

# Twelve Tips for the Best Survey Results

Are there aspects of your target market that you'd like to better understand? Do you know, from your customers' point of view, exactly how you stack up against your competition in critical areas? Are you looking to discover opportunities to generate improved business results?

If you haven't surveyed your customers lately, now might be a great time to do it. This relatively simple initiative can not only give you tremendous insights and new ideas, but it can help you solidify relationships and even stimulate immediate sales. Consider this:

- » *Harvard Business Review* said customers who were invited to complete a satisfaction survey persisted in purchasing loyalty during a one year period twice as often as customers who were not surveyed.
- » *Harvard Business Review* also showed that the act of conducting a survey itself can lead to a sales increase as past purchasers (inactive customers) re-engage.
- » *US News and World Report* says that 68% of customers who leave their current supplier do so because it seems that the organization doesn't care about their business.

A survey can meet various objectives, such as to identify new sales opportunities, understand your customers' choices, measure satisfaction, perform an internal review, find areas for improvement or help develop new products or services. A good survey requires a clear objective, the best execution for the situation and the ability to turn the results into something beneficial for your business.

In helping our clients execute many surveys over the years, Pepper Group has created our *Twelve Tips for the Best Survey Results*.

## 1. IDENTIFY YOUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Good surveys have focused objectives that are easily understood. Spend time up front to identify, in writing:

- » What is the goal of this survey?
- » How will you use the data you are collecting?
- » What decisions do you hope to impact with the results of this survey? (This will later help you identify what data you need to collect in order to make these decisions.)



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## 2. SURVEY THE RIGHT PEOPLE

- » Current clients: focus on your best customers. Look at the upper 60% of customers by sales.
- » Lapsed customers: identifying characteristics leading to attrition may help develop new or repeat customers.
- » Prospective customers: use the survey as a way to gauge interest in an offering, or ask for their help in developing a new product or service.
- » Representative sample: send out anonymously to learn more about a general market.

## 3. HAVE A FOCUSED TOPIC

- » Shorter surveys generally have higher response rates and lower abandonment among survey respondents.
- » Focus on a single objective rather than trying to create a master survey that covers multiple objectives. Keeping focus forces you to think about what's really important.
- » To be certain that the survey is short, time a few people taking the survey. A survey should take five minutes or less to complete. Six to ten minutes is acceptable, but significant abandonment rates occur after 11 minutes.
- » Make sure questions get to the point and avoid the use of jargon. Don't assume that your survey takers are as comfortable with your acronyms as you are.

## 4. PLAN A LOGICAL FLOW

- » Begin with a brief introduction that motivates survey takers to complete the survey. (e.g. "Help us improve our service to you. Please answer the following short survey.")
- » The first page of the survey is the place to include information about how you will be using people's responses. People are more comfortable sharing information if they know how it will be used. Is it anonymous? Confidential? Shared with others?
- » Start with broader-based questions and then move to those narrower in scope.
- » Collect demographic data and ask any sensitive questions at the end (unless you are using this information to screen out survey participants). If you are asking for contact information, place that information last.



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### 5. CREATE EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS

- » Avoid introducing biases that telegraph the answers you hope to receive. Slight word changes can produce great differences in results. Strong words that represent control or action can also change results.
- » Be specific in what you want to know. Avoid questions which are open to interpretation. For example, “Do you like orange juice?” Are you asking about taste, texture, nutritional content, Vitamin C, the current price?
- » Avoid asking respondents two attributes at once. For example, “Are our employees welcoming and professional?”
- » Ask for suggestions via a select few open questions. For example, “What could we do to make your next experience with us extraordinary?”
- » Ask demographic information only if it will drive business decisions or is critical to analyzing the results.

### 6. RELY ON CLOSED QUESTIONS

- » Closed questions give respondents specific choices. They can take the form of yes/no, multiple-choice or rating scale and are much easier for the respondent to answer and for you to analyze than open questions.
- » Open questions are great supplemental questions and may provide useful qualitative information and deep insights. However, too many open questions can cause people to skip questions, provide very short answers that don't give any value or even abandon the entire survey.

### 7. KEEP RATING SCALES CONSISTENT

- » Use the same number of points on the scale and make sure the meanings of the scale's high and low stay consistent throughout the survey. Switching your rating scales around will confuse respondents and result in unreliable data.
- » Respondents more easily understand descriptive words (excellent, fair, poor), rather than a numbered scale.

### 8. CONSIDER HOW YOU'LL COMPARE RESULTS ON A REGULAR BASIS

- » Identify the items you may want to compare year over year, such as customer satisfaction ratings, and build in appropriate questions.
- » Consider using Net Promoter Scores. Ask the customer how likely they are, on a scale of 1-10, to recommend your company, product or service to others. Subtract the percentage of “detractors” (ratings from 0 to 6) from the percentage of “promoters” (ratings of 9 or 10) to determine your ability to use the enthusiasm of current customers to gain new customers.



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### 9. KNOW WHEN TO SEND

- » Recent statistics show the highest open and click rates for online surveys take place on Monday, Friday and Sunday. In addition, research shows that the quality of survey responses does not vary from weekday to weekend.
- » The most important factor is to consider your audience and send the survey at a time that would be convenient for them.

### 10. CONSIDER AN INCENTIVE

- » Research has shown that incentives typically boost response rates by 50% on average.
- » Keep the incentive appropriate in scope. Overly large incentives can lead to undesirable behavior or bump up against corporate gift limitations.
- » In our experience, a smaller incentive offered to everyone results in better response rates than a larger incentive given to only one “winner.”

### 11. EXECUTE IT PROPERLY

There are various ways to execute a survey. The best choice will depend on your strategic objectives, focus and most importantly, your audience.

- » Send it through email with a link to an online survey tool such as Survey Monkey, Zoomerang or Constant Contact.
- » Mail it with a self-addressed stamped envelope.
- » Post it on your website or blog.
- » Hand-deliver it to clients in a meeting or at point of purchase for retail businesses.
- » Conduct the survey over the phone. This can be more of a call-center type Q&A survey with closed questions or a professional conversation-type survey with open questions.

### 12. ANALYZE THE DATA AND CREATE A PLAN

Whether the data is more qualitative or quantitative, analyze the results in light of your survey objective and your business strategy. Thank your respondents and distribute incentives if applicable. Connect with customers who have shared negative opinions. Finally, determine the next steps that the data suggests and, most importantly, take action!

