

The Strategic Content Alliance

Audience research for practitioners



Audience research...

Presenter

Organisation, position

Overview of the presentation

- The digital revolution
- Reasons to research your audiences
- A successful use of audience research - BBC iPlayer
- Getting started - the principles of audience research
- Audience research in your sector

The digital revolution

- Over the last decade digital technologies have fundamentally changed the delivery of public services
 - Digital services are now used widely within public services
 - Rapid growth and development of electronic content
 - Significant body of expertise with digital technologies
- This has been a period of experimentation
 - Often technology-driven
 - Fragmented content and service delivery
 - Lack of real understanding about the way audiences interact with digital services
- Programmes such as Digital Britain and the Strategic Content Alliance now seek to focus, stimulate and coordinate the delivery of digital services



Why might I want to do audience research?

- Audience research is the process of planning and conducting a programme of work to better understand audiences and audience behaviour
- Knowledge about your audiences can provide evidence to help you answer the following questions
 - What are the key audiences of your service/research?
 - How do your audiences use your digital content?
 - What is the relationship between your digital and non-digital services?
 - Are your services meeting your audiences needs?

When might audience research be useful?

- Knowledge about your audiences can be used to
 - develop a product or service
 - evaluate a service or project
 - demonstrate accountability to funders
 - inform business planning
 - ...and much more!

Successful use of audience research ***Case study: redesign of the BBC iPlayer (2008)***



- BBC iPlayer
 - originally launched in 2007
 - a service that lets you watch BBC television programmes from the last week over the internet
- Redesign aim
 - to launch a version of iPlayer that integrated the delivery of on-demand TV and radio
- The redesign relied on extensive user engagement
 - to test the design and usability of the new design of iPlayer
 - to check that existing users would not react negatively to the new design
 - to find out how perceptions of the design might affect audiences' attitudes towards the BBC as an organisation and content provider in the 21st century digital world

Successful use of audience research Case study: redesign of the BBC iPlayer (2008)

- Key research methods
 - moderated 'audience labs'
 - in-depth individual interviews
- Conclusions of the research
 - response to the design generally positive
 - modifications to address concerns and further enhance the benefits
- Relaunch of iPlayer was successful
- BBC continues to research its audiences
 - to monitor the success of the new iPlayer
 - to inform further service development



The stages of audience research

- The basic principles in the lifecycle
 - **1. Target audience:** describe and define the target audience
 - **2. Plan:** plan your research
 - **3. Research:** collect the data
 - **4. Analyse:** model your audience
 - **5. Apply:** exploit the evidence
- The principles are the same as for non-digital services, however
 - additional research techniques are available (eg web statistics)
 - there are potentially new audiences
 - how digital and non-digital services exist together is an interesting consideration



Step 1. Describe and define the target audience

- Knowing who you would like your audience to be is vital
 - You may have more than one distinct audience with different needs
- Defining your target audience doesn't need to be a difficult exercise
 - Picture an ideal audience member...
 - Their occupation, gender, interests, technological expertise...
 - ...Start thinking about categories for audience segmentation
- For example, your audience segments might be task-oriented
 - Students in full-time education
 - Members of local family and history societies
 - Leisure users



Step 2. Plan your research

- Set clear objectives for your research
 - What do you want to know about your audience?
 - Why do you want to know it?
- Reach, uptake, quality and impact – what are your priorities?



WHO are they?

WHY do they use
our service?

WHO is not using
our service?

HOW do they
reach our
service?

DOES the service
meet their needs
and expectations?

WHY are they not
using our
service?

HOW do they use
our service?

WHAT are the
longer term effects
of the service?

HAVE they ever
used our service?

Step 2. Plan your research

- Plan your research to meet your objectives
- Quantitative, qualitative, ethnographic research?
 - do you need statistically valid conclusions?
 - are you more interested in exploring attitudes and motivations?
 - does your data need to be representative?
- What methods are appropriate?
 - determined by the type of information you want about the audience
 - pragmatic considerations (eg available time and money)
 - common to combine methods
- Don't forget that investigating non-users is also important
- Start by using informal knowledge about your audiences and other people's research



Step 3. Collect the data

- In-house research or commission a research agency?
 - Most techniques can be adapted by non-specialists
 - Consider time, resources and available expertise
 - You can choose to outsource specific elements
- Data collection methods
 - Focus groups
 - One-to-one interviews
 - Quantitative surveys
 - Web statistics
 - Web analytics
 - User observation techniques (ethnography)



Step 4. Model the audience from your data

- Analyse and interpret the data
 - Will be easier if the research was well planned and conducted
 - Techniques will depend on the type of data and purpose of the research
 - The data should provide evidence for any statements you make
- The analysis should improve your understanding of your audience
 - address the specific research questions
 - build up a better understanding of the audience and their interactions with the service



Step 5. Make use of the research

- Evidence from audience research can help make informed decisions
 - Service development and audience development
 - What are the wider implications of the work?
- Consider the conclusions of the research
 - Were the specific objectives met?
 - What lessons can be learned for future work?
- Plan follow-up and future research!



Audience research in your sector

- Each sector will have its own priorities, issues and influences which will guide the research that you conduct
 - [Cultural sector](#)
 - [Education sector](#)
 - [Health sector](#)
- There are also important considerations for [research and service managers](#)
- There is also a wealth of support available on audience research in your sectors
 - [Cultural sector](#)
 - [Education sector](#)
 - [Health sector](#)

Summary

- Audience research does not need to be perfect to be useful
- Even a small audience research project is worthwhile
- Audience research should be seen as an ongoing process,
- Many techniques can be implemented quite cheaply or adapted to a shoestring budget
- Audience research should be done with commitment and support from senior management

Thank you for listening and any questions?

For further information please contact the SCA at.....

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Audience research in your sector slides

Audience research in the cultural sector

- In the last 10 years, millions of pounds of public funding has been available in the sector to investigate and experiment with digitisation and online services
 - Digital channels are likely to form a central pillar for the delivery of cultural services in the future
 - Need to better understand how audiences wish to consume digital cultural content
- Audience research can help cultural organisations to
 - develop your whole service - do people wish to consume digital content specifically, or do they wish to have a surrogate “cultural experience”?
 - improve the reach of your service
 - prioritise collections for digitisation
 - provide evidence for assessment frameworks such as the CPA Framework
- Is your website part of your local authority’s website?
 - not having control of your own website can be frustrating
 - build relationships with the IT and marketing teams to reduce timescales for changes
 - ask them for access to their web statistics

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Audience research in the education sector

- Simply offering products and services is no longer enough – you must provide learners and researchers with a satisfactory experience
 - high tuition fees in HE have evolved students into “paying customers” with increased expectations
 - learners, researchers and teachers expect information to be available online, at their fingertips, when they want it, in an easy-to-use form
- Increased requirements from funders to demonstrate value for money and impact mean that it is imperative that services that are wanted, needed and valued by your audience
- Audience research can help services, projects and programmes in the education and research sector to
 - develop new funding streams to improve your sustainability
 - prioritise service enhancements (from that long wish list!)
 - improve your marketing and selling of a service (eg an e-learning tool to institutions)
 - facilitate self-regulation and self-improvement
 - understand the challenge of providing library services for the future

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Audience research in the health sector

- The digital revolution is changing the way in which library and knowledge services are delivered and the role of library professionals
- NHS library and knowledge services are required to demonstrate
 - that the service actively supports health care
 - that it is fit for purpose
 - that it offers value for money
- Knowledge about your audience provide evidence to support
 - Quality assessment – the new NHS quality frameworks focus on providing an appropriate evidence base to demonstrate that you are delivering services which meet the changing needs of users
 - Collaborative working – eg the collaborative procurement of e-resources
 - The evolution of library services in the digital age

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Audience research for service and research managers

- If you do not encourage your projects/services to research and collect evidence on their audiences you may not be able to demonstrate value to your managers
- Audience research is more effective when it is an integral part of a project/service
- How to get started
 - Task your staff, and be able to communicate your requirements
 - Use your central marketing team to exploit their knowledge and support your work
 - Ask around – there may be similar and transferable audience research out there
- Using audience research
 - Service enhancements – user involvement may uncover problems with usability and accessibility that had not been anticipated
 - Evaluations – it can provide important evidence to help you evaluate the “success” of a service/programme
 - Planning programmes of work or research – the reach, uptake and success of previous strands of work will help you decide what to fund in new programmes of work

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Available support in your sector slides

Available support in the cultural sector

- **Collections Link** - a national advisory service for Collections Management - has a range of useful material about market research
- **The Museums, Libraries and Archives council** has a number of informative research briefings on topics such as “increasing attendance and participation”
- The **Arts Council** has an excellent set of publications and information sheets on audience development and participation
- **Taking Part in the Arts** provides information and guidance on how to be more community and customer focused
- **The Audience Alliance** provides information on existing audience development projects, case studies and examples of best practice
- Other
 - **The Market Research Society (MRS)** provides some best practice guidance to promote the professionalism of research on the Internet
 - there is also a wealth of support available on the creation and management of digital materials from sites such as **JISC Digital Media** and **UKOLN Cultural Heritage**

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Available support in the health sector

- Whilst the administration of health services is devolved in the UK, some of the national information available will be more widely applicable
 - **England's National Library for Health** has a wealth of information under “Tools for Library Staff”, including best practice guidance for “Assessing the impact of a health library service”, and information on user needs under “service development”
- Demonstrating value - an **LKDN paper** entitled “The value and impact of information provided through library services for patient care: a systematic review” gives useful pointers
- **The Chartered Institute of Marketing** runs two useful courses
 - “Marketing in the NHS – Principles & Practices” (2 day course, 14 CPD hours)
 - “Marketing to Succeed in a Competitive NHS” (1 day course, 7 CPD hours)
- Additionally, the **Market Research Society (MRS)** provides some best practice guidance to promote the professionalism of research on the Internet.

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Available support in the education sector

- **eVALUED** - an evaluation toolkit “designed to support information services staff in Higher Education Institutions with the evaluation of electronic information services” - covers topics such as audience research, impact measurement, and broader evaluation techniques
- **Becta** has a range of useful guidance for e-learning content providers under its learning and resource development library, including an “Introduction to usability for websites” and a guide to “designing e-learning resources to meet the needs of users”
- A **JISC** project entitled “Digitised Resources: A Usage and Impact Study” is currently developing a best practices toolkit for the assessment of impact of digitisation resources. Their project website has further details
- The **Market Research Society (MRS)** Internet research guidelines are helpful: they interpret the MRS Code of Conduct and provide best practice guidance to promote the professionalism of research on the Internet
- There is also a wealth of support available on the creation and management of digital materials from sites such as **JISC Digital Media**, and **JISC TechDis** provides guidance on making sure e-learning material is accessible to its target audiences

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