



7 Tips for Conducting Successful International Qualitative Research

by Pat Sabena & Nicole Sabena Feagin
Sabena Qualitative Research Services and
[Qualitative Research Consultants Association](#)

If your qualitative research firm has opportunities to do research outside the United States, and during the past five years these opportunities have increased significantly, here are a few best practices to make your project as successful as possible:

1. **Be Prepared** = It's too late to go looking for suppliers and moderators once your client asks you to do an international project. Build global contacts by attending conferences such as those sponsored by Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA), the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) and the American Marketing Association, and by asking colleagues now for references of top-notch suppliers on different continents.
2. **Go Continental** = If you decide to use one supplier in Europe, don't ask them to tag on Asia or South America. You'll pay a hefty surcharge and slow things down across the time zones. Develop good English-speaking contacts in Japan and China, and in Brazil and Argentina, for example, for faster and better communications and more realistic costs.
3. **Chain or Independent** = One advantage of using large firms to set up the project per continent is that you probably won't have to advance fees ahead of time. But take the moderators out of the big company equation so you can deal with them independently, and know you're getting the most experienced and appropriate interviewer you can find through contacts and referrals.
4. **Respect Cultural Differences** = Just because facilities recruit your projects in the US, don't expect this to work well elsewhere. Independent recruiters in Europe, for example, tend to specialize, even to the point of separate ones for patients and physicians. Also, follow local recommendations on what times to conduct interviews. Other countries don't do 12-hour or even 8-hour days the way we do in the US, and don't follow as strict a schedule. The translator also needs more rest time in between interviews than do many moderators. Moderators may have their own favorite translators too.

5. **Be There** = Don't contract with each country for their report. You'll wind up rewriting it to fit in with the rest of the research anyway. Instead, plan to personally attend the interviews in each country's venue including any in-home interviews. That way, you're there to keep the research on course during the interviews, and write the report yourself.

6. **Converting currency** = Don't rely on currency converters on the Internet, because they will inevitably make foreign currencies seem cheaper than your bank will charge you to wire payment, especially with today's dollar. Before wiring large amounts to suppliers abroad, call the Foreign Exchange desk at your bank and ask them for a contract for lower currency rates.

7. **Travel Frugally** = Keep travel expenses to a minimum. Don't go Business Class, but do book Premium Economy for better service and more legroom. Book your hotel near the facility to avoid expensive taxi rides. Travel light (one small suitcase plus your laptop) and you'll avoid lost luggage, extra weight charges, and whisk through customs like the most sophisticated travelers.

Pat Sabena has been an independent research consultant since 1965, and partnered with Nicole Sabena Feagin in 1998. Pat was elected President of QRCA (1995-1997) and taught workshops on best qualitative research practices and techniques all over the world. The pair has conducted more than 11,000 focus groups and more than 5,000 IDIs. QRCA is a vibrant global network of qualitative researchers immersed in the most exciting work being done in the field. QRCA promotes an international presence in many ways, including its annual awarding of a Global Outreach Scholarship. Anyone interested in being considered for this QRCA scholarship should complete an application form at www.QRCA.org.