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Intelligent Measurement

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If you are thinking about commissioning a survey. . . .

1. **Define your objectives.** What is the purpose of the survey? How will you use the information generated? What key decisions will be taken on the basis of the data generated? What departments in the surveying organisation need to be involved? How will the results need to be tailored for different parts of the organisation?
2. **What is your audience?** How is it segmented, and are segment differences important? Are some questions inappropriate for some segments? (Examples of segments – age, location, years as a member, sport, level, occupation etc).
3. **Questionnaire.** This is a conversation between you and your audience. The objective is to engage them in things they are interested in, from which you can derive information and insights. Respondents should feel their participation has been valued. You can do this by not asking stupid, misleading, ambiguous or loaded questions, or not avoiding issues which you know might deliver embarrassing or negative answers. The elephant in the room.

Remember that over the course of the survey the respondent's overall opinion of the organisation can change as a result of the style and content of the questionnaire.

Avoid open ended questions. Anticipate likely responses and provide these as answer choices. Always include "Other-please specify" where the response list is not exhaustive.

Where necessary, you should consider **branching**. This would allow you to take Segment A down a different route to Segment B, or to avoid unnecessary or irrelevant questions.

Keep it as short as possible. Be rigorous in excluding the "nice to know" questions.

4. **Scales.** Avoid numerical scales, and too many points. Most researchers use a 5-point Likert Scale, with each point accurately describing the response attribute. Contrary to what you might think, having a "no opinion" point improves the accuracy of the results, and respondent satisfaction.
5. **Design.** Make sure the design is lively, engaging and reflects the prestige and style of the surveying organisation.
6. **Survey size.** You only need to question a fraction of your total population to get a **statistically valid sample**. Whatever you decide, you should ensure that there are at least 100 responses per demographic sub group.
7. **Invitations.** My experience is that a well-targeted email invitation will elicit a response rate of around 25%. You need to ensure your email lists are up to date, and that the survey provider you use can keep track of responses and issue reminders to non-responders.
8. **Results.** Make sure the survey software you choose provides instantaneous results with your chosen demographic sub-divisions included. The last thing you want to do is wade through spreadsheets. You should also decide the extent you are going to share the results with respondents. They should get something, along with the actions you propose to take.
9. **Interpretation.** You should ideally have the results presented to you by an objective analyst (me!) who does not have an agenda to promote or defend.

I hope this has been helpful. Please get back to me if I can be of further assistance.

Richard Gaunt