



Web vs. Telephone Surveys

Why an Online Survey Isn't Enough

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INTRODUCTION

School district administrators across the country have many things in common within their school systems. Often times school districts encounter similar situations such as tight budgets and reduced state funding. For example, most school administrators have had to put a proposal on an election ballot and then respond to the election results, whether or not the outcome was favorable.

In our experience as market researchers, administrators can relate to the issues and challenges that come about during the decision-making process involved in millage elections and compare it to the decision-making process involved in conducting research or selecting a consultant. After working with dozens of school districts, we have found that for any type of research project—such as surveys and strategic planning efforts—groups within the district such as staff members, parents, and the community all tend to play a role in the decision-making process.

With all the people involved, and all the questions that arise regarding the research expenditure; how does everyone get on the same page? What frequently tends to happen is that the superintendent and other administrative staff are interested in research and understand the benefits, but when the topic is brought to the board, there is commonly a disconnect that causes the board to question the costs of research and idea is turned down.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

So, what are these specific issues that tend to come up while discussing working with a consultant or conducting research? Habitually, one issue that arises is not having enough funds within the school district to pay for research expenses. Since many schools experience budget cuts, those who are on the administrative staff are weary about the financial costs to conduct research. Therefore, schools often turn to web-based surveys to conduct research instead of hiring a research consultant to handle their survey needs. However, even though cost is important to a school district, there are many disadvantages to conducting web-based surveys.

WEB-BASED SURVEYS

Web-based surveys may generate feedback quickly; but the quality of the results is not as accurate as school districts anticipate. Due to the nature of the survey, unqualified respondents can complete the survey (such as those outside the community), and respondents can complete the survey more than once. Some online surveys have preventative measures in place to prohibit respondents from taking the survey multiple times, but they aren't always effective. As a result, the information that school districts obtain from web-based surveys can be inaccurate and misleading to the school's efforts to address community concerns.

"Web-based surveys, though convenient and inexpensive, lack in one very important area: reliability."

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

Frequently, web-based surveys are administered online through e-mails or put on the school's website for respondents in the community to complete. Administering a survey through the Internet could reach a lot of people, but it leaves out those in the community who do not have access to the Internet or who choose not to use e-mail as a communication vehicle. It can also be difficult for the school district to gather e-mail addresses to distribute the survey or to persuade people in the community to complete the survey on their website if they do not have a vested interest in the school.

Another potential issue that may also arise, is that there are many people who delete their e-mails without even looking at the subject line because they fear it may be a virus or spam. Web-based surveys, though convenient and inexpensive, lack in one very important area: reliability.

TELEPHONE SURVEYS

Having research that is valid, reliable, and accurate is very important. Therefore, telephone surveys are the most trustworthy way of conducting surveys for research purposes. They are not completed as fast as web-based surveys, but they are more accurate and statistically representative of a community's population.

Questions for a telephone survey are carefully analyzed, prepared, and pre-tested. One of the key advantages to conducting a telephone survey is that a trained interviewer is talking to respondents and filling out the survey properly. This allows the interviewer to adjust questions accordingly to better fit the respondent's needs.

Our telephone surveys are conducted by well-trained individuals who can alter, add, and filter questions in accordance to the respondent if needed. Respondents have the chance to verbally give opinions about the topic they are asked about. In addition, only one respondent from the household can complete the survey. Therefore, the information obtained from a telephone survey is more representative of the entire community's population and is crucial when it comes to accurately conducting research for school districts.

CONCLUSION

ABOUT PERSPECTIVES

Perspectives Consulting Group, Inc. is dedicated to the mission of providing information and planning that make the difference. Our primary focus is meeting the market research and strategic planning needs of businesses, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, governmental agencies, religious organizations, and United Ways throughout the United States.

Perspectives Consulting Group, Inc. uses state-of-the-art market research techniques to obtain the information necessary to make efficient and effective decisions and plan for the future. Perspectives Consulting Group, Inc. offers a full-range of planning services including facilitated strategic planning, market assessment, and feasibility studies that are essential to succeed in today's marketplace.

Perspectives Consulting Group, Inc. was founded in 1987 by Gary M. Goscenski, Director of Consulting Services and Dr. Paul M. Lane, Senior Consultant and has two offices located in Michigan.

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Are telephone surveys worth the cost with an already-tight budget? Telephone surveys are an accurate source of information and can provide school districts with enough information to help address many problems within the community and school district. For this reason, telephone surveys are worth the cost because they can provide information and planning that will help improve the school district on a long-term basis.

Even though community feedback through e-mails, online surveys, and drop boxes might be effective for a quick assessment of a situation, those forms of feedback do not paint an accurate picture of the perceptions and opinions of the entire community. On those grounds, scientifically conducted research is very important because many school districts' desire for research comes from issues that have been present in the district for years. Information that can improve the community as a whole will be worth the extra cost if it is spent for accurate information.

Because telephone surveys hear from a representative sample in the community, the information is reliable. By hiring a consultant, the information gathered can be analyzed and presented to the district with both positive and negative assessments of the situation to help improve the district.

For more information about how Perspectives Consulting Group, Inc. can help your district with research and planning that make the difference, please visit our website www.perspec.com, or call (800) 724-9994. We will be happy to discuss how research can be beneficial to your school district.

