

Visitor Guidelines: Part 2

How to Carry Out a Visitor Survey

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Part 2 in this visitor guidelines series looks at sampling size and methods, as well as how best to disseminate the questionnaires. This guide on undertaking marketing research also explains how to successfully and professionally carry out a visitor survey. You'll find information about different types of questionnaire, sampling methods, sample sizes, and how to disseminate a survey.

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Visitor Survey Guidelines

Part 2: Carrying out your visitor survey

This three-part guide sets out some principles for designing a visitor survey, for carrying out the survey, and for analysing the survey and making sense of the data. The guide has been produced with a museum or gallery with a small research budget in mind, but the principles are still relevant for any type or size of venue wishing to research and assess their visitors.

Part 2 looks at sampling size and methods, as well as how best to disseminate the questionnaires.

Types of questionnaire

Self-fill (written) questionnaire

The cheapest and easiest way of conducting visitor surveys is to place them somewhere in the venue and leave visitors to fill them out themselves. This can produce lower sample sizes than other methods, and the sample may not be representative as only the most enthusiastic and most disparaging are likely to participate. However, it demands very few resources and can be done over a much longer time period at no extra cost. Also, if a random sample is critical, it could be achieved by handing the questionnaire to, say, every tenth visitor and asking them to fill it out in their own time.

A written questionnaire requires a workspace in the venue for visitors to fill them out. This might simply be a small desk in the corner with a box of pens and a slit to place the completed questionnaires. But with a little imagination and creativity, this workspace can be transformed into one of the attractions of your venue, thus raising response rates and the accuracy of the sample.

A few points to remember:

- Keep the questionnaire short.
- Provide plenty of pens, and make sure the pile is restocked regularly.
- Make sure the system for returning completed surveys is easy and obvious. Ensure the confidentiality of the responses by providing a post box securely attached to the permanent fittings.
- Clearly state on the questionnaire how to return it at a later date – not everyone will be able to complete the survey at the venue.
- Make sure all staff know that the survey is being distributed, and explain to them the importance of collecting the data.
- Collect completed questionnaires regularly, and make sure they are kept in a safe place.

Face-to-face (spoken) questionnaires

Conducting questionnaires face-to-face in the venue is the most effective way of collecting visitor data. Response rates are higher than in written questionnaires, as visitors are actively encouraged into participating, and the quality of the data can be better controlled. However, it does demand more resources in terms of trained interviewers. Also, respondents may not feel they can be critical in a face-to-face questionnaire, whereas there is less inhibition if filling it out themselves.

Not only do spoken questionnaires demand trained interviewers, but also a space in which the interviewing can take place that won't encroach too much upon the other visitors.

A few points to remember:

- Provide interviewers with formal identification and a brief introductory script explaining why you are carrying out the survey and the privacy rules that apply.
- The actual interviews do not require a seating area, but the interviewers will need a quiet area to work, where they can sit and write up any notes between interviews.
- Instruct interviewers about the sampling method you are using.
- Keep the questionnaire brief.

Other types

There are other ways in which surveys can be conducted, namely by post, telephone, e-mail, or via a web survey published online. However, these methods are only possible with an extensive list of visitor names and contact details, a valuable resource that museums and galleries may not possess. For this reason, these methods have been largely discounted, although the principles of questionnaire design and sampling techniques are very much the same as for self-fill and face-to-face questionnaires conducted in a venue.

Surveys conducted in a venue also have the advantage of capturing information "there and then", and so views and opinions about the venue's services and facilities aren't lost in the midst of time.

Sampling methods

A sample is those visitors that you decide or you happen to collect information from. A good sample should be random, in that every visitor should have an equal chance of being surveyed. However, this randomness sometimes needs to be sacrificed for convenience and ease of use. There are three different basic sampling methods that you can choose from:

Convenience sample

This is the most commonly used sampling method, and unsurprisingly the easiest to manage. It involves either selecting a number of people at a certain day and time, or leaving the questionnaires somewhere in the venue for visitors to fill in themselves. This method is not as representative as a random sample, but its reliability can be increased if surveys are conducted over a range of days and times.

Random sample

A random sample is the most accurate of all, and allows similarities or differences to be drawn between the sample and the population. In a random sample everyone has an equal chance of being looked at in the survey. This may be done by surveying every tenth person through the gallery door.

Quota sample

A quota sample is where an interviewer is given a quota of different types of people by various characteristics (age, gender, race, etc.). The proportions to be interviewed of each group are determined by reference to a census or possibly local population statistics. A quota sample can be fairly complicated to administer and control, and is generally no better than a random sample. There is also little point in making the sample representative of the population if your visitors are not representative, eg. there is no point making sure 50% of your sample is male if male visitors only make up 10% of your total visitors.

How many people do I need to survey?

For most purposes, a survey of between 100 and 200 respondents is sufficient. Any less and the sample is unlikely to be representative, meaning firm conclusions cannot be drawn, any more and the survey becomes quite time-consuming and expensive, particularly as all results gathered need to be entered into a spreadsheet or database afterwards.

If you want to examine subcategories within the sample, such as a certain age group or those from a particular town, then anything less than 50 responses for that subcategory should be treated with caution. You may need to conduct a quota sample for that subcategory.

Further Support...

All About Audiences can give advice and offer assistance on designing or carrying out visitor surveys. Contact **Chris Norwood, Head of Evidence & Engagement** at Chris.Norwood@allaboutaudiences.com or **0161 234 2960**.