



Mobile Diaries: 10 GUIDELINES for Success

Research diaries are powerful tools that have been around for decades.

Not long-ago researchers distributed small booklets to respondents, asking them to write down activities, reflections and responses with pen on paper. It was a rudimentary way of capturing sequenced events close to the moment without relying on memory. However, diaries were difficult to administer and equally difficult to analyze.

Smart phones have changed things; giving us flexibility and power that couldn't have been imagined before. However, mobile diaries aren't necessarily any less complex, just perhaps in a different way. That's why it's important to follow these tips before you give mobile diaries a go.

- 1. Design Holistically** – By this we mean look at the big picture. Plan out major sections first, not the specific questions themselves, for a more holistic design. Will you be exploring the who, what, when, where and why of different occasions? Will you be exploring how things went in Step One, Step Two, Step Three, Step Four, and Step Five? Will you have an engagement survey followed by group of tasks and a wrap-up? Plan your sections and add descriptions that define what belongs in each one until you have a solid initial draft. After that, add the specific questions within each section to fill out the design.
- 2. Bite-Sized is Big** – The beauty of a mobile diary is that you don't have to do everything at once. You can break a complex study into small bite-sized pieces. To maintain engagement, keep sections and questions short, simple and easy to do; asking what you need, but no more. People are often willing to respond to a series of questions over time, but your drop-out rates will skyrocket if you make things unnecessarily complicated or burdensome. Instead, keep tasks short, avoid being repetitive, minimize open-ends and use skip logic.
- 3. Do a Quick Qual Before Launch** – Take the time to vet your near-final questionnaire with a quick qualitative study. Discuss the sections (and perhaps questions) of your mobile diary either by phone or live with six-10 people. It will be illuminating and lead to solid refinements. You could also answer the mobile diary yourself for two or three days. If you become confused, if you hate it or if you find it tedious, explore ways to make it smoother and more relevant. Ask others on your team to do the same. If you don't want to do the mobile diary yourselves, why would a customer or prospect?

4. Easy Does It – Make sure the tasks or activities you want people to do are clear (such as CLICK HERE), easy to find and perfectly timed. They should not have to think — just click and go whether you’re inviting them with emails, texts or App delivery.

Your respondents can be in wildly different places in their mobile diary, some at the beginning, others at the end or in between. You need to ensure they get the right task or the right reminder in a super intuitive way. This complexity led us to create a comprehensive APP with a back-end engine to track completed tasks, send reminders and deliver their next task in a seamless way.



5. Engage them from Day One – The first day of a mobile diary is critically important; it’s when people learn your expectations and the importance you place on involved participation. Clear instructions and guidelines may help, but we’ve found that those who neglect day one will often neglect day two and later days. For that reason, we carefully monitor day one and send early reminders to neglectors. Those who still don’t respond after a second reminder are quickly replaced.



6. Remember to Remind – People are busy and put off doing things until later, especially when they consider it to be optional or less important. Sending reminders is a best practice because it establishes the importance of the research and gives a nudge that helps most people give the task an elevated priority. But be careful to strike the right balance as too many reminders can become annoying.

7. Add Wow Factor – Amp up your mobile diary findings by making use of the full capabilities of smart phones. Chats, photos and videos can bring your findings to life for marketing and business leaders who often digest visual information better and are often as excited about the photos/videos as with the data itself.

As you gather videos or photos or as you execute chats, be careful not to create a burden for the respondent or for yourself. Estimate the number of completes you will have and the number of photos or videos you can handle. For example, program your system to only request photos or videos every 10th time or at a frequency that works best for you.



8. Incentives Talk – Incentives are vital for a mobile diary, but they can be tricky. Few people will participate for long if they feel the incentive is small or if they don’t receive one along the way. Here are a few suggestions:

Consider escalated incentives: If you’re willing to give an incentive of \$45 overall, give \$5 for task one, \$10 for task two, \$10 for task three and \$20 for task four.

Developed versus emerging market incentive options: In developed countries, online shopping vouchers, like amazon.com, coffee or fast food vouchers are simple and easy to execute, with convenient online delivery. In the emerging world, consider adding minutes to their phone or PayPal transfers.

9. Dare to Dashboard – Dashboards are common for ongoing trackers, but they are rarely used for a single study. However, a mobile diary is different, and you may be wise to request one. Your research partner may prefer to keep the data until the full analysis is complete, yet the reasons to share mobile diary data earlier with a dashboard include:

- Seeing the story emerge: Mobile diaries take time, lasting months as the data is gathered. An inexpensive dashboard option lets your team see a high-level overview of findings as the data comes in leading to initial discussions and a chance share watch-outs with your research partner while they continue fieldwork and prepare for a broader analysis.
- Focusing the deeper analysis where it belongs: This early access to basic frequencies and crosstabs allows you to ask your research partner to focus on a deeper, more meaningful story if necessary.

10. Go for Deep Mobile Diary Analysis – Mobile diaries capture responses for events over time and they create large and complex datasets. It's not uncommon to have up to 100,000 occasions to analyze. Sadly, this wealth of data can lead to 'analysis paralysis.' Don't waste time and resources analyzing everything by everything. With a dashboard providing the basic analysis, your longitudinal analysis can be highly focused on deep and meaningful insights such as deeply exploring moments of change from event to event or period to period and/or collaborating in advance on hypotheses and assumptions and then going deep to validate or disprove hypotheses.

We hope this expands your thinking as you prepare for your next international study. It's an area many firms struggle to do well. But, armed with this tip sheet, you will be prepared to ask the right questions and benefit from insightful results that educate your business decisions.

Let's talk!

Contact us
today to see
how MDI can
help you make
the most of your
mobile diary.