

# Elements of a good survey

## Something for everyone

Most surveys designed by non-professionals make a few key mistakes. The most prevalent error is to distribute a survey that is only really appropriate to people who have used a product or are involved in an activity. You lose a great chance to ask non-customers or non-aligned people their views on a product or subject when you fail to have at least a portion of the survey applicable to just about anyone.

So a survey could begin with the question "Have you ever used this product or heard of it?" For the answer, "Have used," respondent can answer a few questions about satisfaction with the product and go on to answer all subsequent sections. For the answer, "Have only heard," respondent should be given questions about his/her attitude toward the product. If the respondent answers, "Haven't even heard," he/she can still answer questions about attitudes toward the product category or topic in general.

Example:

Have you ever used or heard of "Crest Total Care Toothpaste"?

- I have used this product – please answer all questions (Sections A, B & C)
- I have heard of this product – please answer questions in sections B & C
- I have never heard of the product – please answer only questions in section C

## Other points to keep in mind

- Is the survey easy and attractive? People like to be asked their opinion, but once asked, don't like to be made to feel foolish or to be confused. A grungy, messy survey will make your respondents feel as if you're wasting their time, which is a gift from them to you.
- Instructions and questions should be clear and short.
- Are the questions specific? Each question should ask only one question. In the above example, asking, "How would you rate the taste and consistency of Crest Total Care?" is actually two questions. Separate them.
- Are the questions self-contained: i.e., they do not assume an unstated answer. For example, "How do your children like the taste of Crest Total Care," assumes that the respondent has kids.
- Scales should allow for a good range of answers: If you ask people to rate something, don't give them only three or four choices. Minimum should be five. Seven is good, ten is better.
- No useless questions: Unless you are examining responses in relation to a particular demographic, don't ask demographic questions about age, gender, marital status, etc
- Ask at least one "probing" question: Getting data on the areas you're interested in is very important. Finding new areas of interest can be incredibly important. Don't assume you know more than the customers or public you're interviewing. Ask at least one question that goes well beyond what you believe are the bounds and purposes of this survey. Examples:
  - If you could change one thing about this product, what would you change?
  - What is your least favorite thing about this product?
  - Under what circumstance would you give this product as a gift?
  - What celebrity endorsement would make you never use this product again?
  - If this product were an animal, what would it be and why?