

Web Survey Technology: Do you *really* know what your customers think about you???

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When was the last time you asked all of your customers the following questions:

- 1) If new requirements regarding the products we offer came up in the future, would we be the company you call first? (This finds out if this “client” is even still a client.)
- 2) Would you freely recommend us to your associates and peers if they were seeking a similar solution?
- 3) On a scale of 1-5 how do you rate the people that deliver services to your organization?
- 4) On a scale of 1-5 how do you rate the experience you had with our sales organization?
- 5) How satisfied are you with our organization (1-5) scale.

These and many more questions should be asked of your new and existing customers on a regular basis. At least quarterly you should survey them. If they are truly active customers you will be surprised at the percentage that responds. It only takes a relative small percentage to get a statistically accurate sampling to base business decisions on.

Are you considering adding a new product or service to your offering? Are you guessing that your customers and prospects would want or use it. How about actually asking them interactively in a way that would be easy and enjoyable. The data gathered might help prevent you from making an expensive mistake or allow you to realize you are on to a large opportunity.

What is your true employee satisfaction? Most won't tell you face to face, but given an anonymous way to fill out feedback is a great way to take the pulse of the company.

Many of you may have sent out surveys in the past, but often it is a one time event that is not repeated on a regularly scheduled basis to ensure continued and up to date data.

Just through this regular communication that shows you care, you can significantly increase the “top of mind” your clients have of your company. Far too many of your competitors focus too much on new customers, to the neglect of existing ones. The old saying that it is far more expensive to generate revenue from new customers rather than existing ones is still true. Don't be blindsided when a client switches to a competitor because you had no clue about their dissatisfaction.

How to do it.

Many methods exist to survey a group of people. This article does not cover the process of calling each one individually and asking them questions. Although this is a valuable method, it is something that should be a responsibility of an integrated existing accounts sales force and methodology. This is part of the SDbT service offering and is critical to maximizing income and referrals from one of your most valuable assets, your clients.

We will cover five possible methods here that don't involve direct meetings or telephone calls. In order to maximize response rates we suggest you offer something such as entry into a drawing for a giveaway item or a coupon for X% off of their next bill. The survey should have the option of allowing the taker to respond anonymously as well as some do not want to feel intimidated by making negative statements. Remember, you want the truth here, not feel good answers.

Remember that the way a survey and it's questions are written, can directly affect the responses you get. There are many famous examples in history where political polls vary widely based on how a question is asked. Simple things such as the order of questions can have an impact on the response. Not asking the right follow up questions are also common mistakes.

Logical branching is another factor that can greatly simplify a survey and thus increase response rates. Logical branching is when follow up questions directly relate to the answer given previously. For example, you could have a question such as "Do you use the Sales Automation components of our software?" Based on the Yes or No answer, the survey could then provide specific questions regarding Sales Automation. If the respondent answered No, those questions wouldn't even be presented.

- 1) One method is to simply write up a survey using Microsoft Word or a similar text processor, print them out and mail them. Although it requires little technical expertise, it is clumsy, expensive, results in low responses, and requires manual intervention to compile and analyze the responses. No logical branching is practical with this method.
- 2) Another method is to prepare an email with the questions and send them to your customers. You don't have the effort and cost of printing and mailing, but again you still need to compile the results manually and it usually results in a low response. Many of you don't have the tools and expertise to build attractive HTML based emails that can easily be sent to large groups of users. Standard email products like Microsoft Outlook do not fit the bill for large group mailings and it provides poor tools for importing, manipulating, and deduping external lists of customer email data. Your other option is to just use plain text, but that will likely even have a lower response rate. No logical branching is practical with this method.
- 3) Similar to item 2, you or your webmaster could design an interactive form to ask the questions and capture the data via your web site. This method allows for you to save the results to a data file that can easily be manipulated in Excel or a more

sophisticated statistics package like SPSS. However, you could spend hundreds or even thousands on professional services to have the necessary web pages created using components like Java, active server pages, Front Page Extensions and the like if you want them to have a professional look and feel and for them to be interactive relative to field entry and data collection. Much of this cost would need to occur each time you wanted to create a new type of survey. You still need to then send an email to your recipients “pulling” them to your web site to fill it out. Many of these solutions do not verify if a participant is taking the survey more than once. Logical branching is possible, but would require extra development and cost that could be nearly as much as the entire base survey work.

- 4) You could use a hosted web survey company. There are many such out there. Just search Google for “web survey” and you will see. The prices and pricing models vary widely from less than \$1000/year to thousands/month. Most of these services offer pre-built templates for additional cost. Our personal observation is that the actual visual experience that a respondent sees varies from poor to OK. Some support logical branching, others do not. Few of the templates revolve around our industry.
- 5) **QUASK.** Quask is a hybrid product that can be purchased as a solution for your own web server, it can be purchased as a solution for Quask to host on their servers for a yearly fee, or you can simply hire SDbT to create the survey for you, transmit it to your recipient list, and present and discuss the results with you using the Quask product that we can host on our site.

What differentiates Quask from all other solutions we have seen is that rather than present traditional “boring” html forms to fill in, it actually creates a Macromedia Flash interactive movie. This gives you many benefits. They include:

- The ability to make the overall form very rich in terms of graphical and design elements without extensive HTML programming
- The form has unique “emoticons” which allow you to graphically slide levers and pullys with items such as thumbs up, smiley faces and the like. It is more intuitive than selecting a rating and makes using the forms “fun.” Fun means a higher response rate.
- The survey can be easily containerized. It can even be embedded in an email where as a traditional data posting HTML form with server side scripts cannot. The whole compiled survey is simply one small .swf file.
- Since the resulting survey is a Flash file, 98% of all web users already have the player installed. If they don’t a convenient automatic installing link is included. Most firewalls and antivirus programs allow Flash files to pass. If they don’t they can still click the link on the email that pulls them to the same form on your website.
- It has the ability to set “cookies.” This gives you the option of not allowing a survey to be filled out by the same person twice.

- Surveys can have interactive logical branching, sounds and video. If the person is asked whether they are ERP or CRM users, the remaining questions can be tailored to that audience without manually having to create and send multiple versions of the survey to filtered sets of users.
- Quask can be used for more than just surveys. We can set up attractive interactive forms to capture any type of data in any part of your web site. Capture registration data, newsletter signups, seminar registrations and the like. Once the form is created, by you or SDbT, it can be configured to stay there until removed versus expiring like a survey.

Quask takes an experienced technical person with web experience to properly setup and run it from your own server. Part of this reason is that it uses CGI, ASP, and Perl scripts depending on whether your server is Unix or Windows based, There are requirements for manually setting proper file and script permissions as well as the fact that many web hosting companies by default block the ability to send an email from a script which would make it difficult for you to be able to have the survey results automatically sent to you. If you pay Quask an annual hosting fee, you can overcome these server based technicalities but you still have the task of creating and scripting a survey that has a high likeliness of being responded to. This is an experience issue, not a technical one.

We have a sample survey created using Quask up on our website regarding a new web conferencing service we will soon be offering. Check it out at www.sdbt.com/survey.htm.

To find out how you can begin understanding your customers and employees better via interactive surveys, call or email us to discuss how we can help.