



Breaking Out of the IR Box: One Office's Entrepreneurial Expedition into the Market Research World

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The Context

- Budget pressures
 - Unit needs skills that can be “outsourced” efficiently
 - Tight IR resources
 - Need for innovative revenue streams
- Culture of evidence – data driven decision making
- Desire to expand academic programming in innovative or entrepreneurial ways
- Continuing Education unit approached IR acknowledging office’s expertise



IR as Market Research Contractor

☞ Summer projects – “down” time

☞ Short, limited scope

☞ IR brings:

- Expertise in research design and data analysis
- Unbiased external review

☞ Project in area outside of IR responsibility – fee for service arrangement



Possible Project Types

■ Focus Groups

■ Labor Market Analysis

■ Competitive Market Analysis

- Identification of competitor institutions/programs
- Enrollment trends
- Environmental scan

■ Survey – design, implementation, analysis



Possible Research Questions

- Ⓜ Are there enough potential students to support a distance program in a particular major?
- Ⓜ Is there a market for an off-campus program in a given area?
- Ⓜ What competitive advantage might the university have when marketing a distance degree in a given major?
- Ⓜ Is there a market for a new graduate program in a given area?



The “How To” Nuts and Bolts

- Create a clear plan of work with well defined scope
- Develop budget and track expenses including personnel hours
 - Estimate hours and then add buffer
 - When possible cost out segments – charge per small unit
- Frequent feedback – keep communication lines open
- Make efficient use of staff and students
 - use low cost personnel (including students) when possible
 - fill “down” time with billable hours to offset costs the office would already incur



The Ups and Downs

On the plus side...

- ↳ Additional financial support for IR budget
- ↳ Maximum use of staff at “down” time
- ↳ Interesting, engaging
- ↳ Rewarding to complete short term project
- ↳ Meet a new audience – work with those not normally IR consumers

But watch out for...

- ↳ Timelines that will impinge on core office function.
- ↳ Poorly defined topics or lack of focus.
- ↳ Projects in which you cannot control the timeline or work flow.
- ↳ Highly political projects with preconceived answers.