

# PRINTING MATTERS

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## READER SURVEYS

### Are you in touch with your readers?



You know what your readers want, right?

Not so fast. When was the last time you actually asked for their input?

The notion of conducting a reader survey is daunting for most publishers simply due to the time constraints that are inherent in publishing a magazine. But we're here to gently urge you to reconsider. Reader surveys provide invaluable information in a time when keeping readers' interest is increasingly paramount.

It's easy for publishers to fall into a lull of thinking they're still relevant to readers, but it's best to be sure, says Mike Albrecht, chief development officer and senior vice president of account services for Houston-based Love Advertising. "What you think customers want to hear is just that, what you think," he said.

#### First steps

The ideal approach to conducting a survey is hiring a professional, but that option is not realistic for most publishers. That said, don't be intimidated by the process of conducting the survey yourself. There are several good online options available, such as Survey Monkey and Survey Gizmo. And you probably already have a good email list for your subscribers, so distribution would be easy.

When you're sitting down to create your survey, a good first step is to spend some time figuring out what you want to know and why, said Betsy Gelb, a marketing professor in the Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston. "I'm big on asking people what you want to know."



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And when you're crafting your questions, ask what you need to know and stop there. "You want to tell people, 'This will take no more than five minutes of your time,'" Gelb said. "Then make sure it does. You don't ask stuff because it's interesting. People ask way too much, and they cut their response rate way down. If you ask yourself why do I need to ask this, and you don't have an answer, kill it."

Albrecht recommends simple, well-worded questions as well. "Don't ask leading questions," he said. "Try to use plain language that anyone could understand, and don't use industry jargon."

Surveys can be particularly helpful for getting input on prospective changes, Gelb said. "It could be any kind of change you are contemplating," she said. "Or maybe you have the feeling you aren't contemplating a change, and you need to check in with your readers."

If you have a specific change in mind, ask about it. If you don't, Gelb suggests asking, "If you could make one change in what we do, what would it be?" and "If there's one thing you want to remain the same, what is it?" Organizations making changes sometimes learn too late that they've tampered with something clients liked just the way it was.

If you are able to present readers a clear, concise survey and make it clear their input really meets a need, you have a good chance of getting the types of responses that can really help your organization, Gelb said.

When Love Advertising develops surveys for clients, it tries to include as many close-ended questions as possible. So instead of asking respondents to describe your new Web site's usability in a few sentences, ask them to rank it on a scale of 1 to 5. "Make sure what you've designed is measurable," Albrecht says. "You want to be able to say a certain percentage of answers said your Web site is strong. Then you can complete a report or executive summary."

### Keep it real

Once your survey is ready, devote some time to how you're going to present it to prospective respondents. Try to avoid what Gelb calls "cookie cutter" language in your appeal. Instead, think about what you would say if you were asking someone to help you face to face. "If you're saying, 'I wish we could sit down and have coffee and I could ask you a question or two, but this is the best I could do,' not everyone will answer, but you're much more likely to get responses," Gelb said.

It's a common practice these days to offer people rewards for completing


surveys, but that isn't an absolute requirement. "You can try to appeal to people's sense of loyalty to the product and the fact it will benefit them in the long run," Albrecht said. "Depending on the number of answers you need, you don't necessarily need to give anything away. If you keep it short and easy to read, you should be able to get a response that's meaningful."

You will also want to do a test run before distribution. "Absolutely, pre-test your survey," Gelb said. "I don't care how simple you think it is." Send it to a handful of folks in your industry whom you trust.

After your volunteers complete the survey, review it with them one question at a time. Make sure they understood what you meant to ask.

Essentially, Gelb said, the key underlying message you want to convey through your survey questions and presentation is the fact that you actually care about people's responses.

"You're saying, 'We're not going to waste your time,'" Gelb said. "'We're really going to take your answers into account.'"

Ultimately, conducting a survey does require a bit of your time, which we know is precious. However, knowing that you're on track with your readers makes the investment well worth it. 

# One on one

**JPA profile:** Sami Cortez, accounting and human resources assistant

**Number of years with JPA:** 1 ½ years

**Why she loves JPA:** "I enjoy how nice everyone is. When you start at a new place, you worry about getting along with people. Luckily, everyone here was very warm and welcoming."



Merry Christmas from Alexis, Dan and Sami




Left to right: Alexis, Dan, Sami, Nancy, Alfred, Daniel, Philip, Amanda

**Family life:** Cortez and her boyfriend, Dan Legner, have been together for five years. Their daughter, Alexis, will turn 4 in January. A preschool student, Alexis loves reading, coloring and learning. "She's just very outgoing and funny," Cortez said. "She cracks us up." One of Cortez's favorite times of the day is bedtime, when she sings a lullaby for Alexis. "It's always 'Hush Little Baby,'" Cortez said. When she and Legner have time, they like hunting,

shooting clay pigeons and hanging out with friends or enjoying a quiet night cooking dinner together.

**Hobbies:** Finding time for hobbies is a challenge these days for Cortez, who is juggling her full-time job with mommy duties and part-time studies at Heartland Community College. After completing her associate's degree in business, Cortez plans to earn a bachelor's degree in accounting. "I feel like it's taking forever," Cortez said. "I'm just trying to make my daughter proud. I want to show her you can do whatever you put your mind to." When Cortez does have free time, she said, she loves to read. "I would like to get into gardening one day," she added.

**One cool fact:** Most of Cortez's family members on her father's side live in Mexico and southern Texas. When she was growing up, it was a tradition every other Christmas to drive to Mexico for family visits with her parents and siblings. "It was nice to get away from the winter," Cortez said. There also was the opportunity to eat her grandmother's homemade flour tortillas. "They're amazing. Just spending time with my grandma was nice. And every New Year's Eve we would have firecrackers. It's still hard being away from them." Cortez, 25, is the oldest sibling in her family. The others are Amanda, 23; Daniel, 19; and Phillip, 17. 



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## RECIPE

### Perfect Oreo Dessert

- 1 package of Oreos (flavor of your choice)
- ½ stick of butter, melted
- 1 8-ounce package of cream cheese, softened
- 1 small package of vanilla instant pudding
- 1 8-ounce container of Cool Whip
- 3 cups of milk
- 1 cup of sugar

Crush the Oreos in a 9x13 inch pan, saving a few for the topping. Pour the melted butter over the Oreos. Mix together the pudding mix, milk, cream cheese and sugar. Fold in the Cool Whip. Spread the mixture over the Oreos. Sprinkle the remaining crushed Oreos on top. Chill before serving.

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