Build a Better Survey

Develop surveys that really tell you something about your users

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Agenda

Define the purpose of the survey

Develop survey questions

Select appropriate dissemination methods
General purposes of surveys

*Self-reported trends* that cannot be monitored through other systems

- Attitudes, feelings, and preferences
- Accounts of past behavior
- Predictions of future behavior
- Dimensions of personality
Can I answer this question with a survey?
Good or bad?

How many books did you check out last year?
Good or bad?

Are the library’s new chairs comfortable?
Good or bad?

In your opinion, are the library’s hours convenient?
Purpose: Key considerations

- What do you want to know about your users?
- Will self-reported data answer your question?
- Are you satisfied with quantitative data?
- When is enough enough?
Finding a focus
We wanted to know about communication

How do you prefer to receive communications about library services and tools? *Rank these methods with 1 being most preferable and six being least preferable.*

- Email: 1
- Library website: 2
- Twitter: 3
- Facebook: 4
- Flyers: 5
- Plasma Displays in lobby: 6
What do you want to know?
Will self-reported data do?

- Surveys
- Feedback forms
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Diaries
Alternatives to self-reported data

- Usage statistics
- Circulation data
- Gate counts
- Observational studies (e.g., mapping)
Quantitative and Qualitative results

- Numbers v. individual perspectives
- What kind of results will help you make a decision?
- How much time do you have for analysis?

Thinking back to the last time you visited the library, how could your experience have been improved?
Will quantitative data do?

When you're in the library, how satisfied are you with the following?

- Access to Electrical Outlets
- Space for Quiet Study
- Space for Group Projects

Categories: Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Neutral, Satisfied, Very Satisfied
Concerns with instructional surveys

- Is a self-reported account of learning the best way to gather this information?
- Is the instrument aligned with the curriculum?
- Is the survey well timed?
Questions about purpose
Developing survey questions
Avoiding question creep
What can our users tell us?

- What they do
- What they think
- What they want
- What they feel
“Do” questions

- Frequency/Duration
- Yes/no – can lead to a think question
“Think” questions

- Ranking
- Scale measurement
- Open ended
- (Yes/no)
Problems with scales

Good          Neutral          Bad

Least Likely  Most Likely

Most Likely   Least Likely
“Want” questions

- Rank options
- Open-ended (user generated ideas)
- (Yes/no)
“Feel” questions

- Verbal scales
Suggestions for verbal scales

Offer a full range of options:

- Depressing
- Friendly
- Relaxed
- Serious
- Tense
- Tranquil
- Uncomfortable
- Upbeat

- Stimulating
- Friendly
- Relaxed
- Casual
- Tense
- Tranquil
- Uncomfortable
- Upbeat
Survey Distribution
Align distribution method with survey purpose
Distribution methods

Online surveys
- Emailed
- Linked

In-person
- Interviews
- Point of contact (e.g., Circulation Desk)
Sample Size if You’re Not a Statistician

- Probability vs. Non-Probability Sampling
- Trial and error
What’s best for you?
Incentives
It doesn’t take much...
Marketing

- Email reminders
- Social media
- Strategically place flyers
- Announcements on blogs, websites, etc.
Wrapping Up

- What’s your big question?
- Who do you need to ask?
- How will you ask the question?
- How will your respondents receive the question?
Thank you!

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