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Designing Effective Surveys

By Eileen "Turtle" Parzek

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As the web becomes more and more a part of both our personal and business lives, business people and marketing professionals have turned towards web surveys to do research, plan projects, get feedback and develop new products and services. The emergence of excellent web survey applications, complete with wizards to make creation fast and simple, templates to ensure attractive designs, and full suites of reports and statistical analysis, make this method of interacting with your customers very attractive and extremely cost effective. However, as with all computer applications, the old adage "garbage in, garbage out" applies to surveys as well – if you do not know how to design an effective survey, the results will leave much to be desired.

Introductions, first

Whether on the first page of the survey, or in the cover letter inviting people to respond, it is important that you introduce the theme and purpose of the survey. This establishes in advance what types of questions you will be asking and puts the audience in the right frame of mind for answering the survey. Additionally, it helps to tell them why they were chosen, to establish understanding and trust, and assure that their input will be confidential, and personal information will not be shared.

Organize Yourself

It is important that the questions you ask fit within the theme and purpose set down in the introduction. Create an outline, when you are first planning your survey, and then subgroup the questions into logical categories.

First think about what information you want to know, and develop your questions from that. Experiment with different groupings, until each question flows from the previous, in logical order.

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Give careful thought to how much you need each question – the fewer the better, because people generally do not have the time or inclination to answer long questionnaires.

Respect your Respondents

Be careful not to use jargon and buzzwords, but also avoid being too simplistic by knowing your survey audience and finding the appropriate balance. Remember that the respondent is taking time out of busy day to help you. Tell them in the introduction approximately how long it might take to complete, and let them know, as they go, how far along they are.

Carefully Craft Questions

When surveys are delivered by phone, trained surveyors usually conduct them and the respondent can get clarification without being led towards a particular answer. With self-administered surveys on the web, every question must be completely clear and understandable. Keep each question as short as possible, without losing meaning, and avoid jargon unless you are sure your audience understands it.

Be careful to ask only one thing at a time. If you have to ask additional questions on the same topic, do it as separate questions to avoid getting muddled responses. Be aware of inserting your own biases and intentions into the question, and try to keep questions neutral so that a "right answer" is not evident. The idea is to get truthful answers which go straight to the heart of the subject, and the simplest variations in a question can make this happen, or not.

Know Your Type

We are all familiar with the most common types of survey question formats – text, check boxes, yes/no, range responses – but there is a real science to knowing which type to use with which question to get the best results. For example:

* When using multiple choice answers to jog the respondent's memory, will it create bias towards the available choices? Is that okay?

* It might seem easiest to use a Yes/No or True/False question, but be sure that these two answers are the only ones that a respondent might possibly want to use or they will be forced to choose, diluting the truth of their answer.

*When using ranges, for example "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," how many choices are necessary? Five is typical – but is it possible that many users will be "lazy" and chose the middle, and neutral, position?

*Before giving using text fields, known also as "free form" fields, consider how you will summarize these responses.

As you develop the survey, think about the different types and picture the results that will come from

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using each type. With your audience in mind, determine which type would provide the most effective results for what you need to find out. You can further refine these decisions when you test the survey, as explained later.

Protect Against Non-Response

It is unavoidable that a percentage of those surveyed are non-responders. The best way to minimize this element in the survey results is to keep the survey short and to the point, follow a clear outline with stated goals, and accurately target who the survey recipients need to be.

Believe it or not, research states that a 10–15% response rate on any survey is considered a success.

Dangle a Carrot

Even with every precaution taken, creating surveys is never an exact science because there is little control over the human element. For whatever reason, you will often scratch your head wondering why people looked at the survey and dropped out, or just never even looked. A carefully executed survey can minimize this – and incentives can take it a step further. Do you have something you can give

away, to encourage folks to take your survey? Providing a free item or bit of information, providing a free copy of the results, or some other lure can go a long way towards gathering results.

Fly a Pilot

When you, yourself, develop a survey, it is easy to overlook the elements that might stop your respondents from completing the survey and wording that might not be clear. Always be sure to test the survey on a few people prior to sending it out to your entire audience. This will also allow you to review the results and see if the questions asked and the way they were answered will result in effective results.

Cut it Off

Be sure to tell your respondents when the survey will be closed. Typically, most respondents will respond within 5 days of receipt and so unless you know for sure that a significant portion of your audience needs longer, a week is a fair amount of time. Do not send out the survey on Fridays or over weekends – we all know what we do with mail received on those days! Try Tuesday morning for optimal response, and expect to see approximately 50% of your responses in the first 24 hours.

It may seem like you need a dual degree in cognitive psychology and statistics to develop an effective survey. This not being true for most of us, these guidelines will provide a foundation to improve both the survey and the results of your efforts. There is no better way to find out what your customers want than to ask them, and if they are already online, web surveys are an ideal way to do it.

Paid Surveys – Do They Really Work?

By Joey Merrick

Being paid to take online surveys has become a very sought after internet business. Simply pay a small fee to a paid survey site and they will send you a list of companies that will send the surveys to you.

All you need to do is sign up with these companies and the surveys will show up in your e-mail box and you will get compensated for your time. Depending on the company you can be paid in cash, entered into large cash drawings, or be compensated with discounts and merchandise.

The cash surveys can range from a couple of dollars for a really short survey to \$15–25 for longer surveys that can take around 30 minutes to complete. Not bad wages... One problem that many people have is that they will sign up for some free survey list and then gripe that they get lousy surveys.

We have tried both and when we signed up with reputable survey companies we saw much better paying surveys as opposed to the sweepstakes, prizes, and \$2 surveys we saw when we were being cheapskates.

Whenever you get surveys in your e-mail box they will tell you what kind of survey it is, what the compensation will be, and how long it will take to complete. So you will always be able to see if a particular survey is worth your time and effort.

Paid Surveys are a great way to earn some extra money in your spare time. The surveys show up in your inbox and you decide when and if you are going to fill them out. The key is to sign up with a reputable company that will give you the better paying surveys.

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Joey Merrick is the webmaster of

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comprehensive reviews on several of todays hottest income opportunities and money making ebooks.



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