

With the COVID-19 pandemic gaining momentum, and unlikely to be resolved until at least this time next year, Independent Researchers' Group (IRG) members of the Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS) have collaborated to assess the risks and opportunities for our businesses, clients, associates.

How we work

Many IRG members work from home in a dedicated and well-equipped office, while some rent offices or utilise shared workspaces with other businesses. Most independent researchers who work outside their homes already have the capacity to work at home if they are required to do so for any reason such as caring for young children. We routinely communicate remotely with our clients, suppliers and associates and are comfortable collaborating across several or many home offices and other sites, via teleconference or email, to undertake our business activities.

The nature of market and social research means that many of us may handle sensitive and identifiable data. We abide by the National Privacy Principles and as members of the AMSRS we are required to adhere to the Society's Code of Professional Behaviour. These requirements are applicable regardless of where we work. To protect your data all AMSRS members are expected to have in place processes for the secure transmission of data and information, regardless of their location. As IRG members we do not anticipate these processes will be compromised by the COVID-19 pandemic, because working at home is business as usual for most.

Continuity of service

Some clients may be concerned that as independent researchers we do not have the back up of colleagues should we become ill and unable to work. In fact the opposite applies, many IRG members already collaborate on projects. As IRG members we are also able to draw upon our excellent network of like-minded independent researchers for assistance, as we have already done from time to time on collaborative projects during exceptionally busy periods or when a member wants to take a holiday or any other leave.

Individually and collectively, IRG members work with a range of suppliers, whether that be survey panel providers, providers of telephone interview services, qualitative research recruiters, data analysts or others. If for any reason one supplier might be temporarily unavailable, another supplier who is already familiar with our needs and expectations can step into the breach. These plans have served us well in the past and we anticipate they will continue to serve us well.

Adapting in a rapidly changing environment

IRG members are well aware of the need to adapt through the current turbulent times.

The need for 'social-distancing' and the growing calls for avoiding crowds, public transport and confined spaces will result in the rapid decline in people wanting to take part in face-to-face research (e.g. in focus groups, or community engagement activities). Telephone interviewers may prefer not to work in CATI centres etc. Some of our suppliers have already informed us they have made arrangements for telephone interviewers to work at home, and they have established protocols to maintain the security of data collected remotely. Alternatively, through improvements in online survey methods we may suggest an online survey rather than telephone interviews. Our clients should feel free to enquire further if they require additional reassurance. Additionally, we can readily adapt qualitative research methods. For example we might suggest substituting face-to-face methods with telephone or online in-depth interviews and online focus groups. Adapting the ways we conduct research will help protect the health of research participants, and researchers alike, whilst ensuring we continue to meet the needs of our clients in these challenging times.

Keeping you informed

We also acknowledge the rapidly changing nature of advice in relation to COVID-19 and are regularly discussing the impacts on our industry, and business needs and issues in general and where this impacts on our clients, suppliers and associates we will do all we can to keep them informed too.

Thank you for your patience and support.