

## Online Moderating 4: Exploring products, concepts, copy, advertising...

**Like our boots above, new ideas will often seem uncomfortable, unwearable, fascinating or desirable.**

When you're testing them, it doesn't matter too much what form they are in. You might have a general idea or theme or you might have specific product, copy, strap lines or executions.

***Whichever it is, try to think of it like meeting a new person.*** *We have done this many times in life and we never really know what we will feel or think beforehand. New experiences cannot be easily calibrated before the event. This is just the same for new ideas.*

I notice that most evaluations in market research have too 'interrogative' a format. The questions are too specific, directed and narrow, too soon. In meetings with real people we have a whole set of openings that allow us to ease into the encounter; we talk about the weather, how we got here, who we know in common, while we adjust to the presence of another. We spend some time passing time and conventional banter with each other until a level of comfort is reached. With ideas we need the same open and unthreatening openings. And these should not be in any way prescriptive at first.

Ask people to describe the first things that come into their mind when they meet the idea, whatever they might be. Adopt a loose, rather than a tight structure and when people make a comment that interests you, follow up with, 'can you say some more about that?'

Have a look at the post on the 'English approach' here:

<http://www.langmaidpractice.com/blog/advertising-the-english-approach/>

and you'll see how much indirect communication is part of the English style. Much of what is really important is hidden at first, Pushing your product too directly is seen as American, un-English and altogether too earnest and self-promoting. In many really successful communications the products are invited into the scene as a consequence of a narrative which is really about something else – in the examples in the linked post, about looking – or trying to look – good.

If you are working with groups or a community to get reactions to this kind of thing, you must be prepared to engage with a similarly indirect, humorous, disparaging, dismissive kind of banter from your respondents. ***Just as it is inappropriate for the maker of the message to be too pushy, so it is inappropriate for the receivers of the message to appear to take it seriously at first.*** This is one very good reason why groups or communities are such an important component of creative development in the UK – or anywhere where a more cautious, not 'taking yourself too seriously' style is a cultural norm.

**This means you need to be patient if you are to discover valuable diagnostic information.**

This is the time when you need to **hang loose** and just invite any remark or response and accept them all as having value. You can tighten up as you elicit interesting feedback. Even in pragmatic cultures that pride themselves on 'telling it like it is' there are many topics that need confidence to be established and acknowledged before tight questions are appropriate. Healthcare and financial services are obvious examples, but things like personal care, fashion, diet may all need confidence established before people can speak their mind.

Also, as in a real life meeting, **recognise that people may not be practiced in the kind of conversation you wish to have with them.** It is quite likely that they will not know how to talk about the topic at the level you need them too. They will tend to simplify.

When I was doing creative development research, I would often give my informants a practice session where I would show them something well-known which had been successful - or unsuccessful - and ask them to talk freely about it and try to find the reason for the success or failure. I would be sure to acknowledge them for their perceptivity and this engendered confidence in free talking among the community. Once this confidence was established I would move onto the test material and ask them to talk as freely as they had in the practice session.

Before I sign off here, just consider this for a moment, what are the places, company and occasions where you can speak freely, even though you are unprepared by norms or practice? There are fewer than you think - even if you do regard yourself as extrovert or outspoken - and these are exceptions rather than the rule in English culture.

If you would like a pdf of this post while you consider these suggestions for yourself and how to use them, it is here: