Web Surveys

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When to use Web surveys

- When Web users only are being surveyed (e.g., users of a Web-based project management system)
- Among populations known to have Web access (e.g., University faculty)
- As part of a mixed-mode study (e.g., mail study with option to complete questionnaire via Web)

Web surveys: Advantages

- FAST! - (almost) instant gratification
- Do not require an interviewer
- No printing/mailing costs
- Can be very inexpensive
- Can include graphics/multimedia
- No interviewer bias
- No data entry
Web surveys: Disadvantages

• With no interviewer, there is no one to guide respondent, answer questions, etc.
• Expense associated with more complex questionnaires/studies considerably higher.
• Coverage error potentially very high due to lack of Internet and e-mail access by many (lower income, African Americans & Hispanics, rural residents).
• Use of certain Web survey products leaves the security of respondent data in the hands of another party.

“Typical” Web survey process

• Potential respondent receives an invitation to participate via
  • e-mail (“evite”) or
  • in a letter that includes URL and a passcode
• R clicks on a link (or types a URL into a browser address bar) to access the survey
• Nonrespondents receive follow-up reminder (e-mail, postcard) a few days after survey is launched

Best practices

• BEGIN WITH A WELL-DESIGNED QUESTIONNAIRE
• Put yourself in the respondent’s shoes. (Or, in front of his or her monitor, at his or her keyboard, etc.)
**Best practices**

- Web surveys should be as simple as possible
  - No flashy pictures, unusual fonts, unnecessary graphics
  - Small logo of sponsor in “header”? Yes!
  - Restrained use of color
  - Questions themselves should be simple and brief (“non-wordy”)
    - In contrast, items in telephone and face-to-face surveys are written so they can be read conversationally.

**Best practices: More on simplicity**

- Users accessing the Web via dial-up or with older computers & Web browsers may have difficulty with a survey with more sophisticated elements.

**Best practices, continued**

- Begin with a question that is fully visible on the first screen and is easily comprehended and answered by all respondents.
- Avoid drop-down boxes
- Avoid making the respondent do a lot of scrolling.
Other considerations

- Incentives
- Preview, preview, preview! On different computers and using different browsers.
- Complete the survey yourself.

Writing the evite: Subject line

- This is your first chance to make a good impression (and the respondent’s first chance to delete the evite)
- Subject line should contain
  - sponsor
  - topic
  - “survey”
  - e.g., “Office of the Chancellor Student Health Survey”

Writing the evite: Body text

- Again, you have to make it clear the message is not spam
- Should include
  - Study sponsor
  - Contact information (who should R contact with a problem or question?)
  - Reply-by date
  - Amount of time the survey should take
  - Keep it short!
- Make sure the survey URL is clearly visible in the body of the message and that the link is accurate. Test the link!
- Make sure your text is grammatically correct & double-check all spellings.
**Writing the evite: For example...**

Dear <Name>:
The Office of the Chancellor is conducting a survey of Illinois students about health practices and beliefs. Your participation is very important, since we must hear from as many students as possible for the results to truly represent the practices and beliefs of Illinois students.
The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. We would appreciate hearing from you by <DATE>. To access the survey, please click the link below:
<Link>
If you have any questions about the study or problems accessing the survey, please contact <NAME> at <PHONE> or via e-mail at <ADDRESS>. Thank you for your help!

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**Survey organizations’ Web survey options**

- Hire programmer(s) to program surveys OR buy a Web survey software package and host it on its own server
- Contract with a Web surveying organization that hosts surveys from many organizations on its server(s)

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**Selecting a Web survey product**

- There are dozens of products available.
- The use of one product over another will depend on the study itself.
  - Study budget?
  - Questionnaire complexity?
  - If mixed mode, what programming features are needed to make the questionnaires comparable?
  - Sample management needs?
  - Topic & sensitivity of requested information?
  - Data analysis needs?
Web survey products: 3 “tiers”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Question types &amp; logic options</th>
<th>Other issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$5</td>
<td>Very limited question types &amp; ability to customize</td>
<td>No sample management component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; no advanced logic capabilities</td>
<td>Format/layout of final data limited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online products:
- Zoomerang, SurveyMonkey
- Limited question types, some customization possible with HTML coding, can program skips
- Include sample management component
- Product contains data review & analysis component

Premium products:
- Sawtooth, Inquisite, Survey Solutions (Perseus), Illume (DatStat)
- Extensive & customizable; sophisticated logic capabilities
- May not include sample management component (e.g., Sawtooth)
- Extensive options for data review, analysis, and download

PRODUCT SELECTION CRITERIA: Questionnaire programming

1. Various question types
   - Standard types include
     - Closed-ended one choice
     - Closed-ended multiple choice
     - Drop-down (one choice)
     - Open-ended (sometimes of varying length)
     - Ranking
     - Rating scale

2. Ability to customize features of a question type

A nonstandard question type: Grid

Please answer the following questions about the electronic products displayed below.

- Which type do you own?
- Which one is your favorite?
- How much would you pay for it (S)?

Sawtooth Software, Sequim WA
Customizing: Specifying the length of an open-ended answer

In Zoomerang, an answer field cannot be limited to a certain number of characters.

PRODUCT SELECTION CRITERIA: Questionnaire programming

3. Randomization of questions, response options
4. Advanced logic (skips, branching, piping, fills)
5. Data validation

PRODUCT SELECTION CRITERIA: Sample management

When a Web survey’s sample consists of a list of e-mail addresses, there must be a means of:
- Sending the evite
- Monitoring who has (and has not) responded
- Sending reminders to nonrespondents

Not all Web survey products have a built-in capability to manage these tasks.
All products allow you to download your data, but there is variation in the number of formats in which it can be downloaded.

Also variation in the ability to specify data file characteristics in advance (e.g., variable names).

Of those that allow you to view results and perform analysis within the product itself, there is variation in the sophistication of the analysis that can be performed.

For a variable such as this, you’d expect the final data to be coded 1 for not at all familiar, 2 for not too familiar, etc.

But using the WebServices survey feature, this is what you get:
**PRODUCT SELECTION CRITERIA:**
*Data review & analysis concerns*

Zoomerang allows you to perform simple analyses and download the results, such as the cross-tab below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>261</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ever attended</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>299</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PRODUCT SELECTION CRITERIA:**
*Additional considerations*

- Topic and its sensitivity
- Ability for a respondent to exit and return to questionnaire to complete at a later time
- Access by multiple users to the product

**A note on the renowned “progress bar”**

- Serves to give the respondent insight into the length of the survey and his/her progress
- Research on the bar’s effect on survey completion has found mixed results
- There’s some indication use of such a feature is helpful only for shorter surveys
WebServices survey tool

- www.webservices.uiuc.edu
- Advantages:
  - Free!
  - Allows for security of blue-stem logon (for University respondents)
  - Has basic question types (short & long open-ended, radio buttons, checkboxes, pulldowns, rankings)
  - Very useful as a means to familiarize yourself with basic Web survey design issues and options

A note on U of I surveys

Web survey challenges

- Increasing sophistication and expectations of Web survey takers
- Coverage and sample issues
- Security of data provided by respondents
Questions?

• E-mail us at info@srl.uic.edu

• The WebSM Web site is dedicated to the methodological issues of Web surveys: www.websm.org