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The work of THE PLANNING PRACTICE is translating insights about people, products, and brands into profitable marketing strategies. We've had a 20-year-long conversation with consumers, always finding new and better ways to include their voice in the creation of:

- Brands people want to associate with
- Advertising people want to read and watch
- Innovative products people want to buy

THE PLANNING PRACTICE is a full-service qualitative research consultancy. We handle every aspect of a project from planning and recruiting through presentation of recommendations that impact your business. Over the years, we have completed hundreds of projects in nearly every consumer and business-to-business category.



### Ethnographic Methods

Ethnography is the systematic observation of behavior in homes, offices, cars, and stores. It reveals how product and services are *really* used, how customer interact with a product or a retail environment, and other aspects of behavior that quantitative research can't access.

THE PLANNING PRACTICE combines varied qualitative research methods to achieve the most appropriate and cost-effective approach.

### A Cost-Efficient Design for Qualitative Research

## Cost-Efficient by Design

The term "qualitative research" encompasses far more than simple ten-person, two-hour focus groups. It includes a wide variety of research designs and variations, including creative-consumer groups, conflict groups, "dial" groups, extended-time groups, peer groups, depth interviews, dyads, triads, quant panels, diary and journal exercises, in-context and ethnographic observations, consumer-generated video exercises, and real-time videoconferencing group interviews.

While each of these approaches has its strengths, we have found that one multi-method design stands out for its flexibility, depth of insight, and efficiency. In the past few years, we've used this approach for projects as diverse as generating new product ideas for **RadioShack**, understanding the small business customer for **FedEx**, and helping **Ford** position its new Taurus.

In this design, respondents complete an extensive homework assignment before attending a focus group interview. Then, a subset of those who participate in the group interview are invited to a one-on-one, in-depth ethnographic interview at a venue appropriate to the study topic.

The power of the approach is that it provides **multiple perspectives** on the consumer and his or her reality. The use of three different interview/observational situations—private journal, group interview, and ethnographic depth interview—allows us to "triangulate" on the topic at hand, whether we are exploring a brand experience, store experience, or a media experience.

The secret to its **cost-effectiveness** is that it makes full use of respondents that we have already recruited and paid to participate. All participants complete a pre-interview journal as a condition of participation. Respondents for the in-depth sessions are chosen during the focus group interviews, so we are certain to get the most articulate, interesting, and representative people.

Here's what each stage offers.

**1. Journaling**—Pre-interview journals let us to see into aspects of consumers' lives that are otherwise out of bounds to us. For example, in a study of social media last year, we asked people to record how they use mobile devices in real time over a period of weeks. Extending the period of data collection over days or

weeks gives consumers time to reflect on personal issues, providing deeper insight into beliefs, aspirations, and dreams, at negligible additional cost.

**2. Focus groups**—Conventional two-hour focus groups conducted at a central location allow us to efficiently collect information from a wide range of respondents. But more importantly, the focus group dynamic creates a powerful stimulus to ideation and creates a level of engagement that individual interviews can't. In a recent study of calcium supplements, the camaraderie of the group allowed women to tell us what really troubles them about growing old.

**3. Ethnographic interviews**—Extended in-home or workplace interviews offer us a glimpse of consumers in their natural

environment, surrounded by their possessions, family, and familiar landmarks of their life. We get to actually watch them as they engage in the behaviors under study. In the RadioShack research, we watched consumers struggle with their home electronics as a way of identifying their unmet product needs. Presenting those needs to product managers in brainstorming sessions resulted in generating over 150 new product ideas.

**The bottom line is that good research design lets us do more and spend less.**

**Strategic qualitative research is the most cost-efficient way to generate the deep and compelling insights that create competitive advantage.**