

# URBAN LIFE: RESEARCH ADVENTURES IN A CHANGING WORLD

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## 1. Introduction

In today's world young, urban professionals form a desirable market for many brands and products. High incomes and spending power are often combined with brand consciousness and a tendency to early adoption in many markets. As such they frequently form the core of many marketing campaigns<sup>1</sup>.

Yet it is this very group who can be the hardest to reach through conventional advertising. Working long hours, establishing successful careers, combined with often active social lives, this group is rarely at home. They watch little TV, are selective in their media choice and in many Western economies have been the group least likely to adopt newspapers in the same way that previous generations did.

Metro is a free newspaper targeted at this Urbanite population. Launched in 1999 in London it is distributed at Underground stations in the Capital during morning commuter time. Designed to suit busy travellers, it is written in a concise format covering just the facts without any political spin. Since 1999 the concept has been taken to a further 7 UK cities<sup>2</sup> again distributed at key commuter points. Metro has been enormously successful in reaching the young, urban audience. It fits into their lifestyles and has successfully established a branding that reflects its audience. Within 4 years it has established a readership of 1.469 million across the seven cities covered.

## 2. Urban Life

Since its inception research has formed the backbone of Metro's success. Alongside traditional readership surveys such as NRS and TGI, previous studies have explored the "Metro Moment" (using qualitative research which uncovered how readers lose themselves in their copy each morning) and have established the presence of an "Urbanite" tribe or outlook. These studies helped develop the brand in the eyes of the readership and, just as importantly, the advertising community. The Urban Life study is designed to take this a step further.

Metro's readership is concentrated around young, urban workers, a group we have come to term "Urbanites". Traditional research often struggles to reach them, primarily because they are rarely at home during typical interviewing hours. Urban Life was created specifically to reach and engage them successfully. Metro's aim was to open a window into their world and to really delve into their lives to reveal insights that would make advertisers sit up and take notice.

Our goal was for a commercially driven study that advertisers would want to use to ask their own questions but also for results that were sufficiently interesting and robust to be featured as editorial within Metro itself.

The key aims of the study were:

- To create an attractive research proposition that describes and reflects the Metro audience effectively to advertisers and agencies
- To develop a deeper understanding of the Metro audience in terms of both behaviour and attitude
- To be used across the entire Metro business: feeding into editorial; product development, as support for advertising sales
- To provide a research vehicle to be used in partnership with Metro's clients.

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<sup>1</sup> By way of illustration TGI data for 2003 suggests that 18 – 44 year olds in London have an average household income that is double that of other adults in GB.

<sup>2</sup> Cities covered with latest circulation figures (ABC June 2003): London: 449,121; Birmingham: 83,683; Glasgow/Edinburgh: 118,914, Manchester: 108,880; Leeds/Sheffield: 75,107; Newcastle: 52,990.

It was always envisaged that the research would take the form of a panel. This gave Metro added flexibility to contact panellists on an ad hoc basis and enabled longitudinal analysis among the group.

With these objectives in mind Metro approached BMRB Media for idea in early 2002. Working together we arrived at a final research design by the middle of the year and launched the first wave of Urban Life in the summer of 2002.

### 3. The Approach: an Overview

Urban Life was designed as a panel study running over six months from August 2002 to January 03. Key information was collected over six main surveys. This enabled us to build an ongoing rapport with our respondents and generate a large body of information on each of them without overburdening them in any one questionnaire. Alongside the main surveys we also ran mini-polls of just a few questions to cover topical issues as they arose.

As this young, mobile audience is hard to reach through traditional data collection methods we chose a web-based methodology. An online approach fits in with readers' busy lifestyles and is readily available to the vast majority of them (according to TGI 2003 83% of our universe are Internet users). It also has the advantage of allowing a fast turnaround of results giving virtually instantaneous feedback. In addition we incorporated an element that took advantage of their enthusiasm for their mobiles by using text messaging (SMS) to ask a small number of simple questions.

The study was designed to be representative of Metro's core readership:

- Regular readers (who read 3 out of 5 issues each week)
- Aged 18 to 44 years old and working full time<sup>3</sup>

Our aim was to understand the core, regular readership rather than total readers or even the potential readership for Metro. We therefore recruited them through the one medium that reaches these Urbanites most effectively: Metro itself. Panel members were recruited through editorial content and advertisements in the newspaper. The sample we derived was therefore self-selecting albeit with a high level of encouragement to ensure our panel was as broad as possible. Quota controls were used to manage the profile of the sample recruited and we set targets based on National Readership Survey data for each city. Each potential member completed an initial registration questionnaire online before being accepted onto our panel.

The study ran for six months across 2002 and achieved a phenomenal participation rate of 80% on average for each survey. From our initial pool of 3000 members, over 2000 were still on board by the end of the project, having completed all six of the surveys run. In 2003 we have run a second Urban Life study with a further six waves of research following a fresh tranche of recruitment.

## 4. Learnings from Urban Life

Urban Life has provided us with valuable learnings which will certainly have applications for other research. In particular, the use of online methodologies is something that we will all need to understand and develop in future. In the rest of this paper we have focused on those elements of the research design that we feel have greatest relevance to other researchers. We have also selected some of the most interesting insights about our urban audience.

### 4.1 Reaching and communicating with Urbanites

#### 4.1.1 Using a panel

Early on we decided that a panel was the most appropriate vehicle for this study. We knew that Metro's core readership would be a difficult group to reach. Once we had gained their commitment we wanted to keep them. We also wanted to cover a wide range of information, to really get an insight into their lives. In all panellists took part in surveys that spanned over 2 hours of questioning. By using a panel approach we could spread the tasks over time ensuring that each one was relatively short and relevant. We also found that as time progressed we could ask slightly more challenging or off beat questions than we would typically expect on a quantitative survey. In particular open-ended questions generated a far richer response than we would usually expect.

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<sup>3</sup> In total this group represent 50% of Metro's total readership according to the NRS.

For example, one of the more light hearted subjects was that of personally written epitaphs. Having created a virtual desert island around which a number of questions were designed over the six months our panellists were finally told to imagine that they would never be rescued. How would they like to be remembered?

*"He did great things with sand"*

*"Finally I can evade the Inland Revenue"*

*"Not sunbathing. Dead"*

*"The most optimistic cynic in the world"*

*"He made me laugh. The fat git"*

*"A girl with a good heart, a great singing voice and massive knockers"*

*"Couldn't read a map to save his life. Literally."*

*"None the bloody wiser"*

*"Finally lost the weight"*

Some of the comments illustrate the relationship we had developed with our panellists over the six months on the panel (as well as reflecting the self deprecating sense of humour with which many of our Urbanites approach life!)

Using a panel gave us the added benefits that we could react very quickly to topical issues. As we already held extensive classification data on each panellist we could focus a short questionnaire on the topical issue and yet still benefit from extensive cross analysis.

For example, after the Bali bombing we were able to get reactions from our panellists on how they now felt about travelling as a result. Had it heightened their fears of terrorist activity? At the time, one in four (26%) felt that it heightened their fears of travelling *anywhere* overseas on holiday. This percentage was consistent across all age groups and both sexes.

One further benefit for Metro has been the way in which the panel reflects the nature of the brand itself. We already knew that Metro has a close and interactive relationship with its readers from the letters and emails it receives as well as the response rates generated on many of its promotions. A panel reiterated this relationship to the advertising community.

#### 4.1.2 Why Online?

Clearly this type of panel could be conducted in a number of different ways: face-to-face interviews, telephone or postal. However, having considered all of the options we concluded that online is a natural choice for communication with this audience:

- Metro readers are by their nature extremely difficult to reach. They are largely full time workers for whom careers are very important. They work relatively long hours and when not at work they play hard. For example, according to NRS 70% of Metro's readership are in employment (an index of 128 vs. all adults); according to TGI 38% go to concerts (an index of 157 on all adults); 35% go to the cinema at least once a month (index of 148); 22% eat out at least twice a month (an index of 215) and 17% go out clubbing twice a month (index of 222). It was unlikely that we would find many of them at home during "normal" interviewing hours. Indeed we know on the NRS that London is a particular challenge. Back in 1999 it was reported that NRS response rates in London as a whole were running at two thirds of those seen elsewhere in Britain, largely due to non contact.<sup>4</sup>
- Among the younger age-groups in particular, use of a landline telephone is on the decline. It is estimated that one in four 15 to 24's has *only* a mobile phone and no landline; this is likely to be even higher among urban populations. For this reason a telephone approach using random digit dialling (which covers landlines only) would have missed an important part of our audience.
- Online fits in with their busy lifestyles. They are computer literate and familiar with the Internet<sup>5</sup>. An online approach uses the medium with which they are familiar and enables them to complete the surveys at their leisure. In fact many of our panellists completed the surveys at work. Taking only 15 minutes at a time many were able to spend time over lunch or coffee breaks completing the task. We found that the best time to send the main surveys was around 12 noon;

<sup>4</sup> At these proceedings in 1999 Katherine Page reported that for the British National Readership Survey response rates in London were running at only two thirds of that elsewhere and that the main reason for this is non contact. "Managing Non Response: Who Really Matters", K Page

<sup>5</sup> According to TGI 2003 83% of Metro's core readership (18-44 full time workers and regularly read Metro) can be classified as Internet "users".

this generated the fastest and best response. We typically keep the survey open for up to a week to ensure maximum response. However, we find that at least 25% complete the survey within 2 hours and well over half complete it within 24 hours.

- An online approach enabled fast feedback. Whilst much of the information was collated and considered over a longer period of time we were able to react fast when the situation demanded it. From initial idea to final report our mini-polls took less than a week to complete.

There were issues that we had to tackle in running the survey online. There are implications for questionnaire design: without an interviewer present we need to be clear and easy to understand. The surveys needed to be short and interesting to maintain co-operation (see section 4.2).

As surveys could be completed at any time of day (or night!) we needed to ensure robust technical systems and back-up. In this we were aided by our sister company, Lightspeed Research who run consumer online panels in the US, Britain and many other countries. We used their infrastructure and technical back-up to support our panel.

#### 4.1.3 The recruitment process

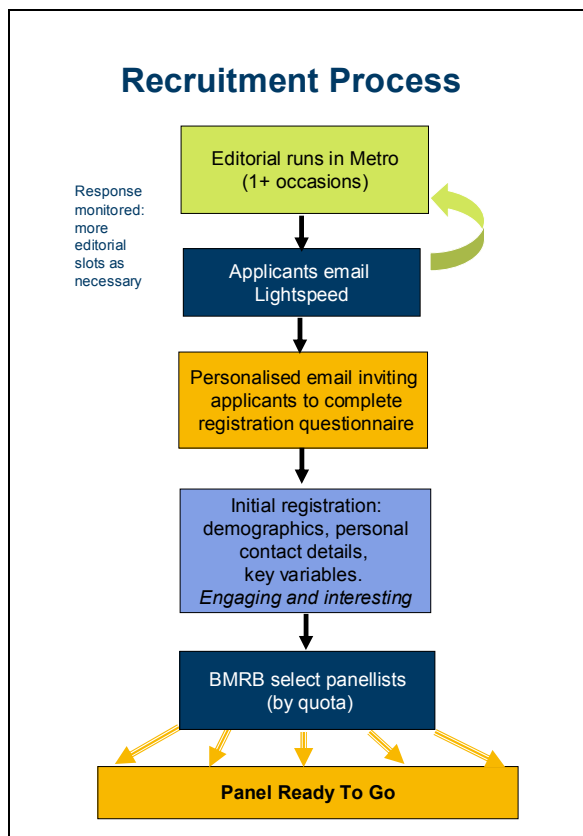
As we highlighted earlier, our aim was to understand the core, regular readership of Metro. Panel members were recruited through editorial content and advertisements in the newspaper.

The panel was recruited on the basis that the members would take part in one survey and one mini poll each month for six months. Panellists understood this commitment from the start.

To notify their interest in joining applicants emailed us their contact details including their email address. They were then sent a personalised email inviting them to complete the registration questionnaire. As well as basic classification details we aimed to give the registration a flavour of what was to come by adding some more interesting and relevant questions alongside.

Once this was complete we selected our final panellists. We placed quota controls on our recruited panel in order to ensure a representative spread by city (or publishing centre) and key demographics (using industry sources such as NRS as a guide). To qualify each panellist had also to meet the stated recruitment criteria (18 to 44, full time worker and regular Metro reader). On the first Urban Life survey we selected a total of some 3000 panellists from an initial application of some 7000 who completed the registration process.

**Figure 2: The Panel Recruitment Process**



As the survey was so clearly branded and associated with Metro we needed to take care not to upset their core readers. Our “rejection” emails were carefully phrased. Here is an example:

Dear ...

Many thanks for completing the registration questionnaire for Urban Life. We have had an amazing response from our readers. Unfortunately, we only have a limited number of spaces. Also, we're striving to get a good cross section of Metro readers to join Urban Life, which means that we can't have too many readers with similar characteristics. Therefore, it will take us a little time to decide which readers we need to include. I very much hope that we can include you in the study and I will email you in a few weeks to let you know.

In the meantime, if you have any problems, questions or comments, you can always send us an email at [helpdesk@myurbanlife.com](mailto:helpdesk@myurbanlife.com)

#### 4.1.4 Keeping the panellists

To recruit these young, urban professionals we had to present the panel as an exclusive and desirable proposition for them. An even greater challenge was in maintaining the members' interest after recruitment. Classic panel management principles were used to achieve this.

**Figure 3: Participation Rates (Urban Life 1)**

% of total recruited panel (3023) that completed survey

Survey Wave	Participation rate
Wave 1	<b>88%</b>
Wave 2	<b>83%</b>
Wave 3	<b>83%</b>
Wave 4	<b>81%</b>
Wave 5	<b>74%</b>
Wave 6	<b>71%</b>
Completed all six surveys	<b>69% (2052 panellists)</b>

In fact, after six months on the panel, only 98 had dropped out completely. From a total of 3023 panellists as many as 2052 completed all six surveys. Indeed each individual survey gained an average participation rate of 80%.

**Figure 4: Sample profiles comparing those who completed all six surveys with the rest (unweighted)**

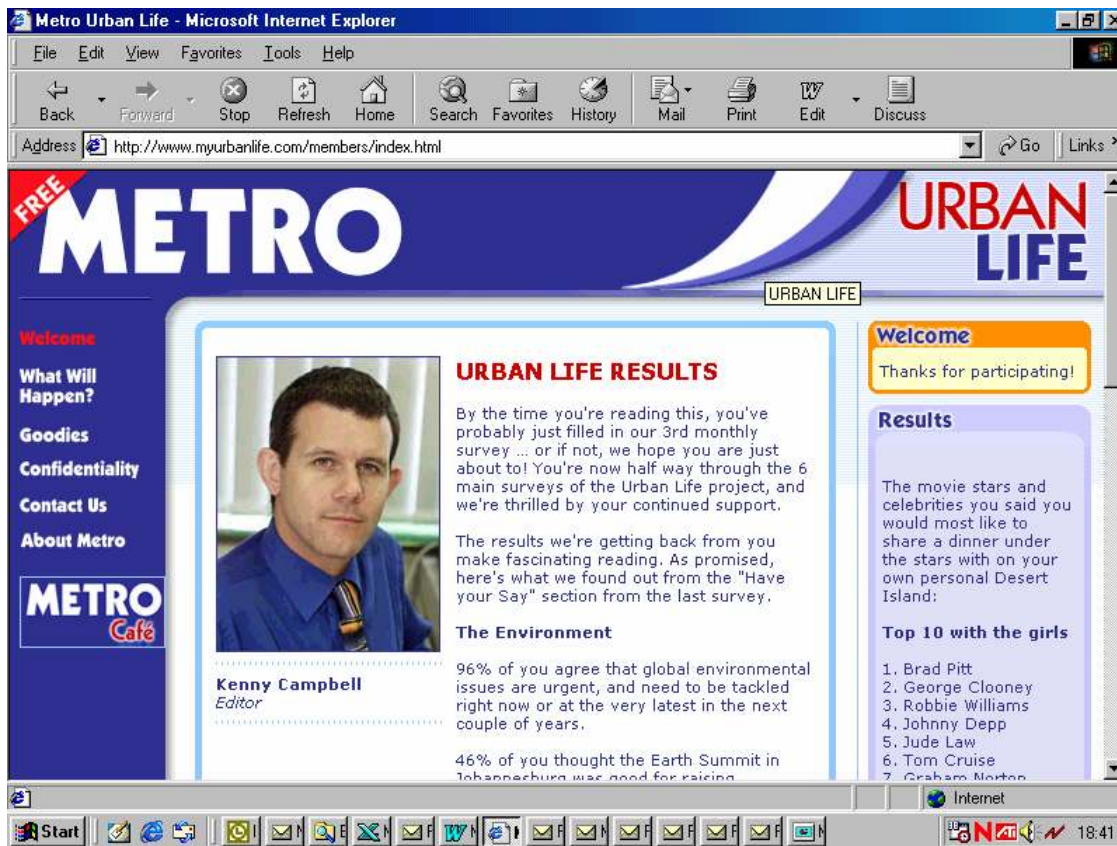
	Completed all six (2052)	Completed 5 surveys or fewer (971)
<b>Men</b>	48%	<b>48%</b>
<b>Women</b>	52%	<b>52%</b>
<b>Aged 18-24</b>	17%	<b>20%</b>
<b>25-29</b>	36%	<b>38%</b>
<b>30-34</b>	23%	<b>21%</b>
<b>35-39</b>	14%	<b>11%</b>
<b>40-44</b>	10%	<b>9%</b>
<b>London</b>	71%	<b>67%</b>
<b>The Rest</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>33%</b>

Reflecting these relatively high participation rates, the sample profile of those who completed *every* wave broadly matched the sample recruited. Those who did not complete every wave were slightly more likely to be aged under 25 (20% vs. 17%) and living in cities other than London (33% vs. 29%).

These participation rates were far in excess of our initial expectations. So, how did we do it?

Fostering a feeling of club membership increased commitment. From the start we called our panellists “members”; we wanted them to feel special. A website for members only was created, providing feedback from previous surveys, details of prize draws and news of the next surveys. Metro editor, Kenny Campbell had direct input into the site.

Figure 4: Example of the Members’ Urban Life Website



Kenny was positioned as the face of the panel for all communication. This gave a personal feel to emails and surveys and demonstrated the direct link into the newspaper. The newspaper itself also frequently features results from our study. As an example, when Alan Milburn resigned as Health Minister on the grounds of wanting to spend more time with his family, Metro’s editor ran a feature using Urban Life data showing the true picture of “work/life balance” in Britain’s cities. In this way our members could see the results being used and gave them a real feeling that their opinion counted.

Figure 5: Example of the Survey in Action

**Family life** Alan Milburn wants more time with his wife Faith and sons Joe, 11, and Danny, six.

# Mr Milburn, you are not alone...

**BY SUZANNE STEVENSON**

AS Alan Milburn steps away from his demanding career and heads back to the bosom of his family, thousands of city professionals will be wishing they could do the same thing.

For the former Health Secretary is part of a growing section of society who find it increasingly difficult to balance home and work life.

City professionals have long complained they spend too many hours at the office and not enough time with their families and friends.

Metro's Urban Life survey shows that, like Mr Milburn, they are increasingly turning their backs on the rat race and downsiding into less demanding jobs.

Stress at work has proved too much for many 30 to 34-year-olds, causing more than a third to quit their jobs and try something less demanding.

The figure is even higher in professional occupations than 40s.

Nearly half of all Urbanites feel their job intrudes too much on their personal lives and three-quarters of them feel powerless to do anything about it, according to the survey.

In many cases, they have only themselves to blame. More than half of those questioned are prepared to work more than 40 hours a week to advance their careers - a trait which is highest among 18 to 29-year-olds.

More than one in ten regularly works weekends. Psychologist Cary Cooper, of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, said the work-life balance was one of the biggest issues facing employers.

This was especially true in Britain, which has the longest working hours in Europe and is second only to the US in the world league.

He added: 'It is not so much the hours as the inflexibility of the workplace. There is a real demand for more flex-time.'

This would make work a lot better for individuals, families and also the environment, by cutting down on commuting.

'The Government needs to do much more to address this issue.'

Urban Life is a detailed survey of 3,000 Metro readers. All are professionals aged 18 to 44 in full-time employment, who live and work in our major cities. They are questioned regularly on a variety of issues.

**WORK & PLAY**

HOBBIES and interests enjoyed by Urbanites suffer the most because of work, according to the survey. 50 per cent of those questioned said parking in long hours at the office gave them less time to pursue extra-curricular activities. Thirty-seven per cent said their health was affected by long hours and 32 per cent said their relationship with their partner suffered - but women experienced this loss. Despite - or because of - putting in long hours, Urbanites still seem to find plenty of room for romance in the office. Nearly a fifth said they had met their partner through work or at work-related events.

**WHICH, IF ANY, OF THE FOLLOWING HAVE SUFFERED BECAUSE OF WORK?**

Hobbies and interests	50%
Health	37%
Relationship with partner	32%
Relationship with children	30%
Nothing has suffered	26%

**DOWNSHIFT**

LESS than a third of Urbanites would consider downsiding within the next two years, the figures are very revealing. However, nearly two-thirds said they would like the option of working flexible and adjusted hours to leave to take a long holiday or to work one or two days a week. Job sharing was the least popular option among Urbanites, favoured by only eight per cent. It was also more popular to take three months' paid leave from work or to take a long holiday with almost a third, saying they would spend more time with family and friends. Just over a tenth would write a novel.

**IF YOU WERE GIVEN THREE MONTHS' HOLIDAY, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

Holiday or travel	74%
Write a novel	20%
Do some reading	11%
Go on road cycling	3%

**CELEBOSSES**

URBANITES use Sir Richard Branson as having the strongest entrepreneurial spirit and most similar to those of their boss, the survey is said. The Virgin boss is also ranked highest in terms of management style according to more than a tenth of Urbanites. He was followed by Tony Blair, David Brent - a daytime boss of TV's *The Office* - and Homer Simpson. It clearly pays to get on very well with your boss because, according to the survey, which found that more than half of those questioned have still not got an overall increase in pay since they were big cheques with the boss.

**WHO DOES YOUR BOSS RESEMBLE IN TERMS OF MANAGEMENT STYLE?**

Sir Richard Branson	12%
Tony Blair	10%
David Brent	9%
Homer Simpson	6%
Paul Faddy	3%
Geoffrey White	2%
George Bush	2%

**The 'child friendly' myth**

FORMER Health Secretary Alan Milburn's decision will resonate with many fellow MPs, who spend long days at Westminster. In theory, working hours in the Commons were reduced to be 'child friendly' earlier this year but that helped only MPs who live in London or the home counties to have extra family time. Mr Milburn, 45, has previously spoken about how important a father-figure is to children. 'I have already missed a good bit of my children growing up and I don't want to miss any more,' he said. 'It's come down to a choice between my career in politics and my life with my family.'

Given the nature of the project it was important that everything we did from the questionnaires and website to the recruitment ads reflected the Metro brand. In this way we could benefit from the high affinity that Metro's readership feel for the brand and it helped to reinforce panellists' involvement with the paper. This ran through not just the design of the online properties but also our use of language and the phrasing of questions. This is a highly educated and media literate audience; members were addressed using language that reflected their age, lifestyle and level of education.

The frequency and timing of contact was an important consideration. Overburdening our members would annoy them but they may lose interest of contact is not frequent enough. We concluded that six main surveys sent out once a month would be the best solution. On top of this we ran several mini-polls either online or via SMS that covered topical issues in just a few questions at a time.

The initial motivation to take part in the study was focused largely on the desirability of being part of the club. However, this task was a big commitment and we needed to incentivise members for their interest and continued participation. Our choice of incentives needed to reflect the nature of the panel and to appeal to a wide cross section; we needed to avoid response bias in our choice of reward. We were careful to offer genuinely exciting prizes such as £1000 Red Letter Day Vouchers. The prizes often reflected likely interests of our audience: new technology, travel or music. Prizes were offered at each stage to encourage response. In addition there was a grand draw of £5000 worth of travel for which those who had stayed the distance were entered.

Although we encouraged members to complete surveys as they were published we also gave them the opportunity to go back and complete any they had missed at the end of the six months. Inevitably a small number had missed just one survey through holidays or pressures of work. Before the final prize draw was complete we allowed a final wave of survey completion.

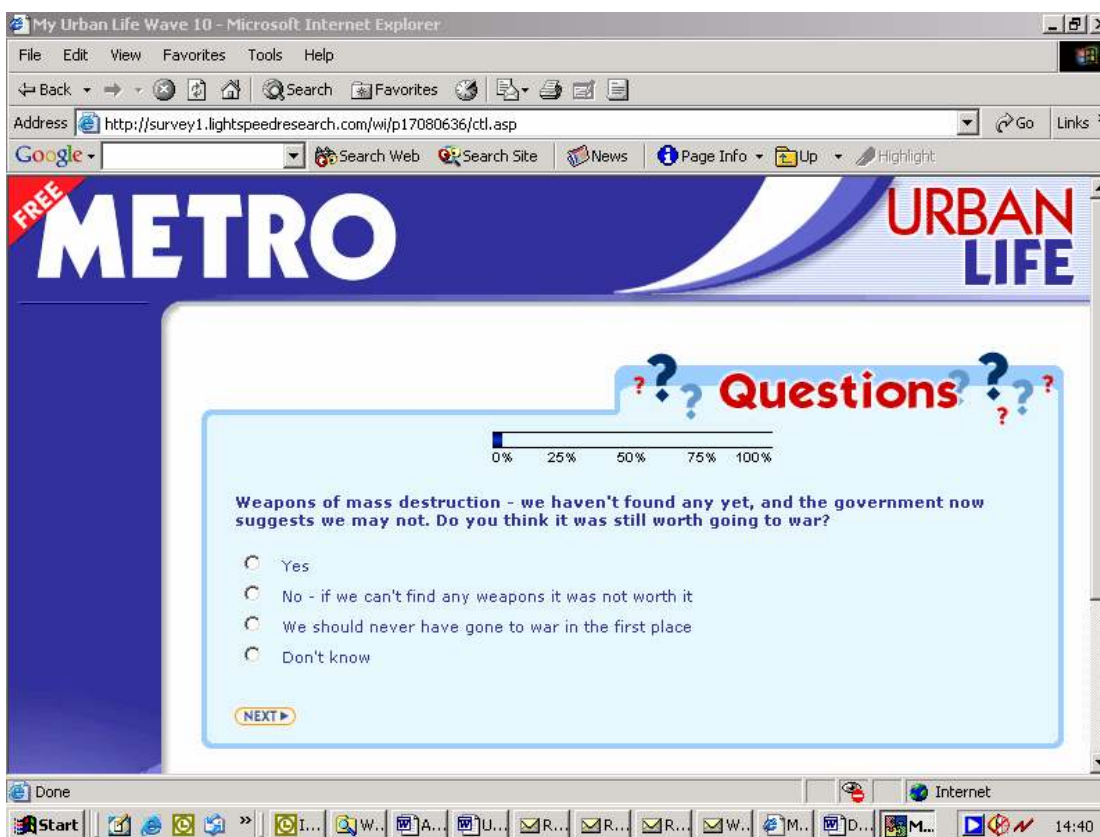
## 4.2 Questionnaire design: Getting the Most from Our Urban Life Members

Questionnaire design was key for getting the most out of our panel. Questions needed to be relevant, interesting and appealing to the members in order to keep their interest.

As the members have busy lives and many were completing the survey at work, each main survey was kept to a maximum of 15 minutes. This is an important consideration for any survey but even more crucial when there is no interviewer present to encourage the respondent to complete the task. In combining the results to all six 15-minute surveys, a database of considerable value was created without overburdening respondents.

As highlighted earlier our choice of language and questioning was tailored to our audience. There were also some issues relevant for online questionnaire design. The screen needs to be clear and easy to read. We aim for just one question per page and minimise the number of “grid” questions we use. At the top of each screen we show a completion bar so that the respondent can judge how far through the task they have gone (see below).

**Figure 6: Example Question Screen from Urban Life 2**



We mixed the commercially driven with opinions on relevant issues. Some questions were serious, others more fun to complete. Each survey focused on slightly different topics guided by the sales strategy at Metro. To date we have covered markets such as travel and holidays; health and fitness, 3G technology and attitudes to leisure shopping. On Urban Life 2 themes cover entertainment, homes and property and food and drink. By developing themes we can manage questionnaire development and provide a consistency to the questions asked of respondents each month.

We have also developed recognisable sections to each questionnaire. On Urban Life 1 we ran five branded question areas each month:

- **Have Your Say:** An opportunity to express opinions on a relevant issue. Examples of the topics we covered include attitudes towards the fire-fighters strike, whether Britain should scrap the Royal Family and perceptions of the importance of the Earth Summit.
- **Urban Life:** Feedback on living in a city. Examples include questions on perceptions of personal safety against crime in the city.
- **Desert Island:** We created a virtual desert island from which a number of questions were derived. The first question was: “You’re going to be exiled onto a desert island but before you go you can take your choice of one musical act to go with you...”. We also asked about a choice of celebrity, radio station and which single thing they would miss most about Britain.



- **Top Tens:** These questions always provided 10 different options ranging from which of ten top films panellists had seen at the cinema to which historical Briton was considered the greatest.
- **Metro Moment:** One of the favourites with both the research team and members. We provided the panellists with a fantasy scenario and asked them to give us their reaction. Examples of this included “Imagine you had the chance to be a TV extra for a day on the set of your favourite TV programme – in which programme could we spot you in the background?” or “Imagine we could ‘teleport’ you to anywhere in the world for two weeks of all expenses paid holiday. Where would it be?”

In this way we could cover serious issues alongside commercially-driven areas whilst enlivening the study with a more frivolous feel in parts.

#### 4.4 Flexibility and fast feedback

As well as the main surveys we were able to use the panel to ask a few short questions or “mini-polls” on topical issues. On Urban Life 1 we covered opinions on the British fire-fighters strike which was in full flow throughout much of our fieldwork. Results of the mini polls were available the day after the questionnaire was sent out.

Other mini polls included specific business related issues for Metro such as reactions to a shopping guide in the paper or a supplement in sister title The Evening Standard. Topical news items were also covered such as reactions to the Bali bombing or opinions on celebrity “kiss and tell” stories that were dominating the news at the time of the survey. Again response rates were high – over two thirds responded within a couple of days.

We were also able to use SMS to ask a small number of very simple questions. We found SMS to be ideal for asking time-specific questions for example on one Friday we asked “Are you going out tonight?”. This enabled us to demonstrate the relative sociability of our panel and analyse by the other “classification” data that we hold.

### 5. Insights

When the second wave of Urban Life finishes in November this year we will have asked over a thousand questions. In this way we complete a growing library of information on Metro's core audience which we have summarised in what we have christened the “A to Z” of Urban Life.

For the sake of brevity here the panel has delivered helpful information in four main areas:

#### 5.1 Providing Us with a Finger on the Pulse of Attitudes

On top of the Fire-fighters’ example we have also followed the changing mood of the panel on the highly charged issue of the European Single currency. It’s a subject which truly divides the public, business and press in Britain. The UK currently is not part of this scheme, its still pounds instead of euros on our island.

When we first polled our ‘Urban Lifers’ in August last year the results showed a significant proportion of them in favour of joining the rest of continent in ‘Euro land’:

Yes:	43%
No:	37%
Undecided	20%

Late last year the whole subject of the European central government hit the headlines for weeks on end. The press coverage was highlighting the increasingly powerful role Brussels plays in ‘influencing’ British laws. It would appear that this has had a negative effect upon Metro readers, repeating the same questions in June 2003 we found 44% of the panel now rejected the idea of joining the single currency. Once again one in five of the panel were undecided.

#### 5.2 Commercial Marketing Advantage

The work in this area falls into two distinct categories, questions that we wanted to answer and questions directly fed into the surveys by advertisers or their media agencies.

From a Metro perspective it was useful to have strong numerical evidence about our core readership to substantiate our sales proposition. We set out at the beginning to build as complete picture of 21st century urban life. If you can describe the hopes, dreams and fears of your readers then the ‘pitch’ you can make for advertising business is far stronger. The UK advertising market is very planning/insight focussed with accent placed upon understanding who, what and why will generate a positive response from your target audience. By illustration 76% of the panel wanted to get to the top of their careers with 23% who had received a promotion in the last 12 months. More than two thirds worked over 40 hours a week (to get the promotion!). We also know when and how much they are bonused, what they spend this on, where they spend it and what they would purchase if they had a little more money than they have now.

On a more micro level we have explored purchase decision making in many product categories. Not just questions about which brand and how often but as importantly about why they choose a brand and what might make them change. As an example, in a section on grocery shopping we broke down in detail how many 'hand to mouth' shopping trips Urbanites do versus how much planning ahead. As young, busy and active people, the last minute and spur of the moment purchase is greater than normal but they also have the money to buy the premium brands, this provides an opportunity for advertisers to influence millions of pounds of expenditure on a daily basis.

### 5.3 Client Specific Answers

We have asked questions on behalf of nearly every top 20 media planning agency as well as many advertisers directly. In January we talked to five major car manufacturers before writing the questionnaire. This resulted in a 20 question general survey on car buying behaviour as well as five short specialist sections which addressed the individual needs of Ford, Vauxhall, VW etc. In our minds this produced a perfect balance between 'hard' questions which established what model of car the panellists own currently to softer questions about attitude towards brands and perception of makes and models.

In other examples we asked the panel what New Year's resolutions they were making (for a detox advertiser looking at New Year feature) and panellists' knowledge of 3G technology (for two separate mobile suppliers).

### 5.4 Keeping It Fun

We have already highlighted the use of the 'desert island' mechanism to help keep the questionnaires interesting. Recently we have asked the panel about their attitudes to the future, how long it would take for flying cars to appear, how long before we all work from home or live to be 100. (flying cars are thought to be further off than the other two!). Questions about sports and celebrities not only collect interesting profile data but also help balance the questionnaires more serious and dull sections. Manchester United emerged as both the best loved and most despised team in the country (typically British to hate a successful side!). Brad Pitt and Kylie Minogue top the sex symbol league at the present time; however the key learning from this question was the eclectic list of characters picked by the panel to dine on their desert island. Brad and Kylie won with less than 100 votes from a total of over 2600.

This 'wide choice' phenomenon was at its greatest when the panel picked their desert island musical act (to entertain them during those long days!) There were over 600 different requests from approximately 2,800 responses. We would claim this is a strong sign of the intelligent and individual nature of our audience, even though some of the choices were rather strange.

In summary the insights from Urban Life have fuelled stories in the newspaper, satisfied agencies who were able to justify their recommendations and pleased our clients who have gone on to book more space. We have found that the study has both added to our existing customer relationships and helped to build new ones.

## 6. Conclusions

The Urban Life Study has worked because:

- The approach matches and even describes the audience we are researching
- It incorporates proprietary questions which offer something unique to Metro's advertisers
- It satisfies both editorial and advertising development needs
- It builds the Metro business (to the degree that a second study on an even larger scale has gone ahead in 2003).

From a research angle, the study moved into new territory. From the start the logistics were complex and we needed careful planning and risk management. In the event the study ran more smoothly than we had expected. In particular the participation rates we achieved were well beyond our initial estimates.

As we have illustrated here there are learnings which might be applied to other research studies. In particular:

- This approach has successfully reached one of the hardest groups to contact in research – young, urban populations. Clearly the online approach is both convenient and matches their expectations
- By the time of the symposium we will have run over 12 surveys as part of Urban Life 1 and 2. Along the way we have developed an understanding of screen design, phrasing and questionnaire composition that works best.
- A panel, whilst challenging to recruit and maintain, does provide many benefits. In an age where respondents may become less willing to devote time to a long interview this approach enables a wealth of data collected without over-burdening respondents at any one time.

Although Urban Life was designed as a proprietary tool for Metro our experiences here suggest that these aspects might well be applied to industry readership surveys in future. In the short term it has certainly given us confidence to use online research far more extensively for other ad hoc studies among similar audiences.