



FREE ARTICLE

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Checklist for selecting a market research agency in Central and Eastern Europe

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Just as cultures around the world vary widely, so do business cultures. This can complicate the process of searching for the right business partner in remote parts of the world. Many international research agencies face these problems when looking for partner agencies in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region. This article highlights issues worth considering when choosing the most appropriate partner in this part of the world.

In our opinion, the perfect research partner from the CEE region should demonstrate the following attributes:

- ◆ **An enthusiastic approach** – given cultural differences, it is important to look for an agency with a ‘can-do’ approach. A perfect partner assumes that everything is possible given sufficient time and resources. At the same time, a reliable partner promises only what they are sure they will be able to achieve within the given budget and deadline.
- ◆ **Suggesting solutions rather than stressing problems** – despite the alleged innovativeness and spontaneity of the region’s nations, they often have a tendency to dwell on problems arising. Finding a partner with a different approach, who focuses on seeking solutions to thorny situations, is vital for smooth project execution.
- ◆ **Excellent communication standards** – not only a good command of English but also global-level communication standards are crucial to project success. The perfect agency employs people who understand cultural differences in communication patterns: always on the end of the phone ready to answer questions, forthcoming with regular project updates, and sensitive to time shifts. This gives you the empowerment that comes with being fully informed and involved in the project.

- ◆ **Strong language skills** – smooth communication with the client and with partners across the CEE region in fluent English is of key importance. A language barrier can cause unnecessary misunderstandings and complications throughout the sales process and project execution. Knowledge of several local languages or at least the ability to read Cyrillic script often proves a huge advantage in document exchange and for checking translations of materials.
- ◆ **Experience in the type of project you are planning to commission** – whether it is a consumer or business-to-business study, a large CATI survey or face-to-face interviews with experts, or research into the medical or FMCG market, the agency should have the skills and experience to field the type of research you need. Knowledge of the market sector that interests you will definitely be another valuable asset.
- ◆ **Extensive experience in various countries in the region** – international projects are commonly fielded in more than one country in the region. Although these countries may appear very similar to each other, there are significant differences between them. It is therefore vital for a partnering agency to have an established network of contacts and past experience in most of the CEE countries, if it is to be able to recommend the best solutions or adjustments for certain countries.
- ◆ **Knowledge of the fast-changing CEE markets** – the Central and Eastern European markets are still developing relatively rapidly. It is essential for the partnering agency to be aware of the region's economic situation and any events that could be of significance when designing the sample or adjusting the target group for a study.
- ◆ **A single point of contact** – it is a good idea to find a company that has established contacts with other research agencies in the region and can manage multi-national projects. You can save significant amounts of time by cooperating with one point of contact for several countries. The benefits are numerous: easier communication, less coordination work, consistent data formats, and a wider perspective on the whole project.
- ◆ **Adherence to ESOMAR codes of conduct** – this guarantees that the company is familiar with and applies international standards in its research. Membership of an international research organisation lends your partner credibility.
- ◆ **Clear, reasonable and 'final' prices** – make sure you know exactly what you will be paying for and how much. A good partner will give you a clear cost split and a guarantee that the price will not change during the project unless you accept it.

- ◆ **Respect for time and deadlines** – strict adherence to deadlines and advance information if any delays are expected ensure that you remain in control of outsourced projects. However, the agency should give you not only impressive but also realistic timings.
- ◆ **Always keeping the cards on the table** – keeping the client informed in advance of any hitches and asking whenever there are any doubts or questions is better than trying to cover up problems. If your partner is honest enough to let you know when anything goes wrong, you have the chance to react while there is still time.

The search for the right partner may not be easy and may involve trial and error. Taking the time and effort to find the perfect company, however, is an investment from which you will certainly reap the benefits. We hope that our guidelines make your path to finding the perfect research partner in Central and Eastern Europe slightly shorter.

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