



Ten tips for DIY Surveys

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What?

Start with the end in mind. For each question you should be able to answer 'what will I do when I have the answer'. How will it add insight and understanding? Be really strict on this, many questionnaires are too long because they fail to distinguish interesting from relevant.

Who?

Who do you want to collect the data from? Many DIY surveys canvas opinions from those in their own network, contact book or organisation. Their views may be representative of a wider population on some topics, but not all. Take care before assuming the results can be said to represent a wider group of people, particularly if you are taking decisions that will impact a broader group.

Set them up.

Today, it is common to be asked to complete a survey and many organisations ask customers for feedback from the last contact. The result is that such requests are all too easy to ignore. It helps to explain who you are, why you want their input and what you will do when you have the results. Also, tell people how long the survey will take. These things help achieve a higher response rate.

Who took part?

With online research it is now much easier to collect lots of responses. As well as the total number, take a good look at the profile of people who completed the survey. Do you have a good spread of respondents, from different demographic groups and people who have roles with diverse experiences? Customers versus non customers or engaged versus disengaged respondents can be expected to have different opinions.

When?

The timing of the DIY survey is important. People's opinions change over time and on some topics can change rapidly. For example, when the subject concerns celebrity or music the shelf life of the data collected can be extremely limited. If possible allow a survey to run for some days to maximise response, but feel free to set an end-date.

How?

Be balanced and non-judgemental in how you phrase the question. You want to know what your audience truly think and not 'lead the witness'. If you direct the question to favour one answer over another, the results are worthless and your audience may be frustrated at the bias.

Cover all the bases

People taking a DIY survey need to be able to answer your question with an answer choice that represents their view or position. Consider ALL the possible answers, not just the most common responses. It is good practice to offer 'don't know/don't want to answer' and, where it is difficult to predict the full range of answers, you might provide a category 'other, please specify' with a box to enter free text.

Use simple, straightforward language

Plain, unambiguous words and phrases are the safest route. The group from which you are seeking opinions will vary in their level of expertise, interest and commitment to the survey. If the question is complicated in its construction, the risk of misunderstanding is high. Before launching try the questions with a friend or colleague.

Ask open-ended questions

If your intention is to explore a subject, open questions like 'why do you say that?' help to reveal a range of opinions on a topic. While this is harder to translate into percentages, this approach will help to ensure you have the breadth of views people covered. Closed questions with multiple answers provide an alternative, but often require your audience to do some force-fitting of their perspective to your survey.

Share the results with care

The presentation of results as statistical totals implies rigour and accuracy. With any Research, care is needed to avoid over-interpretation of results. Note the sample definition, method and timing as well as the number of people completing the question. It is fine to be selective in highlighting results, but be careful not to distort the results. Good research is often described as a blend of art and science.