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Ballpark figures

on 30 April 2000, 22:00



by Niall McKay

Solely as a publicity stunt, online test-market research firm InsightExpress sought to gauge the effectiveness of the many outrageously expensive TV commercials aired during the Super Bowl. "We sent out the survey at 11 p.m. Sunday night, following the Super Bowl," says Lee Smith, executive vice president of InsightExpress in Greenwich, Connecticut. "By 9 a.m. Monday we had 650 completed surveys. Federal Express's Land of Oz and the ETrade monkey were the favorites." But unlike ETrade's commercial, which showed a monkey with a voice-over saying, "We just blew 2 million bucks," the survey cost InsightExpress almost nothing. That's because the company is set up to bring Web-based test-marketing and market research to the little guy, the mom-and-pop shop. Traditionally, test-marketing has been an expensive process. To survey even a group of ten people with analysis can cost between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

With InsightExpress, a company can survey 300 people for around \$1,000, and companies are using it to test-market new names, logos, product ideas, and even concepts for marketing campaigns. According to Mr. Smith, many entrepreneurs even test-market their new business plans at the concept stage. "It's ironic, really," he says. "Several of the venture capital firms we approached for funding who originally passed on the idea are now using us to test out new business ideas." One of InsightExpress's lead investors is the market research firm NFO Worldwide.

Using the service is as easy as filling out a Web-based template. Here's how it works: customers choose the list of questions they want to ask, identify the demographic group they want to reach, and press Send. InsightExpress retrieves the target audience from its database, which is populated through a partnership with Engage Technologies an online marketing firm. When the Web users being surveyed log on to their favorite site, they receive a survey template.

"We don't pay people to take the survey, but we offer them the chance to enter in a competition to win, say, a trip to the Caribbean," says Mr. Smith. Surprisingly, many respondents fill out the survey just for the hell of it. Within 24 hours, the survey results are analyzed and the results are returned to the customer.

But it's not just the mom-and-pop shop that's using the service, according to Mr. Smith. Often companies such as Yahoo and ETrade take advantage of a survey to do a brand-awareness study. Other companies that offer similar services include Customer Insights, Cyber Dialogue (Proposed: Nasdaq: CYDI), Zoomerang, and iGain.com.

Topics: [Ballpark](#), [Figures](#)



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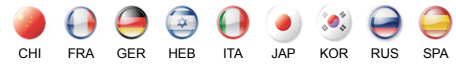
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