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Maximizing Response Rates to Web-Based Surveys: Practical Strategies from the Field

The Situation

<i>Study</i>	<i>Mailed Response Rate</i>	<i>Email/Web Response Rate</i>
Birnholtz, Horn, Finholt, & Bae (2003)		43% with prepayment incentive 36% without prepayment incentive
Calder, Balasubramanian, & Stiell (2004)		64%
Cobanoglu, Warde, & Moreo (2001)	26.27 17.0 (fax)	44.21
Crawford et al. (2001)		34.5%
Crutcher, Banner, Szafran, & Watanabe (2003)		70.3%
Fahy (1998)	34% (U.S.A.), 44% (UK), 65% (Ireland)	
Guterbock, Meekins, Weaver, & Fries (2000)	48%	37%
Hartley (2004)		79%
Heerwegh, Vanhove, Matthijs & Loosveldt (2005)		49.1 (without personalization) 57.7% (with personalization)
Jones & Pitt (1999)	72%	34% E-mail alone 19% Web
Kassebaum, Hendricson, Taft, & Haden (2004)		87%
Kwak & Radler (2000)	42%	27%
Leece (2004)	58%	45%
Medlin, Roy, & Chai (1999)	47%	27%
Mohammad, Preshaw, & Ettinger (2003)		100%
Moss & Hendry (2002)		64%, 46%, 15%
Nainar & Redford-Badwal (2002)	73%	
Ranchod & Zhou (2001)	20%	6%
Shannon & Bradshaw (2002)	44%	22%
Sheehan (2001)		Falling from 61.5 % (1986) to 24% (2000)
Treadwell, Soetikno, & Lenert (1999)		28% 48%
Valaitis, Akhtar-Danesh, Kealey, Brunetti, & Thomas (2005)		69.4%
Zehnder, Bruppacher, Ruppanner, & Hersberger (2004)		58%

The Question

How can survey designers optimize the response rates they obtain in their web-based surveys?

Its Significance

HPT practitioners can benefit from the application of this proven web-based survey approach in their own needs assessment, evaluation, and other feedback efforts. The end result is better information to decision-makers and evaluation stakeholders.

Our Approach

- Literature Review.
- Design and administration of subsequent online surveys involving:
 - Matching evaluation approach to needs of decision-makers.
 - Guaranteeing anonymity.
 - Characteristics that facilitate adoption of new innovations.
 - Adequate time to respond.
 - Ensuring survey can be completed on company time.
 - Dynamic surveys.
 - Pilot tests to determine response time and item quality.
 - Emailing personalized survey invitations and reminders, placing follow-up phone calls.
 - Obtaining high-level survey sponsors and visible participation of opinion leaders.
 - Disseminating findings and recommendations.
 - Implementing results.
- Assessing subsequent response rates.

Our Results

Obtained survey responses above 90 percent.

Conclusions

Web-based survey response rates improve when:

- Participants can complete the surveys quickly and easily.
- Participants receive adequate reminders.
- The survey effort receives adequate sponsorship.
- Survey results are confidential and anonymous.
- Participants know the results of the survey will benefit them.

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