built from data independent from the Electoral Roll, around 100 companies feed in and share data anonymously. It currently comprises over 40 million contributed records incorporating lifestage, lifestyle and consumer demographic variables. "It's basically people buying what oth-



**'Before you go into a partnership, you have to work out what both partners want to gain'**

Veronica Over,  
managing director,  
Consumer Surveys

er people have on the purchasing habits of the names they already hold,” explains Rimay-Muranyi.

Another alternative marketers are testing without the help of lifestyle data providers are affinity programmes. CRM company GB Group works with Hillary's Blinds, a provider of household blinds, which is seeking companies with similar brand values to build relationships with. “If a company provides soft furnishings, Hillary's can be confident their customers might buy their products too,” explains GB Group marketing manager David Green.

### Consumer control

However, these schemes might be great for the retailers involved, but they tend to exclude the lifestyle data provider. It means the data providers have to work that bit harder to gain information, which makes partnering with well-known consumer brands even more important.

To this aim, data provider The Postal Preference Service believes it has a clear point of difference. While asking recipients to answer the usual survey

questions, it also asks them to specify explicitly what they want to receive information about. It believes consumers will be more responsive to surveys if they have some control over what they get sent as a result.

Responders receive a reward pack a number of months later, focused on a particular sector such as travel and leisure, and including a magazine with coupons and samples. “We segment our database so only those who have said they're interested in travel and leisure get that particular reward pack,” says Keith McNeilly, CRM director at The Postal Preference Service.

Does this mean the traditional household consumer survey is dead? Over doesn't think so. “To get a balanced view, you need a certain level of data generated from household surveys. If you move too far away from that the skew would be awful, with the whole database erring towards the people you're partnering with.”

Lake shares this view but adds: “We have to stop treating everyone the same. Household surveys are not segmented by lifestyle or lifestage.”



**Co-branded surveys can lift response**

So, although partnership surveys are providing an answer for how to close the gap between data supply and demand, there is still a place for the household consumer survey. The consensus among data providers though is that there is a need to tailor surveys more towards the consumer. “There has to be more of an obvious benefit to filling in surveys,” sums up Smith. And as consumers grow ever more wise to marketers' techniques, the price for quality lifestyle data rises ever higher. n