

The Wonder of Online Bulletin Board Systems

Market research buyers, ignore them at your peril!

Online Bulletin Board Systems (focus groups) have to be the best kept secret on the Web. They are invaluable for market research buyers because they are so cost-effective and offer enormous benefits.

Commonly referred to as message boards, web forums, discussion forums or discussion groups, Bulletin Board Systems (BBS's) can be a fantastic and extremely powerful web-based market research tool for structured, in-depth discussions between numerous respondents.

How do BBS's work?

A BBS is a computer or application dedicated to the exchange or sharing of messages or other files on a network.

When developing a BBS the first stage is to recruit respondents, which can be done either online (from a nationally representative panel) or ad hoc. These respondents are then sent an e-mail inviting them to enter the group at a specific time. Once respondents enter the group online, they are prompted to answer a series of questions.

Responding to questions is easy. Respondents simply type their answer into the box and click the 'Post reply' button. The response is immediately uploaded onto the main screen and can be seen by everyone. Moderators can then ask further questions in order to obtain more detailed information and promote discussion.

Also contained within the page is a whiteboard where pictures, links, probing questions, reminders etc. can be displayed.

The terms 'forum' and 'board' may refer to the entire community or to a specific sub-forum dealing with a distinct topic. Messages within these sub-forms are then displayed in chronological order or as threaded discussions.

What are the benefits of BBS's?

Research has shown that BBS users spend twice as long online and click on twice as many ads as non-BBS users. Sites with community features also enjoy nine times the visitor frequency than sites without. Respondents can link up with other users and other local, national and international groups with similar interests.

As well as pictures, the session platform can accommodate video and other media, and there is plenty of time for respondents to contribute their opinions, delve into attitudes, behaviours and beliefs, and to interact with each other.

Qubiq Online (www.qubiq-online.com) is a thriving full service research agency specialising in web based research. They conduct all types of qualitative and quantitative research across many different sectors.

Account Manager Victoria Manning says: "A BBS is usually referred to as a focus group, but there is much more to it than that, and the benefits for market research buyers are huge! BBS's are brilliant for profiling a given target audience - who they are, their current behaviour, their lifestyle, category and brand usage. Also, they give an exceptional insight into assessing brand image and position, as well as company identity compared to competition. BBS's work so well with new product work, usage, concept development and packaging design."

Benefits of BBS's to respondents include:

- Unlike 'normal' group discussions, with a BBS, the group may last a day, a few days, a week or even months, depending upon the application
- The ethnic backgrounds, gender, age or physical ability of people online is much less obvious and so people's contributions are valued much more on their own merit
- A BBS can be used to create communities of interest both within and beyond geographical boundaries of the local community
- Moderators are able to review discussion progress and to track and record insights. They can also make any required adjustments in time for the next session

Victoria Manning continues: "Here at Qubiq Online we see evidence all the time of how Bulletin Board Systems are extremely cost effective and work so well with advertising development and in many cases, assessments of advertising. They also give invaluable insights into consumer processes like purchasing, serving and consuming food and beverages, for example, or business processes such as prospect insights and more. Put simply, our advice to market research buyers is: ignore BBS's at your peril!"

To find out more about how a BBS can benefit you - contact Victoria Manning at Qubiq Online to discuss your requirements on 01491 822555 or 07825 607227. Or e-mail Victoria at victoria@qubiq-online.com.

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