

Hearing from the people: Effective survey design

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Outline

- Why bother?
- How?
- What I found
- Reporting guidelines
- What works?
- What else can we do?

“Survey research is sometimes regarded as an easy research approach. However as with any other research approach and method it is easy to conduct a survey of poor quality rather than one of high quality and real value”

(Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003 p. 261)

Why bother?

- Moving away from traditional input/output measurement of service
- Want to know what users think
- Evidence based practice – practicing what we’re preaching
- Effective use of resources

Why bother?

- High response rates are a safeguard against low generalisability.
- Poor response rates = uncertainty or bias
- What is an acceptable response rate?

How?

- Used a systematic review methodology
- Good level of evidence
- Reproducible
- Identified 54 studies (1998-2008)
- Excluded LibQUAL

What I found

- The quality of the majority of the surveys was not clear as the reporting of the methodology of the user surveys was poor.
- 8 studies didn't report the survey format.
- 42 reported response rates.
- Paper format surveys reported higher response rates than online-only surveys.

What I found

- How many reported response rates of over 60%?
- 13 results from 12 studies
- All were print format
- Used pre-testing
- Used cover letters

What I found

- Majority were academic medical libraries
- All had fewer than 30 questions
- Only one reported offering an incentive

Response rates by format

Response rates by format	No. of studies reporting response rates	Average response rate %
Print format	27	53.5%
Online	12	25.5%
Print and online	3	Not calculated

The quality of reporting survey research in the library literature is crucial to the development of the evidence base on which to base decisions and it is “only with sufficient detail and transparent reporting of the survey’s methods and results can readers appraise the survey’s validity” (Burns et al. p. 251).

Reporting guidelines

Development of “Reporting Survey Results Guidelines” (Resurge) was informed by the literature review and results of this study.

It has not been validated beyond this study.

Reporting guidelines

- Preparation (aim, context, ethics)
- Method (design, pre-testing, pre-notification, sampling)
- Administration (format, data collection, distribution, return, incentives, time frame, follow up, cover letter, colour of paper, can answers be edited, questions)
- Results (response rates, data analysis)
- Discussion (conclusions, limitations)

What works?

- Pre-notification
- Personalised cover letters
- Shorter questionnaires
- Print format surveys have better response rates than online surveys
- Incentives offered at the time of the survey can increase responses
- Smaller effect colour paper, booklet

What else can we do?

User surveys in libraries are a potential source of good evidence and can add to the body of knowledge but only if they are well designed and well reported.