



EDUCATION SERVICES RESEARCH

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EDUCATION SERVICES RESEARCH

Opinion Dynamics Corporation (ODC) is a leading, full-service market research firm with extensive experience in the education sector. The numerous and diverse projects we have conducted for clients in the education sector have provided us with an understanding of the technical and sampling issues that are specific to education-related research. Our research for educational institutions has been used for a variety of purposes, including:

- Planning and implementing development strategies
- Perception of universities, schools, and departments among key constituencies (Alumni, Human Resources Directors, Students, Non-Matriculaters, etc.)
- Gauging satisfaction with universities among students, alumni, and parents
- Developing marketing strategies and slogans to encourage enrollment
- Evaluating institutions' program offerings from the perspective of current students, potential students, and other groups of interest
- Measuring satisfaction with university publications sent to alumni and parents

ODC's Approach to Research

Each ODC project is designed to answer specific issues faced by a specific client. At ODC, we firmly believe that if research is to be at all meaningful, it has to be actionable. Our reports include not only the interpretation of survey results, but concrete, strategic recommendations that directly impact the success of various ventures. Every research program is customized to meet the unique research and budgetary needs of an individual client.

RESEARCH TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS AND BOOST ALUMNI GIVING

Increasing alumni giving is a common goal of our higher education clients. Opinion Dynamics Corporation works with institutions of higher learning to help them better understand the opinions and priorities of their alumni. By gaining a better understand of alumni attitudes, our clients are able to improve the effectiveness of their communications with alumni, especially related to financial support.

Many of the basic principles of corporate communications, marketing and political campaigns can be just as effectively applied to alumni communications. In short, communications with alumni can often be greatly enhanced by: 1) identifying the best messages; 2) choosing the optimal channel(s) for delivering the messages; and 3) selecting the best spokesperson.

Understanding Alumni Relationships With Their Alma Mater

ODC's alumni surveys are generally designed to answer three overarching sets of questions:

- **How do alumni feel about the institution?** Do they feel it needs and deserves support? What do they see as the institution's strengths? Do alumni see any major problems at their alma mater? Do they know where money from alumni contributions goes? Where do they want it to go? What are the major reasons alumni give and do not give?
- **Is the institution seen to be as or more deserving of support as other competing institutions?** What aspects make it more deserving than other institutions — hospitals, churches, museums, etc.? How can the institution's competitive case be strengthened?
- **Are the mechanics of the development program working properly?** Are alumni being asked to give? Are they being asked to give via the most effective channels? Does the institution communicate their fundraising efforts effectively and ask for the right amounts? Are recognition and rewards appropriate? Does the institution communicate its appreciation?

We have found that by identifying problems in one or more of the above areas, we can recommend specific actions that institutions can take to strengthen relationships with their alumni and, in turn, increase alumni giving.

RESEARCH TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS AND BOOST ALUMNI GIVING

ODC Case Studies in Alumni Research

ODC clients have used our research results to make a variety of strategic decisions — from planning development strategies, to implementing comprehensive communications plans, to changing the layout of alumni magazines, to “re-branding” the institution. Specific examples of key findings from past ODC alumni studies include the following:

- In one instance, we discovered that alumni of a particular institution were largely unaware of how alumni gifts were being used. When these alumni were informed that a large percentage of alumni giving was dedicated to scholarships, many alumni said they would be much more likely to give in the future.
- In another instance, a university was planning a communications campaign emphasizing that scholarships to underprivileged populations were dependent upon alumni giving. The survey, however, found low support for scholarships to underprivileged populations. In fact, many alumni indicated they might be *less* likely to give if they thought their donations were being used for this purpose. The themes of the campaign were changed based on the survey findings.
- In a third instance, we discovered a situation in which poor tracking and communications with alumni was drastically diminishing annual giving. A large percentage of alumni said that the primary reason they had not given to their alma mater was that no one had asked them to give.
- In a final instance, we found that the income levels of many alumni of a particular institution were far lower than had been assumed. This finding eventually led to a development strategy based on targeting specific segments of alumni.

SELECTING THE RIGHT SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Selecting the right methodology for an alumni survey is crucial to a project's success. Implementing the wrong methodology for a particular situation could confuse rather than clarify an institution's understanding of its alumni.

Three methodologies are commonly used for surveying alumni groups: telephone, mail, and the Internet. Each methodology has its pros and cons; each is suitable for certain situations but not others. Focus groups are another useful methodology for learning about alumni, but focus groups do not produce quantitative results and cannot be assumed to be representative of alumni as a whole.

Major considerations for selecting the optimal methodology include:

- **What is the availability of contact information for alumni?** If email addresses are only available for a small percentage of alumni, using the Internet for a survey is not wise. The results will be biased towards alumni for whom you have email addresses — generally younger alumni.
- **What is the topic of research?** If a primary goal of the research is encouraging more Internet-based communication with alumni, then the Internet is not the right methodology since alumni who do not currently interact with the university via email will be less likely to participate. On the other hand, if you are interested in testing a new logo or mascot then the Internet is probably the best methodology since it allows the use of visual aids.
- **Do you want to ask the same questions of all alumni?** If you want to ask different questions of different alumni based on answers to certain questions (i.e., donors vs. non-donors), you will need to use a telephone or Internet methodology in order to utilize skip patterns.
- **What is your timeframe?** If research results are needed within three months or less, a mail survey is most likely out of the question. If results are needed within a very short timeframe (under two weeks), a telephone survey is likely the only option.

This is just a sampling of the pertinent questions that need to be addressed in order to select the right methodology for your situation. The major advantages and disadvantages of telephone, mail and Internet surveys are summarized on the following page.

SELECTING THE RIGHT SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Telephone Surveys

Advantages:

- Non-response and self-selection biases are minimized; our professional interviewers are trained in techniques of increasing participation.
- The quality of the data is better; interviewers can probe inconsistent answers and follow-up.
- Skip patterns can be used to ask different questions of different respondents based on answers to earlier questions.

Disadvantages:

- Higher interviewing costs.
 - Lists of phone numbers tend to improve as the alumni grow older; younger alumni are less likely to be included.
 - A small number of alumni will be offended by the intrusiveness of the call.
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Mail Surveys

Advantages:

- It is not intrusive; there is little chance that a respondent will be offended by a mail questionnaire.
- The cost is relatively moderate.
- Follow-up mailings and postcards can be used to increase response rates.

Disadvantages:

- Response rates are low.
 - Skip patterns are not possible; all respondents get the same questions.
 - There is evidence that people with strong opinions (pro or con) are more likely to respond than those without such opinions. This may bias the results.
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Internet Surveys

Advantages:

- Very low marginal cost per interview making it possible to do large samples.
- Web surveys are even less intrusive than mail.
- There is the ability to show graphics, charts, and other visual aids.
- Skip patterns can be used to ask different questions of different respondents based on answers to earlier questions.

Disadvantages:

- Spam, spam-blockers, and the sheer volume of email make invitations to do the survey hard to deliver and easy to ignore.
- Low response rates; the low marginal cost has encouraged over-surveying — too many surveys, too large samples.
- Email addresses are generally available for a higher percentage of younger alumni than older alumni.

SELECT PROJECTS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR include:

ARTCO: Market research determining the demand for a new educational institution in New England, identifying the important factors behind enrollment and determining how the school should position itself.

Bates College: A telephone survey of alumni measuring general attitudes toward the college and reasons for giving and not giving to the alumni fund.

Brown University: Surveys of faculty, alumni, staff and the local community, regarding attitudes towards the university and its future.

Bunker Hill Community College: Focus groups with high school principals, guidance counselors, and human resource professionals regarding the image of the institution, possible marketing strategies and slogans, and other changes to encourage enrollment.

City College of San Francisco: Multiple research projects to understand the needs and desires of the public for use in program design. The research entailed exploring elements from pricing to content to determine which programs should be expanded, deleted, or added to the school's offerings. In a time of budget cuts, this improved market share while reducing waste.

Connecticut College: A mixed methodology alumni survey conducted via the Internet and telephone examining a range of issues, including continuing affiliations with the College, evaluations of the College and reasons for contributing or not to the alumni fund.

Harvard College Fund: Surveys of alumni regarding their reasons for contributing or not contributing to the fund.

Harvard University: A multi-faceted research project, which entailed surveying students, faculty, alumni, and community residents regarding the image of the University.

Harvard University Graduate School of Design: A mail survey to explore students' satisfaction with and experience at the school. The research explores the program offerings, the teaching and delivery methods employed by the school, areas for improvement, and more.

Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training: Focus group research to explore the viability of a new educational program designed to increase employment opportunities for state residents. The research was specifically used to evaluate the program and make recommendations for strategic positioning and marketing elements to increase the viability of the program.

Marquette University: A phone survey of alumni measuring general attitudes toward the University and reasons for giving or not giving to the alumni fund.

Middlesex Community College: A multi-phased research project, which included surveying faculty, staff, students, and the community. The objectives of the research were to aid in the development of a marketing program, explore and develop adult education offerings, and understand the needs of the business community to better prepare students for the job market.

MIT: Survey to help MIT better understand issues of importance to alumni, alumni attitudes toward MIT, and the best communication techniques for connecting with alumni, among other items.

Providence College: A mail survey of alumni, parents and friends regarding periodicals produced by the college.

Reed College: A phone survey of alumni measuring general attitudes toward the College and reasons for giving or not giving to the alumni fund.

University of Hawaii: Multiple research projects focusing on the image of the University, public support for government funding, directions for the future and desired changes. The research also involved surveys with alumni on the University's image and alumni donations.

University of Maine: A general image, marketing and communications study that tested messages and marketing strategies designed to encourage local high school students to attend college at the University of Maine.

BIOS OF KEY ODC STAFF

JOHN GORMAN

Opinion Dynamics President John Gorman is one of the nation's leading experts in using public opinion and market research data to make decisions and plan campaigns. Mr. Gorman's thirty years of experience working on major research projects for Presidential candidates, Fortune 500 corporations, and America's leading academic and non-profit institutions has given him a unique perspective on the strategic challenges facing policy makers today.

Mr. Gorman has authored public attitude studies on such diverse topics as electronic banking and America's military and economic role in the world. He has supervised research for industry environmental campaigns in the soft drink, paper, plastics and chemical industries. Mr. Gorman has also directed political research for hundreds of ballot question committees, and, ballot candidates like, President Jimmy Carter, along with several congressmen, governors and local officials.

While an undergraduate at Harvard College in 1970, Mr. Gorman co-founded Cambridge Survey. Over the next decade, Cambridge Survey grew into one of the largest political polling firms in the country. Mr. Gorman then switched focus, helping to found Cambridge Reports in 1974, which provided issue and market research for business. Mr. Gorman and several associates founded Opinion Dynamics Corporation in 1987.

CHRIS ANDERSON

Since joining Opinion Dynamics Corporation in 2001, Chris Anderson has managed hundreds of projects in a variety of industries. He specializes in customizing research projects that enable his clients to both understand how people think, and then develop strategies to shape opinions and change behavior.

Mr. Anderson's work in the education sector has helped a range of colleges and universities develop research driven strategies for increasing giving from their alumni. Working for a variety of associations, Mr. Anderson has helped his clients understand the drivers that keep their members satisfied, and identify the benefits, services and messages that will attract new members. Mr. Anderson is also an experienced political pollster, having worked for candidates at the local, state, and national level.

Mr. Anderson received a master's degree from Columbia University, where his studies focused on statistical analysis, public opinion, and political science. He received a bachelor's degree in English from Colby College. Prior to joining ODC, Mr. Anderson worked for Kiley and Company, the national political polling firm. He also worked as a pollster on Senator John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign.

BIOS OF KEY ODC STAFF

HENRY KANTER

As Vice President of Operations, Henry Kanter is responsible for the quality of research at Opinion Dynamics. He oversees the training, monitoring, and quality control of all interviewing, data entry, and computer operations. Mr. Kanter has managed more than 2,500 research studies, including telephone and mail surveys, opinion leader and executive interviews, in-store intercepts, focus groups, and nationwide door-to-door surveys. He is fully versed in all aspects of the research process, from sample design to computer operations. Mr. Kanter also supervises all sub-contractor activities.

Mr. Kanter has over twenty years of experience in survey research. He came to Opinion Dynamics from Cambridge Reports, Inc., where he was Field Director. Mr. Kanter is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a member of the Marketing Research Association.

LARRY SHIMAN

Since joining Opinion Dynamics Corporation in 1998, Lawrence Shiman has managed hundreds of projects in a variety of industries. He regularly partners with advertising, marketing, and public relations firms in providing information and analysis that advances client goals.

Mr. Shiman is one of the nation's leading experts in consumer behavior related to dieting and nutrition. The results of his research in this area have been published in hundreds of mainstream and industry publications and media outlets. Mr. Shiman is also a highly skilled public speaker, having presented research results at nearly a dozen different international conferences in the past year. He appears regularly on national television, providing analysis of ODC polling results on the FOX News Channel.

Mr. Shiman received a master's degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, where he specialized in public opinion and public policy. He received his undergraduate degree in psychology from New York University.