

## **The choice of survey methodologies**

### **Face to face**

#### **Pros**

You can randomly select your sample. By surveying every one in three parties, or every one in five, you will have the same chance of interviewing a group of girls out on a hen night as a middle-aged gent waiting for his wife outside the gift shop.

You get good qualitative information; people will volunteer all sorts of information when they're having a chat.

Information is 'live' and current; your surveyors can feed back the following morning.

You have complete control over how often you do it - the nights you choose, how many surveyors to have on a particular time, etc., to ensure it's truly representative. You know what your response rate is on a running basis and can quickly adapt if you are getting fewer completed surveys than you were expecting, or if a problem with the questionnaire becomes apparent.

You will have a very high hit rate. If your surveyors are well trained, surprisingly few people will say no.

#### **Cons**

You need surveyors, which can be difficult to recruit. It can be expensive if you get them from an agency and labour-intensive, and sometimes frustrating, to train front of house staff.

The quality of the results depends on your staff. Surveying is a bit of a peculiar skill; it doesn't come naturally to a lot of people.

Questionnaire can't be too long if people are in a hurry to take their seats.

It can be a lengthy process to get the volume that you need, depending on the availability of staff. Face-to-face is not the one-hit wonder that a postal survey is.

### **Self completion - distributed at venue**

#### **Pros**

Inexpensive

It's easy to get a large sample.

You can randomly distribute, e.g give to every fifth person or put on every fifth seat.

#### **Cons**

Front of house staff will be very involved as so you will need their commitment.

You need pens, collection bins, signs etc., which can be a bit of a fiddle.

The sample is self-selecting. It will be skewed towards those who have had very positive or very negative experiences of your organisation, rather than those who feel more neutrally. However, these are the people who will make up the bulk of your customer base.

You will only target current attenders who are there on the night and it can be difficult to target specific segments.

## **Self-completion - postal**

### **Pros**

Questionnaire can be longer, people will sit down with a cup of tea on a Saturday morning and take their time.

You can target more carefully, e.g. group bookers, or people who have bought children's tickets.

You can target other people's customers. There's more chance they'll let you write to their customers than stand in their foyer.

### **Cons**

Sample is self-selecting.

Quite expensive – allow for postage and freepost returns.

A bit of an unknown quantity, (although with postal surveys you can expect a response rate of roughly 10% to 20%). You might end up with fewer than you need and then have to repeat the exercise, or more than you expected and have to pay for the freepost returns.

## **Online surveys**

### **Pros**

Inexpensive.

Easy to get a big sample.

More interesting for people to engage with than traditional paper-based questionnaires.

Data can be 'dumped' straight into analysis software, saving the time and cost of inputting.

You can e-mail a link to segments of your database – good for targeting.

You can time when the e-mail will arrive (Friday afternoon is good).

### **Cons**

Self-selecting sample.

Questionnaire can't be too long - people have much less patience online.

Have to be wary of readability in different systems, size of the questionnaire, load-time etc; people will give up very quickly.

You really need to outsource to someone who has online survey software, or use one of the on-line survey facilities.

## Questionnaire design

No more than 4 A4 sides

Order the questions logically (flow nicely)– and don't put personal information first, it makes people feel twitchy.

Beware of ambiguity – be really clear (flight example)

Be very specific in your instructions – 'tick one box only';

Keep questions short and filter to make it as easy as possible for people (this can be automated with an online survey).

Keep bias out of the questionnaire. Be careful how you word questions, as it's quite easy to lead.

And be careful of the way you order options; ideally do it alphabetically.

Be mindful of surveying ethnic minorities and disabled people. See *Monitoring Audience Diversity*

Include a letter if it's postal and a pre-paid response.

Include an explanatory and reassuring introductory note at the head of the questionnaire

Offer incentives – this will help to overcome apathy in people who don't have any strong feelings. Use 'closed' questions where you can – it's easier to analyse (However, 'other comments' can sometimes be the most interesting). Test, test, test.