

Online survey invitation timing has to match lifestyle of target audience

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LONDON – 9 January 2007 – Although respondents to online surveys can choose when to complete surveys, the time at which the invitation is sent can have a major impact on the number of responses. Lightspeed Research, a leading interactive market research provider, found that it is imperative to time the survey invitation correctly because if responses are low to begin with, they are unlikely to increase significantly over time.

As part of their ongoing “Research on Research”™ programme into the behaviour of online market research respondents, Lightspeed Research sent out invitations to an online survey to 7,440 of its GB panellists at different times during the week. Overall the results showed that invitations sent on a Monday afternoon achieved the best response rates, at up to 39%. Surveys sent at 5.30pm on Friday afternoon resulted in relatively low response rates of 28% for women and 29% for men.

Additionally the research showed that external events could have a dramatic impact on response rates for online surveys. A major football game on Wednesday night had an impact on response rates, in particular amongst male respondents. Only 11% of male invitees from the Wednesday 5.30pm invitation group responded to the survey, compared to 31% of women.

David Day, CEO of Lightspeed Research says “Internet users are happy to take part in surveys but at a time that is suitable to them. Research companies must know their panellists well and take their lifestyle into consideration when planning surveys. Younger people with an active nightlife are unlikely to answer surveys on Saturday morning, whereas working mothers might best be targeted in the early afternoon before their children come home from school. And as our results show, it's best to avoid clashing with major cultural events if you want balanced survey response rates.”

First 24 hours “determine” final response rates

The research also showed that the majority of responders are likely to respond in the first 24 hours, with only around a third responding after this period. In other words, if the response rate is quite low within the first 24 hours it is unlikely to recover in the following days. Invitations sent on Monday at 5.30pm achieved a response rate of 26% within the first 24 hours and ended with a total response rate of 38% after six days. On the other hand, an invitation sent on Wednesday at 5.30pm achieved only 14% response rate after 24 hours and a total rate of 22% after six days.

When looking at the type of people who responded fastest, the study also showed that the older members tended to respond quicker than younger people. 18-24 year olds had a nine percent response rate between 0 and 12 hours after the invitation was sent, rising to 14% for 48 hours plus. The opposite trend was seen for the 55-65 year olds, with a response rate of 29% in the first 12 hours dropping to 22% for 48 hours plus.

David Day adds “Respondents are more likely to take part in a survey shortly after having received the invitation than keep it in their inbox and come back to it later. This does suggest that if the time for fieldwork is short, then deploying studies later in the week should be avoided, and this does have implications for certain industries that favour weekend completion. It also suggests that it is important to understand if the “missing” responders have a different set of characteristics to those available to respond beyond the simple demographic differences outlined in this work which can be managed using quota controls.

At Lightspeed Research we monitor the behaviour of respondents closely to ensure they have enough opportunity to take part in our surveys and this also ensures our response rates remain high.”

The full release including data tables is available for download at:
http://www.andreasgutjahr.com/pr/releases/LSR/LSR_Timely_9Jan07_UK.pdf