



Connections

QRCA is an association of independent qualitative research professionals committed to the highest professional standards and the advancement of the discipline worldwide.

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QRCA Management News

Have You Hugged Your Facility Today?

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As qualitative researchers, we juggle a lot of things: a lot of logistics, a lot of details, and a lot of relationships. One of those relationships is with the facilities we work with to get many of our projects done. Generally, most of us have decent relationships with facilities, and yet too often these focus facilities are taken for granted by many qualitative research practitioners. Even we QRCA members are guilty sometimes – let's face it, we're busy, and the care and feeding of facilities may not always be high on our list.



But maintaining strong and productive relationships with our facilities is critically important to being ultimately more efficient in our work and to generating the best research for our clients.

What exactly is the best way to work with facilities? A couple of years ago my company conducted a survey among facilities, asking them what they think of qualitative researchers. The research shows that facilities don't feel they run into problems all that often, but it still reveals areas where significant breakdowns do occur. The findings boil down to three common-sense issues that greatly influence the outcome of working with a facility:

1. The amount and quality of communications, particularly in the early stages of a project
2. Respecting facilities and treating them as equals and true partners
3. Paying facility invoices on time

These are the areas that focus facilities said QRCs should focus on in their facility relations. Performing well on these points generally results in better facility relations and fewer problems. Conversely, deficiencies on these points often lead to poor relations and possibly even problems with the research.

Now really, why should we care that much about our relationships with facilities? After all, in that relationship we are the client, so why should we work so hard to make them happy?

Maybe we want to enhance our facility relations because we are such nice folks, but actually there is a much more important reason that is cold and calculated and purely focused on our own business goals. By treating focus facilities well, we are giving every opportunity for success to our clients' projects. Just as airplane pilots are supposed to keep their eyes on the end of the runway, qualitative researchers should focus on the end goal of delivering the best, highest-quality research product possible to our clients, and then doing everything along the way to make that happen. That means keeping the facilities in our corner and working hard for us to prevent problems, to come up with solutions earlier in the timetable, and to make ourselves look good to our clients.

I know that, by and large, I am preaching to the choir here. QRCA members demonstrate through their membership and

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involvement their dedication to the practice of our profession, and we tend to be smart enough to know already that facilities can be our best friends and our lifesavers on some projects. But it doesn't hurt to be reminded of the importance of some of the easiest and most fundamental ways we can enhance the quality of our output and deliver value to our clients.

Communication. It goes without saying that we should communicate with facilities about full recruiting specs, realistic timetables, and other details. But good communication with facilities includes taking a proactive stance all through the recruiting process. The sooner a potential problem is identified and a solution worked out, the greater chance the research will yield high-quality feedback for our clients. And even when we work well with a facility, how often do we touch base with them right after the interviews or groups, just to let them know our impressions of how things went? If you don't typically do so, on your next project try shooting off an e-mail to the facilities the day after your visit, just letting them know if everything went well, if you encountered any problems, if the client was happy, etc. I'll bet that you will be amazed at the enthusiastic response you get from the facilities; they will truly appreciate your feedback. And they will be ready to jump through hoops for you on your next project.

Respect, treat as equals. Focus facilities usually are kept in the dark at best and are treated by qualitative researchers like servants and morons at worse. Instead, we should treat facilities as valued equals. After all, we entrust our client's projects, and therefore our own reputations, to them; so we should also show them the respect commensurate with that trust. Focus facilities bring experience, intelligence, and a different perspective to the table that often results in solutions and efficiencies that we otherwise may not have reached on our own. And we should let facilities know as much as possible about every project, not only because they might have valuable input but also because they will be more motivated and more proactive to be looking out for us.

Pay on time. Believe it or not, only 4% of facilities in our survey said that qualitative researchers pay their invoices on time. Whatever the payment terms we work out with a facility, they have a right to expect payment from us that meets those

parameters. If we need facilities to wait until we get paid by our clients, facilities are much more flexible in dealing with that from the very beginning and having that built into the timetables and expectations than to have it sprung on them at the back end.

When things go smoothly on a project, our clients are pleased with the job we did. When we work well with facilities, we motivate them to actually *want* to work on our clients' projects, and we experience far fewer problems because of the way we manage this working relationship. Creating a positive synergy with facilities is just good business, and it translates into better research for your clients. So don't do it because it's the nice thing to do: do it because it serves your interests by causing your clients to want to come back for more.
