

How market research helps Portakabin to remain at the cutting edge

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Introduction

Portakabin produces modular buildings and has 17% of the UK market. The business was founded by Donald Shepherd in 1961. It produces a wide range of buildings, holding from 1 to 1,000 people. The brand is well known and is synonymous with portable buildings. *Portakabin's* market has diverse needs. *Portakabin* needs to understand what its customers want so that it can provide the right solutions. Accommodation must be safe, comfortable and pleasant for people to use. Customers want buildings that provide quality, are delivered on time and are within budget. To maintain its competitive edge, *Portakabin* must therefore

- * deliver what customers want
- * be flexible enough to provide new solutions when needs change
- * attract new customers. Part of *Portakabin's* edge is the added-value of its 'one-stop-shop', which includes help with planning permission, layout, furnishing, fixtures and features such as security and climate control systems.

Market Research

Portakabin needs to understand its market as various factors may cause customers' needs to change. These include changes in technology, working patterns and even legislation. *Portakabin* uses both primary and secondary research to understand its market.

- * Primary, or field, research is new data
- * Secondary, or desk, research is data that has already been collected. Data may also be either qualitative, for example opinions and feelings, or quantitative, such as facts and figures.

Primary research

To make research effective, *Portakabin* has to find ways of gaining accurate information. The sales team has discussions with clients and their staff. It also uses focus groups to find out how people feel about the buildings. It is important for people to be comfortable in their working environment if they are going to be efficient. *Portakabin* also uses surveys to see why clients choose it rather than its competitors.

Secondary research

Portakabin was able to use the results of a recent survey to help it design new products. The survey looked at which improvements to the work environment were most effective in improving employee performance. Key results showed that workers needed to be able to see outside, to work at comfortable temperatures and in quiet surroundings. Another survey reported that 66% of British workers felt that the quality of their working environment was important. This included natural lighting and that temporary buildings should appear to be permanent.

Product development

The research information is used to create new products. These are then rolled out to customers with effective marketing and sales. At all times, quality is a key issue. *Portakabin* has developed two major new products in response to research findings. These are product extensions to its core product of modular buildings:

- * *Ultima Vision* has more glass and provides more natural light
- * *Portakabin Solus* has large windows and materials to produce pleasing working conditions.

Conclusion

Portakabin wants to maintain its position as the leading manufacturer of portable buildings in the UK. To do this, it uses the detailed primary and secondary research to help it to develop products and services that fulfil the changing needs of its customers.