

5 Signs it's Time to Outsource Your Market Research

Market research is the systematic action of gathering and interpreting information – using statistical and analytical methods and techniques – to gain insights into client wants, needs, and preferences. Market research is critical to maintain a competitive advantage and allows firms to gain invaluable information about economic shifts, current and changing market trends, areas for expansion, demographics, client preferences, and more that all impact decision making and, ultimately, the bottom line.

Savvy A/E/C firms rely on market research to provide fact-based data to proactively identify prospective clients, projects, services, and markets. Data gathered from research drives a myriad of action items including the development of strategic plans, marketing campaigns, business development efforts, operational decisions, etc. Firms that forego market research and blindly pursue initiatives with no regard to market data run the risk of misdirected efforts, wasted time, and lost revenue. If you want to keep a competitive advantage, market research must be conducted on a continual basis.

There are two main types of research – primary and secondary. Primary research collects original data directly from the source – usually clients and prospective clients in a target market. Examples of primary research are interviews (telephone or face-to-face), surveys, questionnaires (online or mail), and focus groups.

Secondary research consists of collecting already-published data and includes reports and studies by industry-experts (like Zweig Group's library of surveys including the 2019 Financial Performance Survey of A/E/C Firms), government agencies, and professional organizations. This type of research can also be gained by reading articles in magazines, trade journals, and industry publications.

Determining whether to use in-house staff or outsource your market research comes down to a cost/benefit analysis. Does the impact of obtaining relevant, vital information needed to allow your business to grow with your existing staff outweigh the costs of outsourcing? Firms that outsource

ABOUT ELEVATE MARKETING ADVISORS

Elevate Marketing Advisors develops marketing and business development campaigns to invigorate your brand, differentiate your firm, and drive business to your bottom line so you stay focused on design and delivery of your discipline.

We are driven to help people and firms realize their beyond through relationship, advocacy, and an elevated client experience. We do this through a daily commitment to our guiding principles:

- Embrace Authenticity
- Reject Mediocrity
- Invest in Relationships
- Deliver with Intention
- Have Fun and Kick Ass!

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research gain the benefits of employing research experts who have depth of experience, knowledge, and resources; obtain an objective third-party view; minimize costs while maximizing value (experienced researches are typically more effective and efficient than in-house personnel); and keep their in-house team members focused on existing initiatives.

Key Reasons to Outsource Market Research

Revenue Slow Down. Is revenue generation at your firm meeting financial performance goals? Is revenue growing slower than you'd like or planned? Do you have internal resources to effectively analyze and evaluate financial performance and build a strategy to affect the change needed to turn this around? Analysis takes time and is often overlooked. Marketing research can help you quantify opportunities and prioritize those with the highest revenue potential for your organization.

An external market research partner gives you the information you need to reinforce or realign your strategy and execution based on market conditions, competition in the market, and client. Data can help confirm if your objectives are valid and supports short- mid- and long-term goals.

Poorly Performing Marketing Strategies. How often do you find yourself able to step back from your daily task list and contemplate the ways you can improve your organization's direction? Effective marketing takes time and thought. Busy marketers are often asked to rush strategy due to workload and deadlines. Do you find yourself skipping steps? Are you disappointed with the marketing results? Do you lack time to test concepts and key messages to evaluate which ones resonate with your clients? What's the cost to develop and execute marketing campaigns/materials that are not based on current and accurate facts? You likely are not getting the most out of your budget. Using an outside market research firm can help you rediscover your greater vision and give you the time to properly develop and execute marketing strategies that result in more opportunities and an increased bottom line.

Overloaded Marketing Staff. The A/E/C talent war is not just a battle for technical professionals. In today's climate, experienced marketing talent is tough to find and the ever-elusive marketing coordinator with experience to conduct market research effectively is like an industry unicorn. With typical marketing workloads – proposals, campaigns, social media, opportunity pursuits, CRM maintenance, PR, corporate marketing tasks, and so much more – can your team stay ahead of demands AND add another market research task to their responsibilities? Enlisting a market research partner reduces the workload of your existing staff, nullifies the need to hire more staff, and allows you to dedicate a specific budget item for market research through outsourcing. And, most importantly, keeps your internal team focused on daily management of marketing and business development efforts.

Expansion Opportunities. Whether you are considering expanding your services or geographical reach or contemplating an acquisition market research minimizes risk and helps determine the viability of expansion. Market research focused on expansion carefully analyzes key factors including market saturation, distribution channels (are there adequate "buyers" to support your market entry), and service/consumer trends.

Your Brand Needs an Update. Contrary to what you may think, you cannot determine brand perception; rather, it is determined by external audiences who experience your brand. Conducting research enables you to ensure you have established and are adapting and evolving your brand to meet the needs of your audiences. Market research is paramount to managing an effective brand and often includes periodic perception studies – internally with your team and externally with clients and pros-

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pects. External studies also play a crucial role for firms by demonstrating active engagement with clients (who doesn't like being asked by a service provider "how am I doing" and "can we do better"?). Client feedback, if collected correctly throughout a project, addresses issues before they become problems. Furthermore, a well-executed client perception study not only uncovers potential problems, but also key differentiators as seen by your clients.

While a client perception study can be conducted in-house, outsourcing to a third party consistently provides honest, direct feedback to help your firm develop your authentic brand along with strategies for identifying opportunities for growth and expansion.

It may seem daunting to consider market research as a key strategy for your firm, but the information you'll receive takes the guesswork out of marketing and gives you data and intel that you need to drive your strategy and accomplish your objectives and goals. This systematic approach, while an investment, can make your efforts not only easier but more effective. And, of course, you don't have to choose between an entirely internal or external solution – hybrid strategies can be extremely effective.

To best position your firm for success, invest in market research before every major initiative. Your leaders and your firm deserve to be well informed.