



Tips Offer Better Response Rates, Engaging Surveys

By Peter Mackey, Invoke Solutions and
Keith Price, Greenfield Online

You've heard this before: the Internet has, of course, changed the world as we know it. We now expect everything to be in broadband speed and at our convenience. But beyond speed and convenience, we are also now accustomed to everything in the Internet world being a rich, entertaining experience that is increasingly interactive. Market research online is no different.

Today's online survey respondents have less patience for long and laborious text-based surveys and are looking for a more interactive research experience. This was just one finding from a recent research study conducted by Greenfield Online and Invoke Solutions that took a deeper look at respondent motivation and satisfaction. The results provide some clear insights towards solving the industry problem of respondent cooperation.

Reasons respondents participate

The study was conducted using Invoke's live researching platform with 200 Greenfield Online respondents.

Study findings showed that respondents participate in research for reasons that go way beyond merely receiving an incentive for the task. In fact, equally important is being able to voice their opinions about products and services to marketers. Study highlights include:

- 35% say the primary motivator of joining a market research panel was being able to voice opinions about products and services
- 37% say that having an impact on companies' decisions is what they enjoy most about belonging to a panel
- The opportunity to have an impact is ranked nearly as high as the incentives as reasons to participate in research

- 70% say they earn less than \$25 per month participating in research alike.
- 74% say they participate in research for the chance to be heard, to have an impact, or to influence the decisions of companies
- Acquiring knowledge about new products/services is another significant motivator for participants.

Causes for poor participation

Another interesting finding relates to participation. Market researchers often wonder why respondents choose not to participate or drop out of studies mid-stream. Several factors cause non-participation or drop off. A major factor is the length of the survey itself.

Another reason for drop off, is miscommunication upfront to the participant of the amount of time required to complete the survey. For example, do you remember the last time you gave your name to the hostess at your favorite restaurant and were told the wait would be 15-20 minutes – only to find it was actually 45 minutes before you sat down? Wouldn't you rather have been told up front that it would take that long? Good participation comes from setting the appropriate expectations.

Experience has also shown that it is helpful to give respondents a progress report along the way so they know they are 20%, 50% or 70% completed. Managing the survey taker's expectations is a key driver of improving respondent cooperation and minimizing drop-off.

That is a loose definition for a variety of things that respondents find vexing, including repetitive questions, irrelevant questions, boring or uninteresting topics, questions or answer choices to name a few.

more...

While the resulting data may be very important to the researcher; the reality is that an online survey with multiple screens of questions with attribute tables and check boxes is a sure fire way to bore the respondent and increase the risk of drop-off.

Study reveals respondents like interactivity

The study clearly underlined the fact that we are increasingly competing for respondents' leisure time. And since many are spending an increasing amount of time online, this means that that you're competing for their online attention in an Internet world that is increasing interactive and content-rich. With so many distractions, a survey needs to hold their attention and engage them to stay the whole course.

Recommendations for researchers

So what does this all mean for the marketing research community? It means, of course, what you've been hearing from every corner of the industry lately – that the respondent experience is paramount. Recently, entire conferences have been dedicated to the subject, so it is no doubt top of mind for marketers at the major brands and at marketing research companies alike.

We believe that the more engaged a respondent, the better quality insights they will provide to researchers and their clients. We also believe that the nature of the online medium presents a unique opportunity to connect with respondents and provide a rich, enjoyable experience.

In summary, we recommend the following to improve response rates and ensure your surveys are more engaging, interesting and respectful of respondents' time:

- Use language that is less “research-ese” and more conversational
- Be honest and up front about the time required to complete a study
- Provide more opportunities for participants to provide open-ended answers and truly express themselves
- Ensure that all possible answer choices are given; avoid over-use of “other”

- Keep survey to less than 20 minutes in length and provide participants with progress information as they advance through the survey
- Consider using graphics when possible/appropriate to make the experience more visually engaging
- Explore new ways to facilitate interaction between respondents and/or a researcher
- Make studies more informative – participants are particularly motivated by acquiring new knowledge/i information about a product or topic.
- Offer participants the opportunity to be re-contacted to receive updated on projects of products being tested.

The Internet has become an interactive entertainment medium. The marketing research world has yet to fully take advantage of all that the Internet has to offer to excite, entertain and entice the respondent community to keep coming back to give their opinions.

Peter Mackey is vice president of research and business development for Stamford, Connecticut-based Invoke Solutions Inc, a provider of realtime research platforms, and Keith Price is executive vice president of North American sales and operations for Wilton, CT-based Greenfield Online, Inc., a provider of online data collection needs for research companies.

For more information go to <http://www.invoke.com> or <http://www.greenfield.com>.