



Dear cic: I work for the Canadian subsidiary of a European multinational. Recently I e-mailed the head of the European division highlights of a CI study that I had commissioned. I was surprised at the response I got. I was told that CI is not something that our company encourages, because it is unreliable. Do you have any suggestions on how I can sell CI to my European counterpart? **CI Subsidiary**

Dear ci Subsidiary

Sounds like your European division head may have been "burned" in the past with some CI they received that was either inaccurate and/or incomplete. So, I would ask him/her why they think CI is unreliable to better understand their stance. If they say that CI is unreliable because the sample size is too small to draw meaningful information, you can respond that sample sizes in CI tend to be small because only a limited number of respondents would have the information. You can also point out that one needs to be very selective about whom one approaches because the information being sought is very sensitive. Or, if they question how confident one can be with information that only comes from one source, bring to their attention that the rule of thumb in CI is to corroborate your findings from no less than three different sources.

Dear cic: I am a CI supplier and I am having an ongoing debate with one of my colleagues about whether or not to increase the sample size if we are unable to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the results. My colleague claims that doing more interviews than what was initially agreed upon not only eats into our profits, but signals to clients that we tend to underestimate what we put down in our proposals for targeted sample sizes. My opinion is that you do whatever you got to do to get enough completed surveys to generate accurate findings. **Any advice?**

Dear Any Advice

That's a tough call. In CI, there is no hard and fast rule on what a sample size should be. On the one hand your colleague makes a good point. We are all in business to make some profit and you certainly do not want to send your client mixed signals. However, providing accurate, thorough and reliable work is paramount, especially in CI where marketing strategies and budgets are often contingent on what the competition will be doing. Bottom line, if you really feel that a few more completions will give you the added information you need to be confident with your findings, then by all means do some more interviews. Peace of mind is what counts. But, at the same time, if you find yourself doing this more often than not, then it would make sense when writing your next proposal, to increase your sample size and fee accordingly.

SAMPLE CHALLENGED

Dear cic: Every month I get a CI update (one to two page report) from each of my eight sales reps on competitor initiatives in their respective territories. For the most part the reports are detailed, fairly accurate and informative. However, there is one rep who I suspect is making things up. He is one of our best reps and I would like to speak to him about my concerns, but I am unsure how to go about it. What do you suggest? **Doubtful Sales Manager**

Dear DSM

What you need to do is to bring your concern to your rep's attention in a straight forward, respectful manner with the goal to problem solve with him and agree on a solution. As a first step, I would try to get a sense of why this might be happening. For example, ask him for feedback on how he feels completing the reports. Are they taking up too much time or is he able to easily factor them in with his other responsibilities?

Does he enjoy writing the reports or does he find it tedious? Does he think there is merit in generating these reports or are they a waste of time? What does he like most about doing these reports? The least? Does he have any suggestions on how to improve the process?

Based on your rep's feedback you can gauge whether or not he is committed to the CI process. If he is committed to the process, then it may be more a matter of teaching him how to collect and report his findings. But if his attitude is questionable, (e.g., he dismisses the importance of CI) then the problem may be more chronic. If this is the case, express your concern that his responses do not seem to make sense given what you know of the market and based on what the other reps have been sending you. Cite examples to back up your concern. If you feel he still is not in sync with your expectations, then future reports will need to be more directly supervised. For example, you may communicate to him that you will need a great deal more specificity with his findings, and that his report will need to be backed up with additional examples. If the problem continues, you could have him give you verbal updates so that you can probe for gaps and challenge him on inconsistencies. Alternatively, he can be teamed up with another rep and together they would be responsible for sending you the monthly updates.

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