

Hearing From the People: Designing Effective User Surveys

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Do online or paper surveys give better response rates? Do rewards and inducements for responding to surveys really work? What colour paper works best? How many follow ups should there be?

Librarians regularly conduct user surveys to obtain information to be used to inform decision making about library services. Obtaining a good response rate is important as a high response rate gives greater external validity to the survey results and therefore gives greater confidence that the decisions about services are based on the best possible information.

This paper presents the results of a systematic review of over 50 reports of user surveys carried out in medical libraries over the past 10 years and reported in the library literature. The review analysed the reported surveys to discover the secrets to designing effective library user surveys. It gives practical advice about how to design and administer user surveys to obtain the best possible response rate. The session is particularly relevant to medical librarians but also of interest to anyone in libraries who intends to use survey research to hear from the people using their services.