



WHAT THEY THINK RESEARCH  
Breakthrough Qualitative Research



# [ Secrets of Successful Online Bulletin Boards ]

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome	1
Online Bulletin Boards 101	2
Eight Benefits of Online Bulletin Boards	4
Using Online Bulletin Boards With Quant Surveys	6
Techniques of an Effective Moderator	7
Case Studies To Consider	9

# [Secrets of Successful Online Bulletin Boards]



Whether you use Online Bulletin Boards for qualitative research or only wonder why so many companies have, there's information for you in this new e-book. It is designed to help you understand not only how Online Bulletin Boards work and when they are most effective, but also how **WHAT THEY THINK RESEARCH** can engage participants with moderating techniques and new software capabilities to uncover insights you might not even be able to achieve in person.

Online Bulletin Boards have been a go-to methodology since 2005 for **WHAT THEY THINK RESEARCH**. A lot has changed in seven years. The software is more robust and much easier to use for participants and moderators. More people of all ages have computers (50% of all seniors today have computers) and actually are more comfortable communicating in this way. New options, such as graphic, photo and video sharing add deeper learning and more powerful reports

I hope you find this quick read informative, but more than that I hope it will spur you to pick up the phone and call me to discuss how **WHAT THEY THINK RESEARCH** can design Online Bulletin Boards, on their own or combined with other methodologies, that will exceed your research expectations.

You can reach me at 615-383-4446 or [snyderp@mindspring.com](mailto:snyderp@mindspring.com).

Happy reading!

Pat Snyder

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## Online Bulletin Boards 101

Originally, Online Bulletin Boards were designed to be forums where people left posts to questions. It was one-way communication at best. The technology to conduct Online Bulletin Boards has come a long way.





## Online Bulletin Boards 101: An Overview



- A two-way communications channel with a moderator and participants “talking” online through written and/or video answers.
- Typically, participants are recruited in the same manner in which they would be for an in-person focus group.
- Participants are given a website and password to participate in the discussion.
- The Online Bulletin Board usually takes place over a three to seven day period, with respondents logging in one to three times per day.
- Because of the timeframe and longer discussion, most boards have 12 to 30 participants, as compared to the eight to 10 in an in-person focus group.
- Questions are pre-programmed into the Online Bulletin Board. Participants can answer the questions at their convenience 24/7.
- The moderator responds in writing to the participants, asking follow-up questions and encouraging continued participation with remarks just as she would in-person.
- The clients have a virtual “backroom” where they can view the answers and send notes to the moderator about additional information or questions.
- The researcher has even more capabilities to understand the market than available in person.  
In addition to standard questions, moderators can also ask:
  - Multi-media questions to get responses with pictures or video
  - Webcam response questions to get one-click recordings from participants’ webcam
  - Built-in multiple-choice and multiple answer questions
  - Questions that only go to a sub-group of participants
  - Respondents to evaluate concepts with imagine mark-up tools
- The Online Bulletin Boards can be set-up so that participants always see each other’s answers, or only see other’s answers after they have posted their own answer. It can also be conducted as a one-on-one discussion where they do not see answers from other participants.



# Eight Benefits of Online Bulletin Boards

## 1. Enables Geographic Diversity



Most companies need to understand their product beyond their own backyard. How someone views a product in the South versus the Northeast, or how someone in a small rural setting uses a product versus how it is used in an urban area. And it is even more complicated if you are doing business internationally. It's not always easy even to find facilities in smaller cities, much less afford to conduct research in multiple cities. Online Bulletin Boards overcome these barriers, enabling you to reach out to people in diverse locations and settings faster, easier and more economically.

## 2. Provides An Entrée To Hard To Reach Demographics

Whether it's busy physicians, over-scheduled moms, techie teens or homebound seniors, most everyone is online and can find some time during the day or night to connect.

## 3. Provides Real Anonymity, Increasing Honest Feedback

People say things they might not feel comfortable sharing during in-person focus groups.

## 4. Eliminates Group Think

Boards can be structured so participants must give a response before seeing others' answers. This format also eliminates one person from dominating the conversation.

## 5. More Information; Better Quality Feedback

Typically, focus groups last about 90 minutes, including time for moderator instructions, introductions and warm-up questions. This leaves about 60 minutes for the eight to 10 participants to give feedback on the topic at hand. This means each person has the opportunity to give you between six and seven and a half minutes of



feedback. Compare this to an Online Bulletin Board that on average lasts three days, with each person spending a minimum of 15 minutes per day, or 45 minutes total, offering their opinions. And, online participants have the advantage of being able to take time to think about their answers without time restrictions, often resulting in much longer and more insightful answers.

## 6. Cover More Topics/Concepts



With more time for feedback, Online Bulletin Boards enable you to cover more topics. Typically, you have time for three significant categories of information in a focus group, or about four concepts. With three or more days available for feedback with an online study, that significantly increases the number of topics and concepts you can present. For example, if you show three concepts per day for three days, that is nine concepts tested without the risk of burnout.

## 7. More Cost Effective

Using Online Bulletin Boards eliminates travel costs for moderators and clients, transcription costs (these are included in the software costs and can be downloaded immediately at the end of each project), participant and client meal costs, DVD recording and facility costs (online software is significantly cheaper than facility rental). One software company estimated a savings of \$20,000 for a total of eight groups, in four cities, with three clients traveling.

## 8. Faster Project Completion

You know how long it takes to coordinate executives' busy schedules for a conference call, much less to be out of the office for two to four days for focus groups. With access to the Internet from anywhere today and the ability to monitor the research 24/7, Online Bulletin Boards can be scheduled much faster and can take less time to complete without travel involved. Additionally, there is no waiting for transcripts so the moderator can begin working on the report immediately.





It's not unusual for a research project to require both quantitative and qualitative components. One issue in these situations is the time and cost involved. Once the quantitative survey is complete, the researcher must begin the recruiting process again for the qualitative portion. This typically adds three to four weeks to the project, not to mention having to pay for the new recruiting.

Now there is a program available that works with virtually all survey software that enrolls selected quantitative survey participants in an Online Bulletin Board automatically, based on their survey responses. This means you don't have to spend the extra time or money on re-recruiting. Once survey participants opt in, demographic data and any other relevant information is pushed directly into the Online Bulletin Board participant profile. This enables the data collected in the survey to be used in the qualitative research for targeted probing, segmenting and other analysis.





## Techniques of an Effective Moderator

When choosing your moderator for Online Bulletin Boards, ask her what techniques she uses for making sure she gets the most out of the participants. If she doesn't mention one or more of these tools, you might want to reconsider your moderator choice.

### 1. Set Expectations Upfront

When participants are recruited, make sure they know exactly what to expect and what is expected of them. That means before recruiting begins, you need to know what you expect. If you don't know what you want to find out, or how many concepts you want to test, you are setting yourself and your participants up for failure.

### 2. Offer Appropriate Incentives

How much should you pay your participants? That depends on how much time they will be expected to spend on the boards and how long the boards will last. If you don't know, go back and read *Set Expectations Upfront*.

### 3. Stay Engaged

The more engaged the moderator is with the respondents, the more insight and feedback you will get from them. The moderator's job doesn't end once the questions are programmed. On the contrary, it has only begun. Some researchers are more likely to offer higher incentives or send more reminder emails than they are to communicate with the participants during the research. Just like an in-person focus group, the moderator needs to establish a rapport with the participants from the start, let them know she is reading every response, offer praise for detailed and thoughtful answers, follow-up on incomplete answers and explore new ideas or trains of thought when appropriate.





## 4. Make It Fun

Ask yourself one question after the discussion guide is completed: Would I enjoy doing this? If the answer is “no,” better go back and rethink your approach.

## 5. Add Variety



Let's face it, we all get bored easily. If all you do is ask someone to write the answer to questions, and worse, ask the same questions (“What do you like most? What do you like least?”) for several ideas or concepts, who wouldn't lose interest? Mix it up.

- Add multiple-choice questions.
- Ask them to choose a picture from the Internet to capture a feeling or perception.
- Use video questions and answers to add interest and see inside their world.
- Use concept evaluation software that allows participants to add remarks directly on the concept.
- Add perceptual maps that align products/brands with attributes.
- Present interactive visual storyboards.
- Create virtual store and shelf designs for precise feedback on product placement.

There are numerous tools available today that make research more engaging, insightful and effective. And, some of these tools are easier to use online and not available for use in-person.



# Case Studies to Consider

## Hard to reach physicians in U.S., England and Germany

### Situation:

An international manufacturer of healthcare products was in the process of developing and naming a new medical device. The company wanted to gauge product interest and understand which name being considered was most descriptive to all clinicians who would be using the product. It was important to learn how well potential users grasped the new product concept, possible circumstances when it would be considered and also which name was preferred and what it communicated.

### Solution:

WHAT THEY THINK RESEARCH conducted six two-day Online Bulletin Boards simultaneously in the U.S., England and Germany

#### United States

- One board of Podiatrists and Internists
- One board of Certified Wound Care Nurses

#### United Kingdom

- One board of Podiatrists
- One board of Tissue Viability Nurses and District Nurses

#### Germany

- One board of Surgeons and Diabetologists
- One board of Wound Treatment Nurses

Participants viewed a detailed rendering of the device along with a written description and provided valuable feedback on how well the concept communicated its purpose, advantages, purchase drivers, opportunities for use and potential barriers to acceptance. Additionally, the research was able to identify a name that would appeal to clinicians internationally.



## Quantitative to Qualitative

### Situation:

A seed company needed research conducted quickly to guide the development of its new market plan. It was apparent they needed both quantitative and qualitative information from gardeners to drive their decisions, but they only had a couple of weeks before the planning meeting. Time and cost were both barriers.



### Solution:

WHAT THEY THINK RESEARCH conducted an online quantitative survey with 300 gardeners that had purchased seeds for their garden in the past year. Using QualLink<sup>®</sup> software, within 10 minutes of the survey going live, eight participants qualified for the Online Bulletin Board. Overall, of the 101 gardeners who qualified (based on how much of their gardens were planted from seeds), 54 opted in to participate in the qualitative portion. WHAT THEY THINK RESEARCH accepted 40 of these 54 respondents for the six-day Online Bulletin Board. The rest were on standby. The level of detail and insight, along with participants' photographs of their garden, astounded the client. And even better, the whole process of completing both the quantitative and qualitative took two weeks. Without this methodology the project could have taken two or more months.



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