

Response Rates & Surveying Techniques

Tips to Enhance Survey Respondent Participation

SURVEYMONKEY

What are Response Rates?

Sufficient response rates are important for surveys. A survey that collects very little data may not contain substantial information. In order to collect successful responses, researchers must take into consideration the audience, the quantity of online surveys in circulation, and the potential for surveys reported as spam. These factors may result in lower respondent interest and acceptance of survey invitations. But there are ways to increase response rates!

The percentage of people who respond to your survey is considered the response rate. A high survey response rate helps to ensure that the survey results are representative of the survey population. You can calculate the response rate for your survey using the following equation:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Complete Surveys}}{\text{Number of Participants Contacted}} = \text{Response Rate}$$

Let's say you contacted 100 people and 40 responded.

You would then have $40 / 100 = .4$.

Multiply .4 by 100% to get a 40% response rate for your survey.

How to Collect Acceptable Response Rates:

To determine acceptable response rates based on the way you are administering your survey, you must consider the survey design and the invitation or message announcing the survey:

A. Survey Design & Analysis Considerations:

1. **The Purpose of the Research** - Think about the goal of the survey and what you want to accomplish. How will you then use the data collected?
2. **Relationship to Respondents & Pre-Notification** - The better you know your respondents, the more likely you will have a higher response rate.
 - Possibly choose a smaller sample. Building a relationship with your respondents may make them more likely to respond.
 - Contact your respondents in advance. Let them know about the upcoming survey and the reason it is being conducted. Give your respondents the option to opt out of the survey before creating your recipient list.

3. **Survey Topic** - Create a survey that asks the right questions to meet the objective, thus providing end data that is useful.
 - Will your audience have an interest in the topic (student survey, employee survey, product experience survey, etc.)?
 - Are your questions interesting and do they keep the attention of your audience?
4. **Survey Design** - Keep the questions short and concise. Create a logical flow throughout.
 - Outline the intent of the survey in the introduction. Surveys with a high perceived importance achieve much higher response rates.
 - View our [Smart Survey Design Guide](#) for more even more design tips!
5. **Pilot Test** - Test the survey with a smaller group before sending it out to your final audience.
 - Use different web browsers to see how each handles the survey. Different browsers may show the pages differently. Also, use different computers. Macs and PCs may show the same page in different ways.

B. Email Invitation Considerations:

1. **Consider Message Content** - The invitation message is what your respondents will see first. Upon their initial glance of the invitation, recipients could send it directly to SPAM if you ignore these important tips:
 - **Avoid SPAM:** Do not use spam language in the message.
 - Include your contact information, how you got the email address, the survey intention, what you will do with the data, if it is anonymous, etc.
 - Personalize the message. Include the [name of your respondents](#) in the body.
 - Do not use SPAM language in the subject title like all caps, money symbols, etc.
 - Use a professional reply email address.
 - Indicate how long the survey takes to complete and indicate the cutoff date.
2. **Do Not Send Unsolicited Emails** - Never send your surveys [unsolicited](#) to current or past emails. Never use purchased lists.
 - All respondents must opt in to receive survey invitations.
 - In addition, you must provide a way for anyone to opt out and clean all lists to reflect only opted in and current emails.
3. **Use Only Clean and Updated Lists** - All emails must be valid and current within the past couple of years. If respondents opt out of future communication, clean all your lists.
4. **Timing and Delivery of Invitation** - Consider the availability of your recipients. Avoid busy periods and allow your respondents enough time to complete the survey.

- **Professionals:** If your audience is mostly working professionals, then you may want to avoid sending surveys Friday, Saturday, or Sunday. In addition, Mondays are good to avoid as many people have work to get started for the week and emails to catch up or clean out their in-boxes.
- **Students:** Students tend to have a different usage pattern for emails. Try scheduling a message Monday afternoon, with reminders to non-responders on Thursday morning and again on Saturday afternoon. Also, consider student holidays and activities like football games and schedule around those.

5. **Schedule Reminders** - Following up with reminder emails may help the response rate. Try setting the reminders at least a couple of days apart.

6. **Offer Incentives** - Offer incentives that reach your target audience. Do not offer anything you cannot deliver. If it is a younger audience (students), maybe an electronic game or iPod prize may be beneficial. If it is an older audience (employee, customers, etc.), a monetary gift or coupon may benefit more.

Survey Design Service:

If you are unsure about creating online surveys, you can send us a paper draft of your questions. We can quote you a price for creating the survey for you. With our design service, we can translate your paper version into an online format using the design principles discussed in our Best Practices Guide. Please email your requests to surveydesign@surveymonkey.com.

References:

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