

FMR Associates uses Liberation 6000 to Improve Market Research Data Collection



Market Research Firm FMR Associates uses Liberation 6000 to Manage Complex Survey Scripts, Improve Dialing Efficiency

FMR Associates (www.fmrassociates.com) is a market research firm founded in 1981 and headquartered in Tucson, Arizona. The company provides full service market research services to more than 600 media, marketing and consumer clients around the world, including radio and television stations, cable companies, music syndicators, advertising agencies, consumer companies, and retail businesses. FMR Associates prides itself on objective, innovative research as well as insightful, actionable analysis and reports for its clients. Since late 2001, the firm has deployed Liberation 6000, a customer campaign management system from TeleDirect, in order to achieve greater efficiencies and accuracy in their telephone survey dialing, research and reporting.

Problem

One of the challenges facing FMR Associates as a research firm has been maintaining time savings and efficiency for the multiple scripts they need to develop and conduct for their broadcast clients, primarily radio stations. These surveys are fairly detailed and may take as long as 25 minutes per survey to complete by phone. As a result, the interaction and decision-making required of FMR's interviewers are comparatively more complex than that of typical call centers in other industries, where the agents are placing follow-up call or trade-up calls to subscribers. In contrast, FMR Associates' interviewers are doing branching and skipping based on multiple questions and answers provided previously in the survey. If a respondent decides to terminate the call before the survey is completed, the survey cannot be used, so many households must be contacted in order to acquire a statistically significant number of surveys.

In addition to the longer questionnaires, FMR Associates also develops "callout surveys," which are shorter and typically take only 10-12 minutes to conduct. In this format, the interviewer asks a few questions and then plays short song clips for the respondent, who rates each song based on his or her preference. In general, the respondents need to meet certain criteria or demographics, such as age, gender, and the stations they listen to. Song-rating research is conducted weekly or biweekly, thus enabling the client to determine from report to report which songs are proving to be the least or most popular.

Prior to installation of the system in September 2001, the firm used a computer-aided telephone interviewing program written in DOS to help with the scripts and dialing. "It was very limited as far as the complexity of the survey we could do, however," says Mike Walter, Director of Computer Operations for FMR. "We could only use it for the shorter callout surveys plus a few other simple surveys for clients. We had interviewers just dialing phone numbers and spending half their time just dialing."

Solution

In order to improve the efficiency of the interviewers and overall efficiency of the scripting process, FMR Associates evaluated the Liberation 6000 system from TeleDirect. "We could see after the demo that the software had a lot of features we really needed that weren't in the DOS program", says Walter.



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The number of calls necessary for any given project varies, according to Walter. "It all depends on how tight or narrow the screening criteria are. If the client is looking for a very tight demographic, such as 20-30-year-old women, it's going to be a lot harder than if the calls can be placed to any age or gender. The dialer will make thousands and thousands of dials to end up with those qualified 100. We measure by completed hours per survey. Daily progress reports in Liberation 6000 show the campaigns we're currently working on. For our call-out surveys, typically they're running at about 1 – 1.5 hours of interviewing time to get one completed survey."

During the day, FMR uses 15-18 interviewers for survey research, increasing to 24-26 at night, when most of the calling is conducted. FMR purchases numbers from national list companies, and also randomly generates numbers, using the Liberation 6000 system. Previously the numbers were kept in dBase databases and Microsoft Access. While the interviewers are on the phone, supervisors can view the scripts and record interviews, so if an interviewer is taking longer than usual to complete a survey, they can check up on him or her to determine the reason why.

Although market research firms are currently exempt from the national DNC (Do Not Call) registry regulations, FMR Associates keeps an internal DNC list if a respondent requests to be removed from the list. Each phone call is prefaced with a statement that the company is not selling anything and that all answers are strictly a matter of opinion. It is still a challenge, however, to get respondents to participate with surveys, and in most instances, 75-100 completed callout surveys are required for any given project. For longer "attitudes" surveys, the target sample is usually between 300-600. Improving the efficiency of the dialing capability has allowed FMR Associates to reach more people in less time.

Down the road, FMR would like to streamline the audio clips of the songs they play. Currently they produce tapes for each interviewer for each script, which requires a significant amount of time and effort. Working with TeleDirect, the company plans to have the actual interviewer control the playing of the audio files, so if there are 30 clips in a particular report, there will be 30 MP3 files integrated with the scripting program. The interviewer will be able to easily switch to the correct audio file while on the phone with the called party.

Benefits

FMR has seen increased productivity from the call center interviewers, who are trained on the Liberation 6000 scripting capability and prompted through their decision making for each survey online. It has saved time and money by having the dialing capability and scripting portion automated. The reporting feature of Liberation 6000 has been helpful as well, as it shows the supervisors what progress has been made from shift to shift.

Mike Walter's advice to market research firms wishing to transition to customer campaign management systems is to start early. "Cutting over to a new system always requires a lot of planning. Spend a month or two months working with the scripting program, getting familiar with it and creating scripts." This ensures a smooth project, he feels.

The benefits of intelligent, automated dialing capabilities have long been touted in call centers for newspapers and cable companies, but also can be translated to the market research environment. This stringent market is characterized by longer, more complex interactions between the interviewers and called parties, and the need to meet specific demographics for each research project.