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Taking IHUTs to the Next Level:
7 Essential Tips

Conducting an in-home usage test can be a game-changer when refining a product before it hits the market. It's a unique opportunity to gain valuable insights from real-world users in their natural environment. But to make the most of this research method, planning and execution are key, with a range of new technologies enabling deep insights that can help make critical decisions.

Here are seven tips to ensure your in-home usage test is a success, along with some detailed advice to elevate your results.

1. Set Clear Success Criteria with Your Team
2. Be a "Smooth Operator"
3. Incentivize Properly & Stay Connected
4. Capture In-the-Moment Insights
5. Use AI for Superior Open-End Quality
6. Measure Against Established Benchmarks
7. Next Steps to Properly Activate

Tip #1: Set Clear Success Criteria with Your Team in Advance

Every project needs a destination, and your in-home usage test is no different. It's important to collectively decide upfront what success looks like.

- Are you looking to **outperform a competitor**?
- Do you want to **prove your product is superior** to your current offering?
- Are you **addressing specific pain points** effectively?

By defining clear criteria, you ensure your team is aligned and know exactly what to measure. This clarity also helps when interpreting results—whether the feedback is glowing or constructive.

Tip #2: Be A Smooth Operator

The difference between success and failure in IHUTs often hinges on the operational ability of the team. There are some key aspects to keep in mind when designing and executing research:

- **A robust sample size is your safety net.** Not every participant will complete all tasks, so starting with a larger pool will help you avoid skewed or incomplete data. Make sure there is enough product for all recruits and over-recruit to account for potential dropouts.
- **Minimize surprises.** Clearly outline expectations to participants, with step-by-step instructions during each stage of the project, and be explicit about deadlines and required tasks. This clarity maintains engagement and ensures consistent data collection.
- **Coordinate between recruitment and product fulfillment.** Timing is everything. Don't recruit participants until your product samples are ready to ship. Delays in delivery can lead to dropouts and loss of interest - have an efficient shipping method in place.

The smoother the logistics, the better the participant experience—and the more reliable your results.

Tip #3: Incentivize Properly and Stay Connected

Your participants are dedicating their time to help improve your product, so show them you value their effort.

- Offer **meaningful incentives** beyond just keeping the product.
- **Stay in touch** during longer trials (over two weeks) through calls, texts or emails to maintain engagement.

Building a rapport with your participants can also encourage more detailed and thoughtful feedback.

Tip #4: Capture In-the-Moment Insights

Coordinating product trial with the post-usage survey isn't perfect. There will be time gaps between these two experiences.

- Use **self-recorded video** to capture the usage experience in real-time – whether it be during unboxing, product preparation (e.g., food), or during trial. These will uncover insights that are not easily surfaced in a quantitative survey.
- And/or create a **diary** that allows participants to record their thoughts and experiences during the usage phase of the test.

These artifacts bring the research to life and help product teams build better experiences.

Tip #5: Use AI for Superior Open-End Quality

Researchers often rely on open-ends to help understand the "why" behind key IHUT metrics. However, with most IHUT research now conducted online, open-ended feedback tends to be limited and lacks the desired depth to truly understand motivations.

- Use **artificial intelligence** to synthesize open-ended feedback in online surveys and ask meaningful follow-up questions in real-time.

Open-ended AI probes give stakeholders more contextual qualitative research to make better decisions.

Tip #6: Measure Against Established Benchmarks

The ability to place results in context with historical category data improves the predictability of success or failure.

- Design **surveys with a set of questions** that can be used in normative data analysis.
- Providing **details** about the planned product launch (e.g., distribution, marketing spend) unlocks the ability to provide sales forecasting.

Although not the only measure of success, normative data is a powerful diagnostic tool to help make better decisions.

Tip #7: Next Steps To Help Activation

The IHUT survey isn't always the final word. Additional tools and approaches are available to gain further knowledge to help optimize products and develop launch plans.

- Recruit a subset of study participants for **a follow-up, qualitative phase** that helps better "understand the why", explore potential product modifications based on survey insights, or discuss potential communication strategies to ensure a successful launch.
- Create **"digital twins"** of survey participants to have **in-depth conversations with their AI-created personas** and use this **synthetic data** to obtain additional, directional quantitative data.

Using real-world and AI-developed conversations strengthens insights and can provide clear, practical guidance for confident decision-making.

We Hope These Tips Help You Navigate Your Next IHUT

Running an in-home usage test may seem daunting, but with proper planning and execution, it can provide transformative insights. By setting clear goals, streamlining logistics, and embracing modern tools, you can turn participant feedback into actionable strategies that set your product up for success.

Contact us to discuss your IHUT research needs!

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