

# Pros and Cons of Focus Group Testing

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## The Basics

- Qualitative research tool
- Helps you better understand consumers' underlying attitudes, feelings, and motivations.
- An important step in developing a messaging strategy

## Don't overstep the data

➤ Remember:

1. You are dealing with a small N, and
2. Its not a random sample

➤ So:

1. You can't talk about cause-and-effect, and
2. You can't make generalizations

## Not an end unto itself

- Focus groups are an important tool when developing a research-based messaging strategy.
- They allow you to test consumers' reactions to your message concepts and content.
- But remember, they are only a step in the process.

## Messaging Strategy

- Define the objectives
- Select the target audiences
- Develop message concepts
- Test the concepts
- Refine and retest the concepts
- Identify partners and intermediaries
- Select the venues and opportunities

## What are you testing?

- Awareness? – No
- Knowledge? - No
- Reactions? - Yes
- Attitudes? – Yes
- Motivations? – Yes
- Feelings? – Yes

## Unintended Meanings

- “Remember, you can’t put too much water in a nuclear reactor.”
- Focus groups are useful for identifying message content that may be subject to multiple interpretations.

## Unreasonable Requests

- “You want me to wash my car on my lawn?”
- Focus groups can help identify messages that will hurt your overall credibility

Keep it simple, stupid!

- “What in hell is an aquatic organism?”
- Focus groups can help identify confusing language.

I never thought about that !!!

- “Give me a good reason why I should wear a seatbelt?”
- Focus groups help to identify the emotional “hot buttons” that lead to change.

## But everyone knows this

- Don't fool yourself into thinking you know how the "typical" consumer reacts to advisories and other information about fish consumption.
- Like it or not, you know 99+% more than the "typical" consumer about this topic.
- So don't assume that your message is clear and understandable.

## Money doesn't grow on trees

- Focus groups do not need to be conducted at expensive, state-of-the-art research facilities.
- There are lots of convenience samples around you – remember, the rules for quantitative research do not apply.
- Its not brain surgery. A professional moderator is good to have, but not a necessity.

# Pros and Cons

- Good reality check
- Convenience samples
- In-depth probing
- Taps into attitudes, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviors
- Not representative
- Can't generalize for use in policy
- Don't measure awareness or knowledge