



Experts share sound advice on surveys

There's definitely a right way – and a wrong way – to go about conducting a reader survey. This month, we'll give you a few tips to help keep your surveys on track.

Because the last few issues of the newsletter have focused on the print vs. digital question, let's suppose you're going to survey your readers on that topic.

"It's always important to be in touch with your readers and know what their interests are," says William Dunkerley, owner of William Dunkerley Publishing Consultants, which provides business consulting services to the publishing field. "You should know how they're reacting to the information you provide."

Focus groups

According to Dunkerley, the best way to start the survey process is to conduct a focus group (see sidebar). "A focus group will allow you to gather insight as to where your readers are, and from that you can develop statistics that will help you develop ques-

tions for your survey," he says. Don't fret if you don't have the resources to conduct a focus group in person — a conference call will suffice.

In terms of a starting point for both the focus group and the survey, you should ask participants what other publications they read and how they read them – in print, online or via a mobile device. That will tell you what kinds of channels they're comfortable with and are willing to receive information from.

This information will also give you a frame of reference as you analyze the results of your survey. "For those readers who aren't familiar with online publications, I would take those answers with a grain of salt," Dunkerley says. "They may not



10 clear cut ways to increase reader survey response

Regardless of the method used to survey your readers, here are 10 industry guidelines from Lou Ann Sabatier to increase reader survey response. Sabatier is principal of Sabatier Consulting.

1. Share a research objective. Tell readers why you are soliciting their feedback and opinions.
2. Make it convenient for readers to respond.
3. Write an attention grabbing invitation. If online, test different subject lines.
4. Incorporate images and color into the survey.
5. Use concise wording and keep surveys short – no more than 20 questions.
6. Keep open-ended questions to a minimum. Verbatim responses are valuable, but they require more time and work to complete. Use a combination of a, b, c, d selection and short ranking format.
7. Avoid repetitive questions.
8. Manage expectations by providing a realistic time to complete the survey.
9. Offer an appropriate incentive to participate.
10. Pre-test your survey before executing.

This column ran in the March/April 2010 issue of Signature magazine. Reprinted with permission from Association Media & Publishing (www.associationmediaandpublishing.org).

understand the benefits of receiving information online. This does present a problem for publishers who have a lot of readers in this category, but that doesn't mean it's not a good idea to go forward with digital content. It just means you have to approach them

differently. You have to get them up to speed before you do it."

Regarding the survey itself, you have a few options. Snail mail is one, but many small publishers just send surveys via their own e-mail addresses. There are several companies who offer free surveying tools online, but the size of the survey is usually limited. If this suits you, you might want to check into www.surveymonkey.com or www.zoomerang.com; both are recommended by members of Association & Media Publishing, an association that serves the needs of association publishers, communications professionals and the media they create.

Survey details

So to whom do you send the survey and how many total surveys should you send? Acknowledging that statisticians would not be happy with

this answer, Dunkerley advises drawing a random sample, i.e. picking every 10th name from your database. And actually, the total number you send isn't as important as verifying that your responses give you a representative sample of your database, especially if your readership is segmented into difference factions.

"If you draw your sample by random means, then it will be truly representative – reflecting the group as a whole," Dunkerley says. "However, the smaller the sample is as a percentage of the whole, the greater chance there is for 'sample error.' Statistics books offer formulas for calculating these numbers, but there is a more practical approach that would work for most publishers (see sidebar)."

Figuring out when to send the survey also requires a bit of thought. Obviously, you don't want to send it on Friday afternoon or Monday morning. Give some thought to your readers' habits and determine the best time to send it from there.

Unfortunately, there's no formula that will tell you what type of response to expect from your survey. Dunkerley says he has seen response rates as low as 3 percent and as high as 60 percent. "I always regard the response rate as being indicative of how interested your audience is in your publication," he says.

That's good enough reason to follow proper protocol when conducting your survey — to ensure the best (and most accurate) response that is feasible. After all, if you're basing important decisions on the results, you'll want to have the best possible information on hand in order to do so.



Incentives, anyone?

Publishers can be quite creative when it comes to incentives they use to entice readers to fill out surveys. The following ideas came from members of Association Media & Publishing.

- \$5 gift certificates to Starbucks
- Entry in a drawing for an iPod or other electronic gadget
- a case of wine
- Visa or AmEx gift cards
- \$1 in cash
- donations to the reader's charity of choice
- a free subscription to the magazine
- free registration to the industry's annual meeting

A shift in thinking

Having the proper mindset is very helpful when you're looking at any type of big picture issue for your publication. "The paradigm I always use with my clients is to tell them to forget about thinking about publications in terms of print vs. online," says William Dunkerley, owner of William Dunkerley Publishing Consultants. "It's better to view yourself as a brand, and then different aspects of your brand can be communicated to audiences using different channels.

"A lot of publications are replicating themselves online, which serves the reader in a certain way, but publications are better off delivering the various content they have by whichever channel is the most effective with the audience. The idea is not to create a separate identity for each channel, but blend them together to have them represent whatever your brand is."

Sample focus group questions

If you're looking for sample questions to use with your focus group, the questions below should give you a good place to start. Paul Bergeron, director of communications for the National Apartment Association, was kind enough to share this e-mail that he sent to his Communications Advisory Board, which meets three times per year. He sent the e-mail to let the group know the date of their next meeting. The subject line read: a quick simple survey about an electronic version of UNITS. What follows is the content of the e-mail:

CAB Members,

I wanted to remind you that the next CAB meeting is 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Fri. Nov. 13 at the AOD in Tampa. If you are definitely coming or definitely not coming, please let me know.

One thing we may consider discussing is the thought of providing an electronic version of UNITS magazine. There are MANY pros and cons to this idea. I have some thoughts, but wanted to ask you first. This is purely a discussion. NAA is not asking for a recommendation at this time.

Please offer your thoughts and answers to these questions:

1. Do you currently regularly read any magazines online?
2. Would you rather read UNITS online instead of its current printed version?
3. If you prefer getting it in print, do you think NAA should pay some cost to have an electronic version sent in addition to the print version?
4. If you prefer getting it in print, do you feel NAA should invest time and money over the next year to fully evaluate the option of sending it electronically with additional production cost involved?
5. What would your response be if you heard that a printed version of UNITS would no longer be mailed, but instead would ONLY be sent electronically?
6. Do you have any other thoughts in general?

Again, these questions are designed to simply spark a discussion. Please hit "reply to all" if you wish.

Best,
Paul Bergeron

Advice on survey size

by William Dunkerley

There really isn't a set formula to decide how large the sample size should be for a given survey. However, the examples below will give an indication of when smaller or larger sample sizes are appropriate. Quite honestly, I've seen many publishers who simply pick the largest sample size they can afford within their budget for the survey. That method may have no theoretical correctness, but it is often a practical reality.

The first case study involved an editor who wanted to know how readers felt about all the individual articles that she was publishing. Her hobby magazine had a circulation of over 150,000. The questionnaire I developed listed all the articles in an issue, and asked the recipient to rate each one on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the best rating.

I also included the advertiser index on the list, because it changed very little from issue to issue, and there was no reason for readers to rate it differently month to month. Therefore, it served as an indicator of sample error.

I started by sending the questionnaire to a list of 300 readers randomly drawn from the 150,000. The response rate turned out to be about one-third every month. I found that indeed there was almost no variance in how readers rated the ad index from month to month. That told me that my sample size was large enough for this relatively simple survey. If there had been greater variance on the ad index question, I would have evaluated whether that much sample error was acceptable when viewing answers to the other questionnaire items. If it was not, I would have increased the sample size until I reached an acceptable level.

Our second case study concerns a publisher who wanted to collect demographic and psychographic information on readers. He wanted to use the data as a tool in advertising sales. Unlike the previous example, this survey design involved doing cross tabulations of answers received. In other words, the publisher wanted to know, for instance, for all readers who held the job title of ABC, how much money did they spend on buying XYZ products. And so forth.

An important consideration here is whether a slightly higher or lower number of responses would cause significant changes in the results. This magazine had a circulation of 6,000. I chose a sample size of 1,500. The response rate turned out to be about 25 percent. This was intended to be an annual survey.

For the first time around, I did what's called a split-half test. That means I divided the responses randomly into two groups. Then, I compared variances in answers to questions between the two groups. The degree of agreement between the two halves gave me confidence that sample size and response rate were adequate. We continued with the 1,500 sample size in subsequent years.

William Dunkerley is the owner of William Dunkerley Publishing Consultants, which provides business consulting services to the publishing field. His company has a sister Web site that provides free publishing expertise for those in the field. The address is www.pubbies.com.



One on one

JPA profile: Matt Simkulet, customer service rep

Number of years with JPA: 6 (15 years in the printing industry)

Why he loves JPA: “JPA has given me many opportunities to expand my knowledge of the printing profession. Since starting with JPA in 2004 as a prepress employee, I have had several chances to branch out into other areas. I regularly talk customers through the process of uploading and approving pages in Portal. In addition, I am now crossing into customer service, and I really enjoy the daily communication with customers.”



◀ Katie and Matt
Jacob ▼



Family life: “Katie and I were married in May of 2008, and our son Jacob was born in March of 2009.”

Hobbies: “My sister’s family recently introduced Katie and me to ‘geocaching,’ and we look forward to Jacob getting into it soon as well. Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunting game played throughout the world by adventure seekers equipped with GPS devices. The basic idea is to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, and then share your experiences online. People from all age groups play the game.

“We have not found too many geocaches yet, but it is fun to look for them and to see how they are hidden and what is inside of them. We head out almost every weekend to search, and we always have a great time looking for them together.”

One cool fact: “A former boss of mine is a retired U.S. Marine, and he had jumped out of many planes while in the service. One day he was reminiscing, and he was trying to coax his employees into going out and jumping with him. I was the only one that took him up on it. Scooting up to the open door of the airplane and letting go was the most terrifying part, but after the free fall started, I had a blast the entire way down. It was one of the most exciting moments of my life, and I can’t wait to do it again someday.” 📷



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RECIPE

PB & J Smoothie

- 1 cup frozen bananas
- 1 cup yogurt
- 1 cup skim milk
- 1/3 cup peanut butter
- 1 Tbsp. jelly

Put all ingredients into in a blender (bananas first). Blend, then enjoy!

Tip: Do not fall to the temptation to use fresh bananas. It’s easy to freeze them and the flavor is 1 million times better. Simply chop a few bananas into super thin slices and put them in the freezer (in a proper container). Thaw the bananas about 10 minutes before you’re ready to make it; even commercial blenders are not fond of chopping frozen bananas.

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