

## J202

Culver

Tip Sheet: Executive Summary

Week 6

An executive summary is a brief report of key issues, observations or research findings. Executive summaries are often conceived as cover memos to introduce a packet of results of market or public opinion research. The writer's goal is to analyze research results and boil them down to a summary easily digested by people making strategy decisions.

Executive summaries usually include:

- summary lead with the one or two most important findings
- attention to positive elements (the things that are going right)
- attention to negative elements (the things that are going wrong)
- suggestions on how to fix the negatives
- brief detail on how the study was conducted
- conclusion reiterating the summary in the lead

These summaries are tightly written and favor concise phrasing (such as bulleted lists) over long or complex sentences.

For instance, when I worked in health care marketing, I hired a research firm to survey people about how they use the Yellow Pages and the Internet to find, choose or contact a physician. The firm gave me an inch-thick booklet of all the results plus a three-page summary highlighting the most important themes in the data, including hard evidence that people do not use the Yellow Pages to choose a physician and prefer the White Pages when they want to call their physicians.

Below is a brief sample of an executive summary submitted after a small focus group study of a Web site. The client name is deleted and the firm name is changed.

### Sample:

The DesignPlus site study conducted on <www. .com> found a wealth of useful content but also serious organization and navigation drawbacks that hinder users in their search for information.

DesignPlus asked a focus group of 15 to conduct basic site tasks related to XXX's objectives of attracting new customers, providing pricing information and allowing electronic scheduling. For 14 of 15 subjects, the appearance and structure of the home page:

- confused subjects
- delayed task completion
- hindered movement between tasks

When asked to locate the price of Product X to consider a purchase, 13 subjects needed five or more clicks. One subject said, "I wouldn't have known I could find it here if you hadn't told me to get it."

With simplified navigation and better organization in the site, the subjects would have realized the relevant information was a mere two clicks away. These results indicate problems with achieving XXX's goal of providing pricing information that is easy to find.

(elaboration of evidence related to each of the other objectives, brief detail on the subjects' demographics and how the focus group was conducted, and notes on where the site worked well)

Recommendations:

1. improve home page organization by focusing only on content areas most useful for customers, both new and returning
2. streamline navigation by offering link rollovers that show the pages beneath
3. replace scattered navigation on subpages with standard navigation bar that highlighting current section

Conclusion reiterating summary lead.