



Qual Col

Pierre Bélisle, CMRP

Online qualitative tools

Barack Obama won the presidency of the United States, at least in part, because of his ability to use the Internet to mobilize and engage supporters.

Qualitative researchers may also want to tap into the power of the Internet to engage respondents.

In this, the last of my six articles on online qualitative, I'd like to introduce nine online applications and services that you may find useful for *any* qualitative project, whether it is conducted online or face to face. All these applications and services are inexpensive; most are free.

Blogger. Want focus group participants to maintain a diary before showing up at the group? Want to conduct a bulletin board on the cheap? Investigate Blogger, an application from Google that can easily be adapted to research needs. *Free.*

Picassa. Need participants to store and display images online as part, say, of a bulletin board project? Picassa, another application from Google, lets you do that with online albums that provide much more functionality (thumbnails, comments and captions) than the built-in tools of most research-only applications. *Free.*

Wordle. Expect your respondents to express their feelings about a brochure, print ad, press release, speech, or any

other textual material? Ask them to make a word cloud from the text, and to tweak the wordle until it best expresses their emotions. They can capture the word cloud in an image and post it on Picassa for your online group to see, or they can generate it during your face-to-face session using the facility's laptop and Internet connection. *Free.*

netvibes. Need to monitor which participants are filling out their research diaries on Blogger, or find out when someone has posted a new picture on your Picassa research project site? netvibes lets you set up a web page with an RSS feed that does just that. And it will do so for any web page that supports RSS, allowing you, for instance, to monitor brand name strength or Google searches for web buzz. Very powerful. And *free.*

Skype. Need to do telephone IDIs with a net-savvy international audience? Use Skype instead of the telephone. Skype-to-Skype calls are of surprisingly good quality, often better than telephone. And *free.*

ooVoo. Want to run an individual depth interview but with video enabled? While Skype is an option, ooVoo claims even better quality. ooVoo also lets you run a real-time video focus group with up to six video participants, something that Skype cannot achieve. Two-way video calls are *free.* Unlimited six-participant video calls are US\$17.95 per month.

Vyew. Need to present findings via teleconference? Instead of emailing your PowerPoint deck, load it up on Vyew. Not only will you be able to control the pace of the presentation; you'll be able to share your screen with invited participants. Vyew is collaborative software that is also appropriate for on-demand videos such as tutorials and courses. *Free.*

VoiceThread. Want to hear your participants describe their reactions, especially to an image or movie? VoiceThread lets you and your participants post your audio comments asynchronously on a secure website. Text and video comments are also enabled. *Free.*

myWebspiration. Want participants to create an online mind map or a benefit chain drawing. You can find just the thing at myWebspiration. And it, too, is *free.*

There is a new effervescence on the web, generating a bounty of useful and interesting applications with a direct relevance to qualitative research.

Remember Barack Obama and his use of the Internet when you're next "in the running" for a qualitative project.

When the client asks, "Could we use the Internet for this project?" you can reply confidently, "Yes we can!"

Our profession has attracted and developed, and continues to profit from, a creative class.

Pierre Bélisle is a seasoned qualitative researcher with a special interest in online qualitative. His blog, virtual qualitative, is at <http://pbelisle.blogspot.com>.