

case study

MRS develops online CPD with Nelson Croom to maximise participation on their courses

With members in more than 70 countries, the Market Research Society (MRS) is the world's largest association representing providers and users of market, social and opinion research, and business intelligence. MRS serves both individuals and organisations who identify with its core values of professionalism, excellence and effectiveness. It has a diverse membership of individual researchers within agencies, independent consultancies, client-side organisations, the public sector and the academic community – at all levels of seniority and in all job functions.

In 2003 they commissioned Nelson Croom to develop two online courses: *Questionnaire Design and the Introductory Certificate in Market Research*.

The problem

Before the launch of the project, the MRS ran a one day short course on questionnaire design. It was always oversubscribed and it was clear that they were only satisfying a small proportion of demand for the course, but how could they reach more learners cost-effectively?

At the same time, the Introductory Certificate was designed to give people an introduction to the industry, with assessment carried out by exam. Their objective was to increase the number of members who could take this course, but how could they increase the numbers and effectively resource the assessment requirements?

The two courses were aimed at very different audiences. The Introductory Certificate can lead learners towards the Society's full professional qualifications.

However, many of the learners may not wish to go in that direction and some do not have the ability to progress to a higher level. In contrast, the Questionnaire Design course is aimed at people in the industry who are generally more confident of their ability to learn.

The solution

The MRS commissioned two subject matter experts who work in industry to review the content. These highly qualified experts were really engaged with the online experience and worked with the Nelson Croom team to give it a "real world" feel. Working together the team developed

“ It was frustrating not being able to fulfil demand from our members for our two key courses: *Questionnaire Design and the Introductory Certificate in Market Research*. The work completed by Nelson Croom has allowed us to do just that. We can accommodate more learners and as a consequence improve our professional development provision for the Society ”

Karen Adams, Professional Development Manager, MRS Jane Tippett, Chair, ATNC

online content that would address the different learning requirements.

The Introductory Certificate may have had a set curriculum, but the learners were from a wide range of backgrounds, from 18 year olds including it in their studies as a vocational A-Level equivalent, to a 50 year old survey worker who wanted to find out more about the market research industry. Nelson Croom worked with the MRS to take a diffused learning approach to a syllabus based course. It was designed so that the learner was in charge and the experience would be non-linear.

For the Questionnaire Design course the programme was developed to appeal to members and non-members. It focused very practically on how to write a questionnaire, rather than on the theory. Links to web-based questionnaires as examples of good and bad practice were also incorporated. A structured learning opportunity was created for learners who were unable to attend a course in London.

The results

The *Introductory Certificate in Market Research* was launched in 2004 with a target of recruiting 60 learners at a cost of £200-£250 per course. To date there have been 281 learners. For the *Questionnaire Design* course, the target was to broaden out who could sign-up creating revenue of £150-£200 per learner. To date 144 learners have signed up to the course, with a wide variety of background and experience.

