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# Knowledge Is Power

Simple steps to create surveys that maximize your organization's business intelligence

By: Vicki LaBrosse

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Information is the heart of business today, and one of the best ways to keep your finger on the pulse of your company is to gather feedback from your customer base. Surveys are one of the primary vehicles for collecting information and gaining valuable insight into your business. Follow these simple steps to create a meaningful survey that produces useful results.

**Define the objective.** Spend some time planning your survey and consider what you want to get out of the results before building your questions. Good surveys have focused objectives that are easily understood. Identify what you are looking for, how will you use the data collected and what decisions you hope to impact with the results.

**Keep it short.** Ideally, a survey should take five minutes or less to complete in order to get the best response rate. Being brief and focused helps with both quality and quantity of responses. Focus on a single objective rather than trying to create a survey that covers multiple objectives. Avoid questions with too many answer options. Listing more than ten answer options will slow down completion time and result in a lower response rate.

**Be clear and concise.** Make your questions as specific and direct as possible. Ask closed-ended questions that generate results that are easy to analyze, spot trends and set baselines. Closed-ended questions make it easy for the survey taker to whisk through the questions and give you quantifiable data.

**Maintain a consistent rating scale.** If you decide to use rating scales (e.g., 1-5), keep them consistent throughout the survey. Use the same number of points on the scale and make sure the meanings of high and low stay consistent. Avoid biasing responses by asking questions in a manner that does not trend answers in a particular way. Steer clear from using "Always" or "Never" extremes as they can bias responses.

**Create a logical flow.** Question order does matter. Make sure your survey flows in a logical order. Begin with a brief introduction that motivates survey takers to complete the survey. Start with broader-based questions and then move to those narrower in scope. Place profile or demographic-related questions at the end of the survey to avoid scaring people off.

**Test the survey.** Before you officially launch your survey with your target audience, send it to a couple of trusted associates for testing purposes. Have them time how long it takes to complete and provide feedback on the overall flow of the survey. This will also allow you to check on the test entries to ensure the format of answers will provide useful data.

**Offer an incentive.** Depending upon the type of survey and target audience, offering an incentive is often effective at improving response rates. Incentives can range in value. For some, receiving the final survey results may be enough of an incentive to participate in the survey. For others, receiving a gift card or something of monetary value may move them to participate. Be sure to keep the incentive appropriate in scope. Overly large incentives can lead to undesirable behavior – for example, respondents lying about demographics, so as to not be excluded from the survey – which can skew results.



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**Share the results.** Once the survey is complete and the data collected and analyzed, let the respondents know what you have learned and what follow-up actions will be taken as a result. Following up with respondents helps validate your relationship with them and sends the message that their opinions are important. When customers feel like a part of a business, they are more likely to provide feedback in the future.

Your business and your business strategy are only as good as the information you have. If done right, surveys can generate insights about your customers, employees and markets. By efficiently gathering feedback, analyzing it and acting on it in a meaningful way, you can increase your business intelligence and ensure your company's success.

***About the Author***

*Vicki LaBrosse is a media relations manager with Edge Marketing, Inc. Leveraging more than 13 years of experience working in professional services industries, LaBrosse works with clients to develop and execute comprehensive marketing strategies that will help grow their business.*



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