Getting The Best Results:
Best Practices In Survey Design

BY: EMI RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

Anybody can design a survey, but it takes a true professional to design one that provides quality data. There are hundreds of mistakes a person can make when designing a survey that leads to poor results, as well as wasted time and resources. To ensure your next survey is a success, we have put together the best practices in survey design.

1. Spend extra time designing the screener

🔹 WHILE MOST RESEARCHERS FOCUS ON THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE, DESIGN ERRORS IN THE SCREENER CAN RAISE DROPOUT RATES AND DECREASE DATA QUALITY

Our recommendation is to always write screeners as if you're sampling the general population.

🔺 SAMPLE COMPANIES HAVE STRONG TARGETING, BUT IT ISN'T PERFECT. INCLUDING A QUESTION FOR ALL YOUR SCREENING CRITERIA WILL ENSURE THAT THE RIGHT PEOPLE ENTER YOUR SURVEY, BETTERING THE RESPONDENT EXPERIENCE AS WELL AS GIVE YOU PEACE OF MIND ABOUT YOUR DATA QUALITY.

2. Ensure you have a data quality check plan prior to launching

🔷 **WHILE WE ALWAYS WISH WE COULD HAVE ASKED QUESTIONS AFTER THE FACT, SPEND SOME TIME ENSURING YOU'LL HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION TO DETERMINE IF THE RESPONDENT IS TRULY ENGAGED AND IF THEY SHOULD BE REMOVED. SOME WAYS TO DO THIS INCLUDE:**

- Ensure open-ended responses are included, even in the screener if possible. This is the best method to identify a quality respondent

- Consider adding in a trap question/red herring or reverse scaling questions. This can help screen out bots or other fraudulent respondents.

3. Make your survey device agnostic

AN EVER-INCREASING PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS ARE TAKING SURVEYS FROM THEIR MOBILE DEVICES, WHETHER IT'S THEIR PHONE OR TABLET, SO YOU NEED TO TAKE THIS INTO ACCOUNT IN YOUR DESIGN. HERE ARE A COUPLE TIPS WHEN DESIGNING FOR MOBILE:

- Check your survey on multiple devices – it can render differently on each device-type.

- Avoid lengthy questions or large grids – they require too much scrolling on smaller screens.

4. Avoid leading questions

🔷 LEADING QUESTIONS USE QUESTION PHRASING TO CREATE PERCEPTIONS IN THE RESPONDENTS' MINDS TO "LEAD" THEM TO RESPOND A CERTAIN WAY. THIS QUESTION DESIGN HIGHLY CORRELATES TO RESPONSES THAT ARE BIASED TOWARDS A SPECIFIC RESPONSE.

🔷 TO AVOID MAKING YOUR QUESTIONS LEADING, AVOID ADJECTIVES OR ADVERBS THAT CAN LEAD TO A RESPONDENT TO, EITHER DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, BELIEVE ANY ANSWER SHOULD BE CHOSEN OVER ANOTHER

5. Don't overuse Yes/No questions

🔹 **WHILE MOST RESEARCHERS FOCUS ON THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE, DESIGN ERRORS IN THE SCREENER CAN RAISE DROPOUT RATES AND DECREASE DATA QUALITY**

Our recommendation is to limit the number of Yes/No questions you use.

🔺 **SAMPLE COMPANIES HAVE STRONG TARGETING, BUT IT ISN'T PERFECT. INCLUDING A QUESTION FOR ALL YOUR SCREENING CRITERIA WILL ENSURE THAT THE RIGHT PEOPLE ENTER YOUR SURVEY, BETTERING THE RESPONDENT EXPERIENCE AS WELL AS GIVING YOU PEACE OF MIND ABOUT YOUR DATA QUALITY.**

6. Use the right question type

🔰 JUST LIKE YES/NO QUESTIONS HAVE A PLACE IN A SURVEY, SO DO OTHER TYPES OF QUESTIONS. YOU WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU USE THE RIGHT TYPE OF QUESTION FOR THE TYPE OF INFORMATION YOU ARE TRYING TO GATHER.

🔰 SOME EXAMPLES OF QUESTION TYPES INCLUDE MULTIPLE CHOICE, CHECK BOXES, MATRIX, OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS, GRIDS, OR OTHER ADVANCED QUESTION TYPES.

An example is if you want respondents to choose from a list of options, use multiple choice, but if you have a question where there could be multiple answers, use check boxes.

Be sure to understand question types and when it is best to use them.

7. Reduce the number of answer options

🔹 ONE OF THE QUICKEST WAYS TO FRUSTRATE A RESPONDENT IS TO OFFER TOO MANY ANSWER OPTIONS TO A QUESTION. IF THERE ARE TOO MANY OPTIONS, THEY WILL LOSE FOCUS AND YOUR DATA WILL SUFFER. YOU NEED TO PROVIDE ONLY ENOUGH ANSWER OPTIONS TO GATHER THE INFORMATION YOU ARE LOOKING TO COLLECT.

 If your question has too many answer options, consider splitting it up into multiple questions.

8. Ensure you have a catch-all

☑ **THIS GOES WITH THE PREVIOUS TIP REGARDING THE NUMBER OF ANSWER OPTIONS YOU PROVIDE PER QUESTION. WHILE YOU DON'T WANT TO HAVE TOO MANY ANSWER OPTIONS, YOU ALSO DON'T WANT TO MISS A POTENTIAL ANSWER.**

The best way to handle this is to ensure you inlcude an "Other" or "None of the Above" type of response to your multiple-choice questions. Missing this step may "force" respondents to select an answer that isn't true.
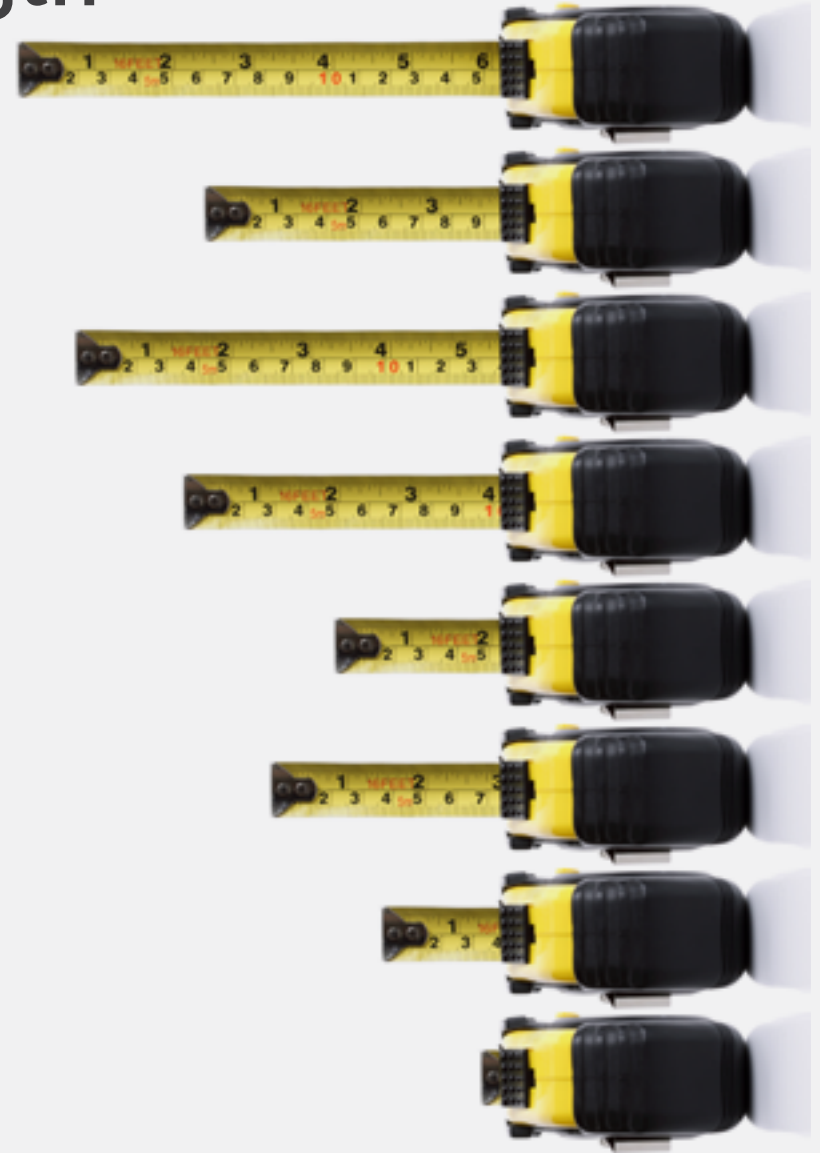
9. Watch your survey length

Want people to complete your survey? Make sure it isn't too long.

🔹 THE LONGER THE SURVEY THE MORE LIKELY RESPONDENTS ARE TO BECOME FATIGUED AND LOSE INTEREST IN THE SURVEY, CAUSING A HIGHER DROPOUT RATE.

Aim for around 20 questions or less.

10. Ensure answers are mutually exclusive

▼ EACH ANSWER SHOULD BE DISTINCT FROM ONE ANOTHER. IF THEY AREN'T, YOUR RESPONDENTS MAY BE CONFUSED OR NEED TO SELECT MULTIPLE ANSWERS TO BE TRUTHFUL, BUT WON'T HAVE THAT OPTION.

11. Keep your questions specific

🔹 **HAVE A CLEAR GOAL ON THE INFORMATION YOU ARE TRYING TO GATHER FROM YOUR RESPONDENTS. AVOID QUESTIONS OR PHRASING THAT DISTRACT FROM THAT GOAL OR DON'T RELATE TO INFORMATION YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.**

12. Keep your rating scales well-defined

🔽 RESPONDENTS CAN INTERPRET RATING SCALES DIFFERENTLY FROM ONE ANOTHER. ONE PERSON MIGHT THING SOMETHING IS "GREAT", WHILE A DIFFERENT PERSON WHO HAD THE SAME EXPERIENCE MIGHT RATE IT AS "GOOD".

📈 IF YOU ARE USING A RATING SCALE, BE SURE TO HAVE A BEST AND WORST OPTION AND EVENLY SPACE THE OTHER RATING OPTIONS BETWEEN THE TWO.

Using a five or seven-point rating scale can simplify this.

13. Skip the jargon

Respondents may not understand specific industry terminology, so either avoid using it or clearly define any terms you plan on using.

In additional to providing sample, EMI has decades of experience in programming and deploying surveys. From simple to highly complex surveys, we employ a highly experienced team that can program, deploy and host your study.

To learn more about our programming services, request a 15 minutes demo.

REQUEST A DEMO