The 4 Keys to Successful Data Collection by Janet Taylor

Article published on December 23rd 2011 | Software

It really takes a special type of individual to manage a survey project. Iâ€™ve learned that no matter how big or small a survey is â€“ itâ€™s definitely more challenging and complex than youâ€™d think. You have have loads of patience, strong organizational skills and lots of coffee!

So here are a few tips on making your life easier when you start your next data collection venture.

1. Setting Stringent Timelines

One of the keys to a successful data collection cycle is putting into place firm timelines. It is vital to plot out each task, and all the resources related to the task for a survey. This will aid in ensuring that there is ample time for data collection deadlines and performing necessary quality assurance and testing for data integrity at the end.

Surveys are a huge undertaking that involve countless components. From managing the minutest tasks such as setting up conference calls/meetings, to the more complex tasks such as analyzing and compiling the data itself; each step needs to be properly documented in order to clearly identify responsibilities and resources. I suggest using either an Excel-based template such as a work breakdown structure (WBS) or Microsoft Project. Both tools are resourceful for managing data collection timelines.

2. Data Collection Tools

There are several methods of collecting data: online-surveys, phone interviews, focus groups and yes, even dreaded handwritten surveys. Each type possesses its own advantages and disadvantages. Whichever method you use, there are bound to be obstacles to overcome along the way.

One of the more contemporary methods of data collection is through online surveys which by the way, I am a HUGE fan of! Taking surveys online was a lifesaver at a small association I worked for. They were still, get this, collecting survey responses from paper! Talk about being stuck in a time warp. I knew I had to make changes quickly to keep my sanity. A co-worker of mine introduced me to InSite Surveys and that was all she wrote. Everything was at my fingertips: designing and customizing surveys for my data collection needs, managing responses, respondents, contacts and even a quantitative and qualitative breakdown. InSite Surveys allowed me to nearly triple the organizationâ€™s annual statistical studyâ€™s participants from 800 to 2100 respondents.

3. Incentives

One of the bigger challenges to online surveys is ensuring that there is an adequate amount of responses in order to guarantee data integrity. Without valid data, the whole project is a bust.

For those of you who struggle to increase the participation rate for your surveys, the answer is formulating a high-quality and efficient incentive campaign. There are several ways to incentivize your survey respondents. In the world of associations, we utilized a great deal of discounts and coupons good towards our conferences, education and even free publications. But you can think outside the box and come up with your own unique solutions: free iPods, gift cards and yes, even cash! The key to incentives is thinking of one (or two) that pertain to your industry and will lure respondents and sustain participation for future surveys.

4. Fresh Eyes

Probably one of the most demanding tasks of data collection is, well, the data itself. Once the data is in, someone has to be accountable for the dirty job of sifting through it all to make sure certain respondents properly entered the requested data. And if there are any data calculations involved, those need to be verified as well.

Try to find a set of fresh eyes that will assist when your eyes begin to experience â€œlazy eyesâ€• with all the data youâ€™re trying to scan through. Because after awhile all the data starts to get jumbled together and look the same.

So the next time youâ€™re asked to take on a survey project and youâ€™re feeling a little overwhelmed about getting through it, you can implement some of these tactics and breeze through it like a pro.

Article Source:
http://www.articleside.com/software-articles/the-4-keys-to-successful-data-collection.htm - Article Side

Janet Taylor - About Author:
Janet Taylor writes for InSite Systems, a leader in surveys systems and a pioneer of a online survey software. For more information about our a online survey tool visit a http://www.insitesystems.com

Article Keywords:
Online Survey Tools, Online Survey Software, Survey System, Online Survey Tool

You can find more free articles on Article Side. Sign up today and share your knowledge to the community! It is completely FREE!