

Hearing From the Silent Majority

How to capture the missing perspective on your reputation



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SHUTTERSTOCK

As a business owner or senior executive, it is imperative that you stay closely connected to your stakeholders and the communities in which your organization operates. It has never been more important to engage with them and authentically listen to what they have to say. Engaging these communities allows you to maintain your social licence to operate and shows value beyond profit. A company's reputation can quickly lose traction with the speed of communications today, so having an ongoing two-way dialogue has become vital. The recent challenges faced by such companies as Tim Hortons, once one of the strongest brands in Canada, shows how quickly a reputation can change.

The success of activities designed to engage these communities is often measured by several touch-points: the number of people

who participated in an open-house or meeting; the number who completed a survey; or the number of letters/emails submitted.

But how can you be sure you have tapped into the silent majority—those stakeholders or members of the public who are too busy to participate, are indifferent, or are apprehensive about getting involved? Often those with a vested interest or strong opinion tend to participate in engagement activities. One only needs to attend a public hearing for a new development, expansion project or zoning change to see that those with the strongest views are typically the most well-represented. Case in point: If one only reads newspaper headlines, one would think the entire population of B.C. is against Kinder Morgan's pipeline expansion.

Many municipalities and Crown corporations have developed panels of residents or customers in order to gain feedback on new policies, programs

and issues (e.g.: City of Vancouver's Talk Vancouver). These are great engagement tools and platforms for testing ideas, but on their own don't capture a representative sample of the communities they're trying to reach.

An effective way to ensure you are hearing all perspectives is to conduct a survey with a randomly selected sample of stakeholders or members of the public. Rather than waiting for people to opt in on engagement activities, a random survey actively seeks out a representative sample and provides a safe and confidential platform for those who are otherwise less likely to express their opinions.

The team at Mustel Group Market Research has

many tools at their fingertips to ensure a representative sample is obtained and those difficult-to-engage populations, such as youth and newcomers, are heard. Even with the decline in landline use, Mustel Group has found great success in reaching people through mobile phones, ensuring nearly 100-percent coverage of the population.

In addition to traditional market research survey options, Mustel Group also offers a variety of innovative research methodologies and a proprietary online panel that is exclusively randomly recruited, offering a level of reliability not possible through self-selected panels.

Public and stakeholder engagement that involves the silent majority is a must in today's social environment. To be sure you truly understand your audience's opinions, perceptions and concerns, a random survey provides a valuable complement to engagement initiatives. ■