

Market researchers get new tool in iPad

July 28 2010, By Bruce Horovitz



The iPad 3G

The struggling world of consumer market research appears on the brink of getting a serious shot in the arm from an unexpected new tool: the iPad.

The \$20 billion market research industry was hit hard by the [economic downturn](#), but the rectangular [tablet computer](#) from Apple is emerging as an unlikely benefactor.

The gadget is luring curious consumers who've never seen one to participate in research projects conducted at shopping malls, primarily because they just want to see how it works.

Consumers who never would have considered talking to clipboard-wielding researchers are not only agreeing to take part -- in some cases, they're approaching the survey takers before they've been asked.

People "are attracted by the cool factor," says Jude Olinger, CEO of the Olinger Group, a marketing research company that conducted surveys at 130 shopping malls for the past two months using 200 iPads. "People who haven't seen iPads are fascinated."

At many of the centers, he says, response was so good that survey takers collected the required information in about three weeks instead of the four they had anticipated. "Instead of people turning away and saying, 'I don't have time,' the [iPad](#) makes it a lot easier to say, 'Yes,'" says Diane Bowers, president of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations, a trade group for survey research business.

The research project that Olinger Group conducted was for General Growth Properties, the nation's second-largest shopping center developer. The company wanted to do a benchmark study of consumer shopping habits coming out of the recession.

In April, the research business was asked to interview 52,000 people in 130 malls nationwide. The request was for a pencil-and-paper survey. But Jude Olinger, who says such studies typically have marginal data quality, opted for the iPad -- which he knew was about to come out. His firm purchased 300 iPads at \$684 each.

The iPad presented its own set of research challenges. Some overheated in direct sunlight and shut down, Olinger says.

In one case, a consumer at a mall in Rhode Island was so enamored with the iPad, he grabbed it from the interviewer and ran off.

Apple declined to comment.

But iPad's benefits far outweighed the negatives, Olinger says. The iPad lets researchers collect data in real time -- and aggregate it.

The 10-hour battery life, he says, lets workers put in long days without needing to plug in.

The data gathered via iPads was top quality, says Keith Maladra, vice president at General Growth Properties. "We'd want to use iPads again when another project like this comes up."

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