

A yellow sticky note with a slight shadow and rounded corners, centered on a white background. The text is written in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

**TOP 10 TIPS
FOR CONDUCTING
EFFECTIVE ONLINE
MARKET RESEARCH**

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INTRODUCTION

Surveys have long provided an effective means for research, marketing and customer service. Thankfully, the days of laborious manual surveys are gone. The amount of time, money, manpower and effort taken to create, distribute and collect traditional surveys has made them less popular as quantitative research tools.

Fortunately, online surveys are fast, efficient, cost-effective and viable for practically any business in any field looking to do research. When combined with the use of a response panel, the benefits become compelling:

- **Speed.** Studies show that most panel respondents reply to online surveys within 48 hours. Results can be collected in real time if required.
- **Cost.** Online surveys can cost 30 to 50% less than traditional printed surveys.
- **Relevance.** Online panel surveys allow you to specify the right data from the right sources.
- **Flexibility.** Online panel research can be quick to set up. Surveys can easily be adapted to changing needs and priorities
- **Global reach.** The geographic location of panellists can enhance the efficiency and quality of research data.
- **Low risk.** Costs are only incurred for completed responses, so you know you'll always get what you pay for.
- **Privacy.** Panellists can complete surveys wherever it suits them, knowing their confidentiality is guaranteed.
- **Unpressured.** Completing surveys at their own pace means respondents have pressure-free time to think, which reduces the margin for error and further enhances the quality of the data.
- **Unbiased.** In comparison with face-to-face or telephone surveys, online research completely removes interviewer bias from the equation.

That said, not all online surveys and research panels are created equal. For online panel research to be effective you need to use the right tools to ask the right questions, to get the right answers, from the right people, at the right time.

In this white paper we provide you with the basis for finding those tools. Here are our Top 10 Tips for conducting effective online panel research:

1. Clarify your objectives
2. Visualise the outcome
3. Keep it short
4. Stick to the point
5. Keep it simple
6. Test your questionnaire design thoroughly
7. Motivate your participants
8. Pick your panel supplier carefully
9. Test your survey on live respondents
10. You've got the data – now use it



TOP 10 TIPS FOR CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE ONLINE RESEARCH

1. Clarify your Objectives

What do you really want to know? What actions do you want to take as a result of your research?

It might seem overly simple, but it's really important that you answer these questions clearly. Defining the basic objectives is the first, and most essential, step to conducting effective research – whether or not you're using online panels.

Knowing exactly what you want to achieve at the outset will help you create clear, concise questionnaires which will in turn allow respondents to give you clear, concise, and relevant answers.

It couldn't be simpler: if your goals aren't clear from the very beginning, your results won't be either.

2. Visualise the Outcome

There is little point conducting research if you can't understand and analyse the results and then use the results to make relevant changes. Think about all the relevant information you will need post-survey:

- How do you want to see results - online or as a summary hard copy report?
- What should the output report look like? How should it be formatted?

- What charts and graphs would you like included?
- How, and to whom, are you going to distribute the results?
- How confident will you need to feel in the results?



Reporting and analysis tools that are detailed, yet easy to use and understand, are as crucial to survey success as asking the right questions of the right people. Is the data going to be used just for internal decision-making purposes or will it be published in the public domain? The degree of scrutiny it is required to stand up to in either scenario may differ. Make sure you've paid enough attention to your desired results before you get too far down the survey design journey.

3. Keep it Short

Even if your survey company has the capability for you to send out a long, complicated, multi-part questionnaire, try to avoid this if at all possible.

Ideally, a panel survey should take no more than 10 minutes at most. Take into account that the average respondent will answer three to four multiple choice questions per minute, and that one open-ended text question counts for three multiple choice questions.

Before you send out your final survey, test the timing with colleagues, family or friends, clocking their completed survey response time carefully. Refine your survey according to these time tests.

Once your survey is live, watch out for 'speeders' – people who complete a survey so fast, they could not possibly have read the questions and answer

options carefully, resulting in invalid responses. Most online survey software tools will record the time taken for the respondents to answer questions. This will allow you to identify speeders and remove their responses from your data.

4. Keep it Simple

Don't try to reinvent the wheel: let the professionals do their job and take advice on the survey style and content that best meets your needs. You could even consider using survey and report templates created by experts.

The questionnaire:

It's important that you make the questionnaire as engaging and interesting to respondents as possible. Seemingly trivial, simple things – like formatting issues and where to break pages, for example – can derail the most carefully thought out survey. Format and design your questionnaire carefully as this can play a key role in determining how respondents interpret the questions. Don't underestimate the amount of time needed to design effective questionnaires:

- Organise questions in a logical order with related questions grouped together.
- Think carefully about the number of pages in a survey. Introduce page breaks only where absolutely necessary so you avoid a survey that requires a lot of annoying scrolling, but don't just have one question on a page. It takes longer to complete surveys with many pages and this can increase the dropout rate. Balancing these requirements can be tricky, but your survey provider should be able to assist.
- Too many pages of questions can also be a problem. Even though you're passionate about your subject, it's unlikely that all your

respondents are going to make it all the way through a 20-page survey. If you stick to the point and keep the survey as short and focused as possible though, you're more likely to see considerably more successfully completed questionnaires.

- Avoid confusing question formats like "If you answered No to Q1 then Answer Q4". This can cause frustration and increase your dropout rate. Rather make full use of the online environment and design the survey so that questions are automatically routed based on previous responses.
- Ask your more important questions at the beginning of the survey wherever possible. Leave the less engaging demographic questions (such as age, gender, location etc) for the end unless you need to use these criteria to screen out unsuitable candidates so you meet your panel sample quota.
- Try to leave contentious or sensitive questions to the end of your questionnaire.
- Don't use graphics excessively as they can cause download delays.
- Use a common, easy-to-read font on a standard white background.

The results:

Design, or ask for, reports that are easy to understand at a glance. Use graphics to achieve clarity by all means, but avoid complicated, overly detailed charts that will cause confusion.

5. Stick to the Point

Back to point number one: keep focussed on the basic objectives of the study and the main questions you want answered.

Avoid intricate detail.

Only ask the questions you really, really need answered.

Don't try getting answers to too many questions regarding too many issues in just one survey. Pick the most important thing/s you want information about and make sure all your questions relate to that.

6. Test the Questionnaire Design Thoroughly

This may very well be the most important step in conducting effective online panel research. If your questionnaires are too complicated and difficult to understand, your dropout rate will unfortunately be high.

Start the questionnaire with a brief introduction which explains the purpose of your research, how the survey should be completed, an estimate of how much time it will take, and what will happen with the results. End the questionnaire with a short 'thank you' to respondents for their participation.

Now for the all-important questions in between:

- List all your questions and group them according to their relevance to each other and their position in the logical flow of the questionnaire.
- Review your questions: how easy or difficult is it for the respondent to provide information on each topic? If it is difficult, is there another way to obtain the information by asking another question?
- You may need to write several questions for each topic, reviewing again and again before finally selecting the best one.

Other question-creation tips you may find helpful:

- Use simple language, avoiding industry specific jargon, terminology and acronyms.

- Ask only one question per question. For example: ‘*What is the fastest and most economical internet service you’ve ever used?*’ The *fastest* may not be the most *economical*. Split double-barrelled questions into two questions.
- Avoid asking leading questions that may introduce bias into the data.
- Make sure multiple choice questions allow for clear choices to be made.
- Make sure all response options are covered.
- Be careful about forcing answers: privacy is important to most people, so sensitive questions about income, finances, relationships, family life, personal beliefs, etc are often rejected as too intrusive. Provide respondents with an opt-out option.
- Avoid over-long questions
- Avoid questions on future plans or intentions: predictions are rarely accurate and seldom play out as planned.

Finally, review your questions and relate each and every one back to your primary objective. Resist the urge to ask questions that don’t contribute to that goal. Be brutal in removing questions that don’t support your goals. The fewer questions you ask, the more people will participate, the better your results and the lower your costs will be.

7. Pick your Panel Supplier Carefully

The success of your survey and the relevance and usefulness of the data you receive all rely heavily on having a quality sample. Make sure your panel partner can supply you with the right data to help you meet your objectives.



Consider these points carefully when choosing your panel supplier:

- Does the panel supplier accurately record respondents' demographic profiles as part of their registration process so they can present you with highly targeted samples for your research?
- Have respondents agreed to receive questionnaires and participate in surveys?
- Will the online sample be sufficiently representative and unbiased?
- Can the panel supplier provide quality sample for the required demographic?
- Does the panel provider subscribe to recognised industry standards monitoring bodies?
- How confident is your panel provider that they can meet your sample size requirements and what are the cost implications if they don't?

8. Motivate your Participants

It's a universal truth: people will very seldom do something for nothing. Offering participants an incentive to complete the survey may help to improve your response rate.

Free gifts, prize draws, charitable donations and cash are good rewards but beware of possible bias or influence that an incentive may have, especially if the results of the survey are likely to come under any degree of scrutiny. It's often also effective – and far more cost-effective – to simply tell respondents you'll share the results with them. If you understand your target market, you should be able to tailor the incentive to optimise your response rate.

However you decide to incentivise your respondents, it's essential that you follow up as you promised once your survey is complete.

9. Test your Survey

Doing a 'dummy run' of your survey is an essential step in making sure it delivers the best possible results. Your test group can consist of colleagues, friends and typical respondents who have never seen the questionnaire before. Testers should help you identify flawed questions, spelling and grammatical errors and points of confusion and frustration within the survey.

Ask your test group if:

- They had any trouble understanding what you wanted
- There were any points of view not covered in your questions or answers
- They felt frustrated at any stage
- They were easily able to answer all questions.

Use the feedback from your test group to make the necessary revisions, double check your questionnaire then distribute your survey to the panel.

10. You've Got the Data – Now Use It

You're not done with your survey until you act on the results. Revisit your original survey objectives and make sure you do whatever follow up actions are appropriate.

As with any other project:

- Draw up a clear action plan.
- Include deadline dates – and stick to them.
- Monitor the progress of any changes you implement.
- Follow up to see that the changes made are indeed useful and relevant.

ABOUT SURVEYSHACK ONLINE PANEL RESEARCH

SurveyShack can provide access to online panel respondents in over 70 countries worldwide for any market research project.

Whether you require responses from consumers or specialist sectors, SurveyShack is able to provide the sample and deploy your questionnaire swiftly and cost effectively, even in multiple languages if required.

Using SurveyShack online panels gives you the luxury of a guaranteed number of responses at a fixed cost. This allows you to judge the potential yield and gives you much greater control over project costs.

SurveyShack's online panel research team has years of experience in planning, setting up and running successful surveys. This means clients get:

- Quick turnaround of panel respondent quotes and projects.
- Very competitive per-response costs.
- A value for money service that is transparent – you know how much it's going to cost from the outset.
- A carefully recruited global database of consumer panels.
- Access to a vast range of specialist sectors including health, business-to-business, mobile, auto, finance, cosmetics, fashion and others.
- Secure data hosting and processing.
- Beautifully designed questionnaires and stylish reports that are, above all, easy to understand.
- Timing certainty.

With the right online panels at your disposal, research results are reliable, accurate and always worthwhile.

ABOUT SURVEYSHACK

SurveyShack specialises in developing and running flexible feedback and reporting systems that are designed to make collecting, analysing and reporting on data efficient and cost effective.

We use our own unique technology to automate questionnaire design, deployment, response collection and collation, data analysis and reporting. Feedback can be collected via multiple mediums such as web, email, or paper questionnaires.

We have helped a broad range of clients across several industries to gather insight about their customers, their staff, their products and issues that affect their businesses. We have helped organisations to:

- Understand and benchmark customer satisfaction levels
- Gather market research data from niche sectors
- Conduct reader surveys and audience polls
- Collect employee and member feedback
- Evaluate events
- Assess new products prior to launch
- Develop pricing, distribution and packaging strategies
- Measure brand awareness and advertising effectiveness
- Implement 360 degree appraisals of leadership and management teams
- Learn about current and desired organisational skills
- Identify training needs.
- Measure organisational stress and wellbeing.

We are accredited by the Market Research Society (MRS).

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