

## Five Tips When Considering a Private Label Panel



by [Matt Dusig](#) on Thursday, May 20, 2010

Imagine you're the owner of a small retail establishment and, on any given day, you see a shopper stroll the aisles, examine your merchandise, hold it up for a close look -- and then walk out without making a purchase. "Wait!" you'd want to call out, wishing you could determine the precise reason that the potential customer left empty-handed.

Now, consider your virtual customers -- that is, visitors to your website -- people who are clearly interested enough in your brand to click on your URL. Maybe they've come to make a purchase, find information, or perhaps they're looking for some form of engagement with your product. You may not realize it, but they're offering you the perfect opportunity to pose all those questions you've always wanted to ask but didn't have the means to do.

### The online private label panel

This is the domain of online market research, and your website's traffic comprises your ideal survey takers. These individuals have already visited your site, so they know about you, and are clearly interested in your product. Wouldn't you like to know more about them -- and what they think of your brand? Your latest product introductions? Your competitors? Their opinion of your new ad campaign? The thing that irks them most about your goods? The thing they love the most?

In the market research world, this is called a "private label panel" -- and it presents you with an invaluable way to engage your audience. Pique their interest with a short survey and then invite them to join your panel, essentially forming an online dialogue and perhaps a long-term connection.

You'll be able to gauge their opinions immediately, as well as long-term; the panel belongs to your company and falls under its umbrella: your name, your site. And with experts and technology out there to take that traffic and turn it into a panel, you don't need to be in the market research business to reap the benefits. Here are five things to consider if you do decide to go with an online private label panel:

**1. Clarify (and act on) your motivations.** Consider your motivations for building the panel, then select a partner that shares your vision and has the tools to help you realize it.

For example, are you seeking to better monetize your traffic? To provide additional content and give some added value to your customer base? To extend your brand in a creative, effective way? Some combination of all three? Whatever your motivation, it's essential that the technology conveys your brand in a seamless fashion.

When a panelist logs in to your survey site's dashboard, make sure it's flexible enough to actually embellish your brand. Just as relevant for flexibility: the ability to provide visitors with the right incentives to participate. If you want to award \$25 branded gift cards to your panelists, make certain your technology partner can deliver.

**2. Make the panel a uniformly positive experience.** Providing your panel members with a positive experience -- at every touch point -- retains panelists and ultimately drives response rates. Make certain the panel experience, including everything from rewards, to security and customer service, are all commensurate with your brand.

From the onset, you may want to implement a diverse rewards system that appeals to a variety of survey takers. A sample mix of electronically-delivered incentives could range from Amazon.com gift certificates, airline miles, and Virtual Visa cards, to red-hot virtual currencies like Farmville coins and Mafia Wars points, and even donations to non-profits made in your panelist's name.

# DiGiDAY: DAILY

Key here is that the panel provider be a reputable company with mechanisms in place to safeguard information, and ensure that the data is used only for market research surveys -- not for marketing or promotion of *any* kind. Make sure the panel company is affiliated with an industry association such as CASRO, ESOMAR or the ARF to be confident that it follows the market research trade's recognized code of ethics.

Engagement is a two-way street, so it's critical that the brand -- through its panel partner -- deliver impeccable customer service. If panelists have trouble logging in, if they haven't been sent any surveys, have trouble completing a survey, or haven't received rewards on a timely basis, the brand may suffer.

Of course, the surveys themselves need to materialize. Once someone signs up for your panel, there must be consistent inventory of surveys so panelists can participate. Consumers tend to leave panels if the opportunities don't present themselves with some regularity, and as a general rule of thumb, you want to touch panelists at least once a month. If you don't have enough survey needs to meet that challenge, put together an engagement calendar -- send newsletters, industry factoids, and questionnaires to build a more robust profile of your panelists.

**3. Achieve a consistent look & feel.** Make sure you have complete flexibility in terms of look and feel of the panel member site so it is consistent with your site branding and voice.

You've built this equity via your entire online presence: website, e-mails, newsletters, banner ads, and so on, so the panel needs to look and feel like you. Ideally, your panel partner will create the site so there's no lifting -- heavy or otherwise -- on your part.

**4. Insist on timely reporting.** Tracking participation of panelists and monitoring the health of your panel is crucial. Moreover, advanced reporting and diagnostics are critical to the success of any private panel initiative. Know not only what your consumers say, but what they *do*.

Enlist Google Analytics or some other solution to establish benchmarks, and then track activity at the site on a daily or weekly basis. How many consumers have signed up? How many are active? How many surveys have they participated in?

A dashboard will enable you to run a report indicating how many surveys users have completed, how certain themes and topics are faring, what isn't resonating, how much people have earned, etc. If mid-course corrections are warranted, you can make them with confidence.

**5. Accentuate the content.** These panels provide additional content for your website, newsletters and emails. It's also served up in a way that enables your customer base to express their opinions and be heard.

But unlike user-generated posts or threads, these opinions -- collated in the aggregate -- are rewarded quickly and tangibly. This is engagement that gives your brand new shading and tonality, while reinforcing customer involvement.

For consumers, commenting online may be a new national pastime, but it's also the tree falling in the forest. (Who reads all those posts, anyway?) As private label panels demonstrate so vividly, it's far better, for consumer and brand alike, to join with others and make that voice heard in a way that actually effects some change.

Matt Dusig is Co-Founder and CEO of [uSamp™](#)