

Conserve your resources

Manufacturers and providers of advanced technology products and services need to stay up to date with the current desires of a constantly changing marketplace. To do so they conduct thousands of surveys with IT professionals. These individuals comprise a critical research target, with the purchasing authority and servicing responsibility of computer hardware and software, servers, wireless communications, handhelds and other technologies utilized in businesses of all sizes. Because the online surveys they are asked to complete gather data that heavily influences next-generation designs for the technologies under their jurisdiction, IT professionals have a vested interest in participating. However, because they are relatively small and frequently-contacted group, it is important for marketers to consider factors that will encourage survey participation when designing online Web surveys.

Important considerations to ensure respondent participation include a clearly-written and -presented survey, short length (under 20 minutes is preferred), completion flexibility and a generous incentive. Online surveys allow the respondent to read and digest all questions quickly, and perhaps most importantly, give this crucial respondent set the flexibility to complete the survey according to their own schedule, not the interviewer's.

Use of this method can in turn offer the project sponsor a decrease in research cost and timing, and an increase in survey response rates.

Online method offers flexibility

A study conducted by my firm uncovered that more than 98 percent of IT managers working in large companies (more than

500 employees) were asked to participate in a market research survey within the previous year. Additionally, the majority of respondents were asked to participate on more than five occasions. On average, respondents were invited to participate in surveys eight times. With stats like these, it's clear that if researchers wish to gain participation from this heavily surveyed group, offering flexibility is key.

Reaching IT professionals through online surveys



By Ron Weidemann II

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Advanced technology industries are extremely thirsty for information on changing perceptions and needs and it is not surprising that so much research is taking place among this very powerful group. For researchers, it is very important to understand the demands placed on this group of busy professionals. We need to provide them with appropriate rewards, information and incentives to gain their cooperation. Using an online method, IT respondents can complete a survey as their busy schedules permit. Frequent monitoring of our survey completion logbooks shows that respondents to online surveys work on the survey at all hours of the day and night.

Using an online panel

One of the most efficient methods of garnering ongoing survey participation from the IT professional is through online panel creation. A panel can offer benefits to the researcher and panel member since it can offer a survey control and consistency for both groups. Panel membership offers the participant the opportunity to contribute to a set number of studies per set time frame, usually a year. Respondents have the convenience of completing studies on their own time and typically receive an incentive for each completed survey. The main benefit of a panel to researchers is that a large group of cooperative respondents matching your criteria is in one database. This provides a more cost-efficient sample because a higher percent of the people who receive the survey will qualify and they will be more likely to take the survey than people who did not opt-in to a panel.

Incentives

As marketers and research professionals, we must be aware of the ever-increasing number of

requests to participate in studies among the IT manager sample set. To show appreciation for participation in market research surveys, and to encourage a willingness to participate in future studies, it is imperative that an incentive be delivered immediately following survey completion. The good news is that a standard incentive for online surveys is smaller than that for other methodologies. This is because the incentive must match the inconvenience placed on a respondent to participate in the research. In cases where a respondent must travel to a central recruit facility or set aside a block of time for a scheduled or impromptu telephone interview, a larger incentive is usually paid. A short online survey that can be completed at the respondent's leisure requires a lower incentive.

Adding a qualitative element

Quantitative surveys can provide a more complete picture of an IT manager's viewpoint when a qualitative element is added. By asking an open-ended question, researchers can supplement quantitative research and learn why IT managers feel a certain way. A hypothetical example would be to add an open-ended question asking why the color black was the most preferred color for a hard drive. The reasons given could be used when messaging a product's image.

There are some caveats. Using open-ended questions in an online survey does not provide the depth that other qualitative research provides. Online surveys do not have a person available to probe and delve deeply into why an IT manager thinks the way they do. Too many open-ended questions can irritate respondents. Open-ended questions require more effort to answer than closed-ended questions. When respondents take a survey

they expect the experience to be simple. If too many open-ended questions are included, some respondents will refuse to answer them.

Applications of online surveys

Initially, the online mode was only appropriate for straightforward surveys. Advances in technology have enabled the execution of complex studies such as discrete choice modeling and conjoint to move from a central-location recruit or a telephone/mail combination to online computers. This has dramatically reduced the cost and shortened the time frame for these types of studies. Now that broadband has reached the desktops of IT professionals at companies of all sizes, even more research has migrated online. Higher bandwidth has enabled companies to show detailed, high-resolution photos of products when doing preference studies. In fact, high-resolution video has been incorporated into the surveys, offering the ability to see all sides of a product or how the product operates.

Make it convenient

As manufacturers and marketers strive to design products that match client needs, input from today's advanced technology decision makers is critical. To reach this heavily surveyed population, researchers must make the interviewing process convenient for the IT professional participant. By using Internet surveys among this group, marketers serve both the respondent and the research sponsor. Online Web surveys can provide the researcher with timely data collection, lower overall project cost and increased data viability. With this kind of win-win scenario, marketers are wise to take advantage of an online approach. | Q