



Case Study

ISO 20252
Certification:
ISO 20252 (Australian
Market and Social
Research Standard)



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Strong foundations for quality research

“From 2010 all AMSRO members in Australia must have ISO 20252.”

Defining global best practice in research

As social, opinion and market research organisations grew, and as they gained clients across borders and through different mediums, it became clear that a common quality management system was required. In 2006, the International Organisation for Standardisation developed the ISO 20252 standard to meet the needs of an increasingly global research sector.

The final version of AS/NZS ISO 20252 was published by Standards Australia in January 2007. As the peak industry body for Australia’s market and social research companies, the Association of Market and Social Research Organisations (AMSRO) saw that it would be the key to the sustainable business growth of its members. From 2010 all AMSRO members in Australia must have ISO 20252.

This framework for practice in the market and social research sector has become an essential tool for business growth, and for overcoming the challenges that technology and ethical issues present to the market.

Nicola Neyland, Senior Operations Manager at leading global research firm Millward Brown Australia, explains; “We already had IQCA (Interviewer Quality Control Australia) for our phone operations, but ISO 20252 is the next step up. It covers the whole organisation, and now that our work is more and more online that is crucial.”

Supporting future opportunities

Grant Piazza, Director of Piazza Research in Canberra, sees three core challenges facing the research sector.

“Firstly, our clients need to get results faster than ever. If we are conducting research at high speed, we need systems that prevent speed from compromising quality. The quick and easy transmission of private data is a big issue too. A quality framework needs to cover professional and ethical handling of data.”

“And finally, I’m seeing growing levels of what I’d call imitation research – anyone can bang up their own ‘web survey’ now. But people end up making important decisions on flimsy research that looks robust. ISO 20252 provides consumers with a very clear indication of whether a research finding can be trusted or not.”

ISO 20252 has been designed specifically for the research sector, covering all the quality controls and functions of organisations of any size, and regardless of how they conduct research.

“I was pleasantly surprised at how well it applied to online research,” says Steven Davies from the Online Research Unit (ORU). “And also how it covered all our business processes. The nature of what we do is process oriented, and ISO 20252 ties all our procedures together – from administration and client management to in-field project and panel management.”

“The specialist third party feedback was invaluable.”

Steps to certification

As ORU is an online fieldwork company rather than a research consultancy, their systems and processes are quite specialised and technologically involved. These include the areas of panel management, online sampling and survey execution.

But their certification process was similar to that at Millward Brown, a global full-service consultancy, and Piazza Research, a boutique market and social research firm.

“We did an internal review first, tightened up any gaps. Then Anthea Duke at NCS International came in for the audit. The specialist third party feedback was invaluable. She knew and understood research but could look at our processes independently,” says Steven.

Grant and Nicola also chose to bring in a consulting firm for a pre-audit assessment. “They offered us a few additional tweaks for our quality system,” says Grant. “We didn’t want to rush the process. We wanted to properly bed this system into our organisational culture, so we gave ourselves an 18 month timeframe.”

Grant says he chose to work with NCSI almost by default. “They are part of the small business accreditation process with AMSRO,” he says. “But I’d certainly recommend them. They understood the practicalities of running a business. I know some other firms whose auditors don’t get the reality – that a business can be managed in a number of different ways.”



Practical initiatives

The three firms already had processes in place, but ideas for improvement continue to arise through the annual audit process.

“Quite a few things have changed,” says Nicola. “We now run training sessions on what ISO 20252 is and why we do it, and I always give the example of our coding teams. Since we achieved certification, we have tightened our validation processes – coding teams check each other’s work

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and there are no mistakes. Because everyone is more vigilant, we reduce the time taken with queries later on.”

AT ORU, Steven also sees their formal structures as a way of improving risk management. “It’s assurance for both management and clients. And if something does go wrong, we have a well-trained response structure in place.”

At Piazza Research, a clear communication structure was also established to send complex information to sub-contractors over multiple projects and issues. “Picking up human errors early on saves time and energy later,” says Grant.

Guaranteed quality outcomes

“If you ask any business owner out there, they will all claim they are doing a great job and delivering great services, but they don’t have any evidence to show. The ISO 20252 is evidence of a commitment to quality – for both clients and staff,” says Grant.

And it’s the type of proof many more clients are expecting. “It’s now essential for getting a new project,” says Nicola. “We often send a copy of our certificate with the proposal.”

Formalising and documenting all processes has proven beneficial for staff too. “New staff are given a step-by-step guide so they can just get on with things – there’s less hand-holding and more importantly less guesswork,” Nicola explains.

“The core functions of our business are now clearly aligned,” says Steven. “This leads to business efficiencies. By improving our internal operations, we improve the quality of our service to clients.”

These internal changes are certainly providing external results. ORU has had double-digit growth in the past twelve months. Meanwhile, Millward Brown continues to grow its client base, particularly into online research. And Piazza Research has seen growth beyond Canberra, with almost half its clients now in Sydney, Perth and beyond.

“On some of those tenders, the mandatory criteria is ISO 20252. It’s an advantage to be able to prove your quality processes, and I think it will become increasingly necessary for new business growth,” says Grant.

For more information on how your business can achieve ISO 20252 certification with NCS International, please visit our website www.ncsi.com.au, email us at marketing@ncsi.com.au, or call **1300 856 554**.

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