

Web-Based Surveys Basics

Points for Consideration

Overview:

The telephone, random sampling, and electronic surveys are probably the three most significant advances in survey technology in the twentieth century. An on-line survey is the collection of data through a self-administered electronic set of questions by e-mail, the web, or a combination of both.

E-mail surveys are usually limited to text based responses that require the respondent to click the e-mail program REPLY button before responding. Although data is electronic in form, it generally must be transposed to another program for analysis.

Web surveys have several advantages over the e-mail variety. There is more control over the physical appearance, and one can create attractive and inviting forms. Web based surveys can include radio buttons and drop down lists that permit only one choice for the response. Check boxes allow multiple answers. Text boxes can be one line with a limited number of characters, or they may permit unlimited text entry. Data from web based surveys can be easily imported into data analysis programs. Often, data from web based surveys is available in real time in graphic and numerical format.

Advantages of Web Based Surveys:

1. Nearly complete elimination of paper, postage, mail out, and data entry costs
2. Time required for implementation can be reduced
3. Potential for overcoming international boundaries
4. Once electronic data collection system is developed, cost of surveying additional respondents is much less
5. Display of response data can be simultaneous with completion of surveys
6. Reminders and follow-up on non-respondents are relatively easy
7. Web based surveys can be designed to provide more dynamic interaction with respondents

Limitations of Web Based Surveys:

1. Not everyone is connected, so this survey method will not work with all populations
2. Even if connected, not all potential respondents are equally computer literate
3. Screen configurations may appear significantly different from one respondent to another dependent on settings of individual computers
4. Sampling of e-mail addresses is difficult (no directory; sometimes more than one e-mail address per household or respondent; addresses not standardized)
5. The decision not to respond is likely to be made more quickly
6. As e-mail programs become more sophisticated, invitations to web based surveys may be detected as "junk" mail.

Design Guidelines for Web Based Surveys:

1. Utilize a multiple contact strategy much like that used for regular mail surveys
2. Personalize all e-mail contacts
3. Keep the invitation brief – but make it good
4. Begin with an interesting, but simple to answer, question
5. Only if necessary, introduce a web survey with a welcome screen that is motivational, emphasizes the ease of response, and instructs about how to proceed to the survey

6. Present each question in a conventional format similar to that normally used on paper, self-administered surveys
7. Do not require respondents to provide an answer to each question before being allowed to answer subsequent questions; Use “skip logic” if possible
8. Make it possible for each question, and corresponding potential responses to that question, to be visible on the screen at one time

Tips:

1. Shorten the timing between notice and reminders, and the total duration of the response period compared to mailed questionnaires
2. Shorten the length of invitation and reminder messages, but remember that the invitation is the most important part
3. Keep the questionnaires short (*but this may not be as critical as one would think*)
4. Simplify the questions even more so than in paper surveys
5. Make limited use of open-ended questions (*but there is evidence that narrative responses are more likely and of higher quality in web-based questionnaires*)
6. Think of a survey as an outline version of a conversation, there should be a natural flow, with transitions between one thought and the next
7. Pilot test each survey to a variety of people using different e-mail programs and browsers
8. Avoid undeliverable e-mail invitations by developing accurate potential respondent e-mail lists
9. Use logos / branding to increase the credibility of survey

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Web Based Survey Tools

As of October 15, 2014

1. LimeSurvey <http://www.limesurvey.org/index.php>

Open source web based survey program; this effectively means it is free. This program is currently used by Ohio State's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) and is housed on an internal server. Any student / staff / faculty member of CFAES can request a free account.

2. Zoomerang

Zoomerang was sold to Survey Monkey in early 2012. See next entry.

3. SurveyMonkey.com <http://www.surveymonkey.com>

A "select" subscription is \$26/month. "Gold" subscription for \$300/year. Platinum Level for \$780/year.

4. WebSM – Everything about Web Based Surveys <http://www.websm.org/>

Mission - WebSM website (short profile) is dedicated to the methodological issues of Web surveys, but it also covers the broader area of interaction between modern technologies and survey data collection process. The goals are as follows: [1] provide professional information on web surveys methodology and impact of new technologies on survey process, [2] serve all key target groups (students, professionals, users) in all sectors (academic, public, business); [3] stimulate the communication and interaction; [4] integrate and increase the research cooperation; [4] enforce more efficient implementation of web surveys

Over 300 Web-based survey programs are listed.

Coordinating institution: University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Science, Centre for Methodology and informatics.

5. QuestionPro <http://www.questionpro.com/products/index.html>

\$12 to \$75 per month; Minimum subscription: Includes: UNLIMITED surveys; UNLIMITED responses; 24x5 Live Help; 30 Day Guarantee; Features: Upload Images/Logos, Integrated Email System, Real-Time Reports; The Student Research Sponsorship Program is meant for students doing online research to use QuestionPro as the data-collection and analytical tool. Students participating in the program are provided free access to QuestionPro Survey Software.

6. VoVici (formerly WebSurveyor) <http://www.vovici.com/survey-software/online-survey-software.aspx>

As of summer 2007, the rates were \$1,495 to \$2,195 per year or \$ 8,995 for a perpetual license with 5 users; Currently, a potential user requests a quote.

7. Survey Writer <http://www.surveywriter.net/site/index.html>

Pricing is \$1.25 for each completed survey, with a minimum of 200 completes per project. If you purchase multiple surveys at one time, an adjustable volume discount is available.

8. Hosted Survey.com <http://www.hostedsurvey.com/>

20,000 responses \$.20 each; ranges down to 50 responses \$.50 each; Call for special academic pricing

9. KeySurvey.com <http://www.keysurvey.com/>

April 2008 pricing: \$1950 (Premium – Unlimited surveys – 10,000 responses), \$3950-\$5950 (Professional – Unlimited surveys – 10,000 responses) per user; Includes: Ability to create and distribute an unlimited number of surveys; Ability to view and download results for unlimited surveys; On-line access for one year; Free technical support. Currently, a potential user requests a quote.

10. Test Pilot <http://www.tp1.clearlearning.com/>
Academic Prices (single server, unlimited authors): Up to 200 participants - \$750; Up to 500 - \$1,500; Up to 1000 - \$3,000; Up to 2500 - \$5,000; Up to 10,000 - \$10,000; Up to 20,000 - \$15,000; Unlimited - \$20,000; That is, we charge you once to license a particular version of Test Pilot for use on a single server computer. Unlike our competitors, we do not charge yearly, quarterly or monthly fees.
11. Custominsight.com <http://www.custominsight.com/pricing.asp>
Prices start at \$900 for a “basic package” up to \$2900 for a “standard package” (prices as of December 2013).
12. SurveyShare.com <http://surveyshare.com/>
\$199.99 (16% discount for educational and non-profit) for one year, unlimited surveys and unlimited responses
13. SuperSurvey <http://www.supersurvey.com/>
Single survey starting at \$19.95/survey. Monthly subscription starting at \$29.95/month. Yearly subscription starting at \$159.00/year.
14. Event Handler <http://www.event-handler.com/>
Looking to hold an event such as a contest, survey, poll, or quiz on your site? Are you trying to avoid all the headaches of having to manually handle entries, winners, totals, and all the boring time consuming stuff? If so, this is the script for you. It's a one of a kind and the ultimate in an event manager. A site license (\$100) allows you to install EventHandler in a single location. If you are going to install EventHandler in more than one location, you must purchase a license for each location.
15. StellarSurvey <http://www.stellarsurvey.com/>
StellarSurvey is pay-as-you-go: No long term contracts, no sign-up fee, no termination fee, cancel at any time. \$9.95 per month for academic, but limited to 500 responses per month; \$29.95 per month for highest level (Enterprise) limited to 3000 responses (exceeding the monthly response limit adds a charge of \$.04 / per response over the monthly maximum)
16. MakeSurvey <http://www.makesurvey.net/default.asp>
MakeSurvey – \$120 one-time fee
17. Qualtrics <http://www.qualtrics.com/>
Qualtrics is a very powerful web survey tool; newer feature is an offline survey app to collect information on a tablet or smartphone, when an internet connection is not available. No pricing on web site, must request a quote
18. ViewsFlash <http://www.cogix.com/>
ViewsFlash is a web application that creates questionnaires for surveys, assessments, data collection, quizzes, tests and polls. Questionnaire forms are presented to respondents as web pages, embedded in web sites, and email invitations. Responses are tabulated in real time and graphical reports including two and three way cross tabulations and univariate analysis are created. The ViewsFlash software is licensed on a per CPU basis, regardless of the number of users, questionnaire authors, or participants. To get a quotation, please estimate the production server and cluster configuration and the non-production (development, testing, staging) servers. Pricing depends on these factors
19. SurveyGizmo <http://www.surveygizmo.com/>
Surveys have never been Easier or More Powerful. SurveyGizmo is a creative platform for your marketing, lead generation and research projects. Create surveys, landing pages, polls, quizzes, contact forms, ticketing queues and mobile marketing campaigns. Whatever data you need, we can help you get it. Subscriptions range from “Free” to “Enterprise” (\$199 / month).

20. FeedbackFarm <http://www.feedbackfarm.com/>

Get customer, market and employee feedback in minutes! Fun, Free and Easy to use; Why Choose Feedback Farm? Unlimited survey responses per month; Customize look and feel of studies; Integrate into your site or blog; All for free!

21. Survey Gold <http://www.surveygoldsolutions.com>

SurveyGold survey software installs on your computer and provides the ability to create web survey forms or survey questionnaires that you conduct on paper or in-person. Designed for the occasional survey author, SurveyGold guides you through the process of creating and conducting your survey with an intuitive, easy-to-use interface and familiar features that help you get the results you want, quickly and easily. Non-profit, government, academic individual license: \$100/year.

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Tips for SurveyMonkey (formerly Zoomerang)

File Management:

1. Name and keep; Seldom delete
2. Use the File Management system
3. Can have a file name different than the survey title (useful for tracking client names)

Survey Creation:

1. Templates are good for getting ideas, but have never used one exactly as is; usually start from scratch or copy an existing survey.
2. Use basic design theme formats for background; e.g. basic red; blue; black
3. Skip Logic requires much more time and planning to create. Do outline on paper before creating pages, especially for mapping the skips
4. Can now edit a live survey, but limited to mostly spelling corrections
5. Follow guidelines for jpg or gif images; Good to add images; Usually put left of the text in the survey title. Adds credibility to survey.
6. If you want a print version of the survey to use; Do not use drop down questions; can save as a word doc or pdf.
7. Sometimes need to “trick” Survey Monkey so that a particular type of question can be used; e.g. need to put a dot (period) into the space where question/response item would be.
8. Ranking questions need more instructions AND are harder to analyze for YOU; use rating instead.
9. If you have more items than will fit the screen for a matrix question, break into two or more questions
10. SAVE once in a while for long surveys
11. I rarely use the START SURVEY page, but it is good where you have a lot of information and do not want to put all of that in the invitation or you have IRB information you need to convey
12. Can move questions up and down while creating, but if have to move a long way, then it is faster to copy and paste the question
13. Can copy/paste survey pages if you find you want to move entire groups of questions earlier or later in the survey
14. Best to create in a word processor, and copy and paste to Survey Monkey; the spell check feature is cumbersome. You have to spell check each individual question as you set them up, can't spell check the entire survey at once.
15. Use the preview button to see how it will look; This preview is the only way you can view how the image you added in Edit Title.
16. A link to a preview of your survey can be shared without actually launching your survey.

Thank You Page:

1. Can link text or icon to other web addresses
2. Usually put name and contact information of the person who created the survey
3. Can re-direct to a completely different page that you create

Deployment:

1. Email invitations work the best; Can send reminders to only the non-respondents
2. If send a paper copy for a URL only survey, recommend creating an intermediate site that is easy to enter into the browser; The URLs created by Survey Monkey are long and difficult to key in; If have a simple URL to enter, and that takes the potential respondent to a site where there is an icon “Take Survey”, and all they have to do is click on that icon, it is much better. You can use <http://go.osu.edu> to shorten long and difficult URLs

3. Usually leave up for 12 work days or less, with invitation and two reminders; Better response rate if left open in at least parts of three calendar weeks.

View/ Share Results:

1. Can have the spreadsheet sent to any email address
2. Unless you like to mess with graphics and tables, best not to copy into word processing documents; Print from browser looks good. Now has a feature to download results into Excel.
3. Before importing into SPSS, delete columns with narrative data; Sometimes the narrative data confuses SPSS, and you cannot use SPSS to analyze text anyway
4. When copying a survey, the default is that if you select to Share Results, a link will be available to click on the Thank You page; Recommend to un-check this box on Share Results page

Address Book:

1. This is a great feature; Can copy from either a word processing or spreadsheet; Now I ask for email addresses in column format of a spreadsheet from the people creating the survey, and almost always get what I need
2. Once a person OPTS OUT, the system will NEVER send an invitation to that email address again
3. Can delete a name from the list after the deployment if the person wants to be or if it is wrong, and then a reminder will not be sent to that address when re-launched

Help/ Support Feature:

1. This is good to use; Great turn-around time; Either on line or phone
2. There is a good Q and A feature of the support too

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Effect of the Number of Reminders on Response Rate of Web Based Surveys

by Thomas M. Archer, Ph.D.

October 2005

Null Hypothesis:

There will be no difference in the response rate of Extension personnel regardless of whether they receive an initial web based survey with no reminders to non-respondents, versus one reminder, two reminders, and three reminders.

Method:

Ohio State University Extension programming personnel were randomly divided based on email addresses into four study groups. An alphabetized list of 552 addresses was received on August 3. This list was numbered so that the first potential respondent was in one group, the second in the next group, the third in the next group, and the fourth in the final group. The whole list was numbered 1, 2, 3, 4 -- 1, 2, 3, 4 – etc. until all 552 addresses had one of the four numbers. Therefore, 138 email addresses were in each of the four study groups.

Using a random number generator, the four groups were randomly assigned to the treatment groups. The groups were:

Group #1 – Receive a web based survey through an email invitation

Group #2 – Receive a web based survey through an email invitation with one reminder

Group #3 – Receive a web based survey through an email invitation with two reminders

Group #4 – Receive a web based survey through an email invitation with three reminders

Web based survey content consisted of questions related to dimensions of in-service offerings of the Program Development and Evaluation Unit, Ohio State University Extension. The survey was launched to all groups on Tuesday, August 24, 2004 6:00 p.m. with the deadline for completion set at a week and a Friday following, September 3, 2004.

Group #1 non-respondents received no reminders.

Group #2 non-respondents received a reminder on the following Tuesday, August 31.

Group #3 non-respondents received reminders on the following Tuesday, August 31 and Thursday, September 2

Group #4 non-respondents received reminders on the following Friday, August 27, Tuesday, August 31, and Thursday, September 2.

Only difference in the reminder email invitations was that in the SUBJECT line of the email. The words added in the respective reminders was:

Group #2 – REMINDER

Group #3 – FIRST REMINDER, FINAL REMINDER

Group #4 – FIRST REMINDER, SECOND REMINDER, FINAL REMINDER

Findings:

Graph 1. Number of Respondents by Number of Contacts

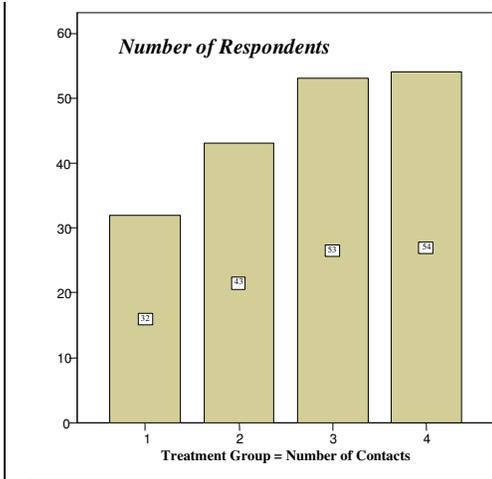


Table 1. Number of Respondents by Day of Survey and Treatment Group

Treatment Group	Day 1 – Launch	Day 3 – Reminder sent to Grp4	Day 5	Day 7 – Reminder sent to Grp2, Grp3, & Grp4	Day 9 – Reminder set to Grp3 & Grp4	Day 11 –Close
1	0	25	30	30	31	32
2	0	24	29	30	43	43
3	0	36	38	43	50	53
4	0	28	33	38	51	54

[1] The total number of respondents by group during this eleven-day survey:

Group 1 – 32; Group 2 – 43; Group 3 – 53; Group 4 – 54

[2] After the first reminder was sent to Group 2 (Day 7), Group 3 (Day 7) and Group 4 (Day 3), the number of additional respondents by group in the next two days was:

Group 1 – 1 (No reminder sent to this group on Day 7);

Group 2 – 13; Group 3 – 7; Group 4 – 5

[3] After the second reminder was sent to Group 3 (Day 9) and Group 4 (Day 7), the number of additional respondents by group in the next two days was:

Group 1 – 1 (No reminder sent to this group on Day 9);

Group 2 – 0 (No second reminder sent to this group on Day 9);

Group 3 – 3; Group 4 – 13

[4] After the third reminder was sent to Group 4 (Day 9), the number of additional respondents in this treatment group in the next two days was 3.

Conclusions:

[1] Reminders increased the response rate of this web-based survey. Reminders increased response rate in every group, every time, up through four reminders.

[2] The optimum number of reminders in an eleven-day web based survey for this study was two, which is three total contacts, including the initial invitation.

[3] Reminders sent on day seven of the eleven-day survey produced the largest increase in responses over the next two days.

Characteristics Associated with Increasing the Response Rates of Web-Based Surveys

By Thomas M. Archer
October 2007

Available at: <http://pareonline.net/pdf/v12n12.pdf>

Abstract:

Having a respectable response rate is critical to the generalizability of results for any survey, and web surveys present their own unique set of issues. This research identified web deployment and questionnaire characteristics that were significantly associated with increasing the response rate to web-based surveys based on a systematic evaluation of ninety-nine web-based surveys. Thirteen web deployment characteristics and nine web-based questionnaire survey characteristics were subjected to correlation and regression analysis with response rate. The resultant findings prompted recommendations: [1] Increasing the total days a questionnaire is left open, with two reminders, may significantly increase response rates. It may be wise to launch in one week, remind in the next week, and then send the final reminder in the third week; [2] Potential respondents must be convinced of the potential benefit of accessing the questionnaire; and [3] Do not be overly concerned about the length or detail of the questionnaire - getting people to the web site of the questionnaire is more important to increasing response rates.