



TIPS & TOOLS #22: INCREASING RESPONSE RATES FOR ONLINE SURVEYS

More and more projects are using online platforms such as SurveyMonkey and Google Survey to conduct their surveys, and it is good evaluation practice to get a respectable response rate. This tips and tools provides some helpful tips for increasing your response rate. As always, if you have any questions regarding response rates, or anything related to your evaluations, please contact TCEC.

What are response rates?

The response rate is simply the percentage of people who respond to your survey. You can calculate the response rate for your survey by dividing the number of completed surveys by the number of people contacted.

What is a good response rate?

There is no “magic” number for an acceptable response rate that guarantees your evaluation is high quality. Nonetheless, although there is no magic number in terms of response rate, sufficient response rates are important for surveys. The basic assumption is that the higher the response rate, the more likely the data describes the people in the sample. A survey that collects very little data (via a low response rate) may not contain substantial (and useful) information.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INCREASING YOUR RESPONSE RATES

Contacting Your Respondents

- Prior to the email invitation, give the recipients a “heads up” and let them know about the upcoming survey and the reason it is being conducted
- Craft an effective email invitation—Because the invitation message is what your respondents will see first, this first step of considering your message content is vital. Here are tips for the email invitation:
 - Include your contact information, the intent of your survey, and what you will do with the data
 - Describe the level of confidentiality of the survey
 - Personalize the message. Include the name of the respondents in the body
Maintain an informal tone
 - Indicate how long the survey takes to complete and indicate the cutoff date
 - Use a professional reply email address
 - Avoid SPAM language (e.g. all caps, money symbols, etc.) in the subject title line

- Use only clean and updated email lists
 - All respondents must opt in to receive survey invitations
 - You must provide a way for potential respondents to opt out if they desire
 - All emails must be valid and derive from a current recipient list
- Think about the timing and delivery of the invitation
 - Consider the availability of your recipients
 - Avoid busy periods and provide a window of time to complete the survey
 - Typically, you want to avoid Fridays and the weekends. Mondays are also a day to avoid because many people use the day to catch up on their emails
- Schedule reminders
 - Follow up emails have been found to increase response rates
 - Try to space reminders at least a few days apart
- Offer Incentives
 - Offer incentives that reach your target audience
 - For a younger audience, an electronic item or iPod may be beneficial
 - For an older audience, a gift certificate may be beneficial
- Offer to send a brief summary of the results, so respondents know their information will be used
- Make sure the survey simultaneously accomplishes your goals and remains interesting, useful, and is not too long. Short surveys, and surveys with a high perceived importance, achieve much higher response rates
 - Think about the purpose of the research (end-use strategizing)
 - Create a survey that asks the right questions to meet the objective
 - Keep the questions short and concise
 - Create a logical flow throughout
 - Pilot test the survey
 - Use different web browsers to see how each handles the survey
 - Use different computers and devices to see how each handles the survey

References:

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