



MRS Diploma in Market & Social Research Practice

**UNIT 2 – The Practice and Context of Market & Social
Research**

**Assignment Materials & Tasks – December 2013
Assessment**

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The research problems contained in this material are fictional. Any similarity to any real-life organization, company or business is entirely unintended.

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MRS Diploma in Market & Social Research Practice
Unit 2 – December 2013 Assessment Materials
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Introduction

This document provides the material for the December 2013 assessment round of Unit 2 of the MRS Diploma in Market & Social Research Practice. It contains the tasks and materials on which your assignment must be based. These materials include a description of a research context, a proposal for a research project designed to address the research problem and four tasks related to the materials.

The research problem and proposal contained in this sample material is entirely fictional. Any similarity to any real-life organization, company or business is entirely unintended.

Mode of assessment for Unit 2 Principles & Practice of Market Research

You are required to complete all four tasks. These are externally assessed and externally moderated.

Assignment specifications

Each task is designed to be completed in essay format and should address the issues detailed in the specifications table for that task. Copies of task specifications can be obtained from your centre.

The total word count for all four tasks should fall between 5000-7000 words (excluding appendices). Word limits for individual tasks are provided for general guidance. Appendices of material used to illustrate points made within the assignment may be included if you feel these are necessary. However, appendices should not be used to extend the word limit.

Assignments that considerably exceed the 7000 word limit (by more than 10%) will be graded as 'non-compliant' as they do not comply with assessment criteria and cannot be assessed with the qualifications framework.

Candidates **must** include an accurate word count at the end of the assignment.

All assessed components of the MRS Diploma should be completed in English.

Assessment weighting

The tasks are weighted in accordance with the weighting ascribed to each area within the syllabus description and also with the level of analysis required within each assignment.

Task 1	25% of total
Task 2	25% of total
Task 3	25% of total
Task 4	25% of total
Total	100%

Presentation of your assignment

The assignment should be printed on A4 white paper, with a one-inch margin around the text. Text size should ideally be 11pt.

Make sure that each section within your assignment is easy to read by:

- using headings and bullet points effectively;
- avoiding over-brief note form. If you include notes, you should ensure they make your points clearly and overtly;
- ensuring that your use of English is clear, accurate and appropriate to a client audience.

All four tasks should be secured together and submitted as one assignment. The assignment should be secured with a staple in the top left hand corner. Please do not bind your assignment by any other means.

Number of copies

You are required to present three hard copies of the assignment in its final form for formal assessment to your centre co-ordinator by the centre's specified deadline. All copies must include an Assignment Cover Sheet. One copy of your assignment will be retained by your centre. The remaining two copies will be sent to MRS for external assessment.

Overall Result

No overall grade is awarded for the MRS Diploma. The *certificate* issued to successful candidates will give the level of achievement in each unit of assessment.

Pass requirements

In order to complete a unit successfully, candidates should meet or exceed the Pass requirements highlighted in the assessment sections of the handbook.

In order to be awarded the Diploma, candidates must achieve a Pass grade (or above) in all 4 units of assessment.

Grading System for each unit of Diploma assessment

Unit 1

Answers will be awarded a band grade (Distinction, Pass or Fail). In order to pass the examination, candidates will normally be required to achieve a minimum of a Pass grade in all three questions.

All candidates must pass Question 1. Candidates who are awarded a Fail grade in either question 2 or 3 will normally be expected to achieve a strong Pass grade in the other question. Guidance on the general assessment criteria for each grade can be found in the following table.

Units 2 & 3 and 4

Candidates are given an overall band grade (Distinction, Pass or Fail). The assessment criteria for each assignment is included in the assignment specifications. In addition, the level descriptors provide guidance for the expected depth and range which are expected to be demonstrated at Distinction, Pass and Fail grades. In order to pass the assessment candidates will normally be required to achieve a minimum of a Pass grade for each task within the assignment. Candidates who are awarded a Fail grade for a task will normally be expected to achieve a strong Pass grade or above in one or more of the remaining tasks to pass.

Unit 5

Candidates are awarded a band grade (Distinction, Pass or Fail). In order to pass the examination, candidates will normally be required to achieve a minimum of a Pass grade in all three questions. Candidates who are awarded a Fail grade in one question will normally be expected to achieve a strong Pass grade or above in one of the remaining two questions to pass.

For full guidance on the levels of attainment required for awarding each grade for all Units please refer to the **Full Syllabus & Assessment Guidelines Handbook**.

The Research Problem

Background

Everywhere Electrics are one of the key specialist home electrical retailers in the UK. Following on from a major rebranding exercise, their network of 600 stores in towns and cities across the UK were revamped and refitted in 2012 and a concerted effort was made to improve customer service and remain competitive in terms of range of goods offered and prices charged. The decision to retain all of the 600 stores in the physical retail network was made after a major research investigation which had advised rationalising (decreasing by 50%) the number of outlets. The decision to disregard the advice and keep all the stores caused some disagreement among the management team, resulting in the appointment of a new Marketing Director, Pam Jones.

In addition to the 600 physical retail stores, *Everywhere Electrics* has a full website, which enables customers to both view the range of goods offered and buy online.

However, despite their efforts, *Everywhere Electrics* has suffered a serious decline in sales over the last two years. With the recession, the overall market for domestic electrical goods has shrunk year-on-year. Households are replacing goods such as TVs, fridges and cookers with less frequency, and when forced to buy, choose cheaper items from the ranges stocked. In addition, the customers choice of purchase outlet has changed. Online competition has boomed, with customers increasingly using the web for information and advice. In addition, competition has come from non-specialist retail outlets such as supermarkets and department stores.

Previously, customers considering making a purchase would visit their nearest specialist store for advice and information. Now, the main reference point is *Everywhere Electrics* largest online competitor, *Oya.com*, a company with no retail outlets, plus other retailers and manufacturers websites. At the final stage of purchase, customers might visit a retail store to see what the product they are considering purchasing looks like. The rapid growth of online and other competition has seriously eroded *Everywhere Electrics* market share.

While *Everywhere Electrics* management team consider their chain of retail outlets to be a key part of their retail mix, they believe that the main point of contact for customers is their website. They have decided to redesign the site in line with the 2012 rebranding exercise, using *Oya.com* and other major online competitors as examples of best practice.

Pam Jones, *Everywhere Electrics* Marketing Director has decided to commission market research to support the re-design of the website, and has invited *Rich Research Ltd*, a full-service market research agency, to bid for the project via a written research proposal.

The Proposal

Rich Research Ltd has produced the following research proposal for *Everywhere Electrics*:

Client's Information Needs

The client, *Everywhere Electrics*, is seeking information to help the re-design of its website. It specifically wants to compare the *Everywhere Electrics* shopping experience with that of its competitors *Oya.com*. By doing this, it feels it will be able to identify the features that have the most impact on customer conversion, and inform the web designers of the key initiatives that should be developed. In addition, it is important to provide evidence to support the case for change and engage all stakeholders in the research programme.

Research Objectives

The research objectives are as follows:

- To gain an understanding of the buying behaviour of *Everywhere Electrics* customers
- To understand how customers use the *Everywhere Electrics* website and the websites of competitors, principally comparing the *Oya* and *Everywhere Electrics* websites.
- To evaluate the different features of the *Everywhere* website in terms of customer usage and preference

Research Programme Proposed

We recommend a comprehensive programme of both qualitative and quantitative research among the target group *Everywhere* customers, males and females, across the UK.

Preliminary Research

To help us gain insight into the research problem, we will create an internal bulletin board for the whole *Everywhere Electrics* management team, and the *E-Commerce* and *Insight* teams so that observations and ideas about the key challenges and constraints and priorities can be fed into the research programme. Secondary data on the home electronics market will be obtained from both publically available sources and from syndicated services to help in the design of the quantitative study. In addition, internal sales information will be requested from the client, to help in profiling the current customer base of *Everywhere Electrics*.

Quantitative Research

An online quantitative survey of customer's views and use of the website will be designed. The *Everywhere Electrics* team will be responsible for recruitment for this study via their own online customer database. The electronic questionnaire will be distributed via email sent directly to the chosen sample of customers. Questions will be asked about usage of the website, opinions of competitors' websites, attitudes towards and usage of the physical *Everywhere Electrics* stores, and past and possible future purchasing behaviour. Other question areas may be added as a result of the preliminary research detailed above.

Quantitative Sampling

A random sample of 4000 online customers will be provided by *Everywhere Electrics*. With an estimated response rate of 50% (two emails will be sent, one initial and one reminder) we would hope to achieve a completed sample of 2000 respondents. To stimulate response, entry into a prize draw will be offered to all respondents, with a prize to be donated by *Everywhere Electrics*.

Qualitative Research

A representative sample will be recruited from the quantitative study. Those selected will be invited to take part in a two hour online group discussion, moderated by experienced *Rich Research* qualitative professionals. The groups will be designed to explore in greater detail customer perceptions of the current website, and to provide suggestions and directions for the ecommerce team and the web designers working on the new website. All the groups will be viewed remotely by the *Everywhere Electrics* team, who can give the moderator questions to ask in real time, and thus be actively engaged in the project.

Qualitative Sampling:

We propose recruiting a total of 20 online groups, each comprising 16 to 18 members. Groups will be homogenous for purchase type and for location. The precise structure of each group will be determined after the first two research stages outlined above (preliminary and quantitative). Recruitment will be conducted from participants in the quantitative study, as detailed above. An incentive of £50 in *Everywhere Electrics* vouchers will be given to each participant.

Final Data Analysis and Reporting

The **quantitative data** will be analysed using survey analysis software, and a copy of the processed data will be made available to the client in a format to be agreed. An oral presentation of the main findings of the quantitative research will be given immediately after the end of the survey period, so that details of the next qualitative stage may be agreed and finalised. Data collected from the **qualitative** focus groups will be analysed, and a brief written report and oral presentation of the main findings will be made to the client. The client is also invited to view the discussion in progress, and so will be able to participate in the analytical and interpretative process. We will of course work with the client to help them interpret and understand the research findings.

A written report containing the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative phases will be provided two weeks after the end of the qualitative research.

TASKS

Task 1: Project Analysis Task

(1,250 – 1750 words)

(Weighting: 25% of total)

This task requires you to evaluate the fitness for purpose of the above proposed programme of research as contained in the proposal document.

Your answer should provide evaluations of:

- The definition of the research problem being investigated.
- The fitness for purpose of the proposed programme of research.
- The usefulness to *Everywhere Electrics* of the programme of research which has been outlined, with specific reference to the research objectives and the decisions to be taken.

Task 2: Analysis of the Research Sample

(1,250 – 1,750 words)

(Weighting: 25% of total)

This task requires you to analyse and evaluate the sampling plan proposed for this research project.

In your answer you should:

- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches to sampling identified for both qualitative and quantitative phases of the research, in relation to the given research objectives, and with reference to relevant statistical theory.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of the size and composition of the qualitative and quantitative samples, in relation to the given research objectives and analysis plan.
- Identify the statistical tests which could be applied in analysing the quantitative data provided by this sample, with justification for their use.
- Evaluate the fitness for purpose of the sampling proposed for all phases of this research.

Task 3: Developing and Evaluating Data Collection Tools (1,250 – 1,750 words)
(Weighting: 25% of total)

This task requires you to prepare and provide a detailed rationale for a data collection tool or tools.

Either:

Qualitative Stage

- a) Devise a topic guide for use in the group discussions. The topic guide should provide sufficient information for the moderator to gather the data required in relation to the appropriate research objectives.
- b) Provide some rationale for the structure and design of your topic guide, identifying its strengths and limitations in relation to gathering the information required.

Or:

Quantitative Stage

- a) Design 6 questions, to include appropriate response formats and instructions for completion, for inclusion within the quantitative survey.
- b) Provide a rationale for the inclusion of each of your six questions, identifying the strengths and limitations of the questions in relation to gathering the information required.

Task 4: Reporting and Contextualising Research Findings (1,250-1,750 words)
(Weighting: 25% of total)

This task requires you to specify the format and prepare an outline content of the **final** research presentation (**the oral presentation of both the qualitative and the quantitative research**) which will be made to the client at the end of project. You should refer to the research proposal and to your own identification of gaps in this proposal to help you determine the main areas to be covered.

In your answer you should:

- Specify the format and outline content, in the form of headings and subheadings, of the final research presentation.
- Justify the format and content choices made in terms of managerial decision making.
- Specify the proposed audience for the final presentation.
- Discuss how possible research findings should be used by the client.
- Outline any barriers to implementation of the research recommendations.
- Specify any further research or specific sources of information which could be consulted to aid managerial decision making.



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