Choosing Survey Software:
Top 10 Things to Consider

1 Ease of Use

You're probably looking to make your job easier and aren't interested in difficult, complex software applications. If the survey system is too cumbersome, you will not use it and your organization will lose its investment. Ultimately, you want software that can grow with your survey needs, but to get started, look for these elements:

- WYSIWYG design interface
- Full drag-and-drop capabilities for questions and scales, notes, overviews, summaries, and other text
- A robust library of commonly-asked questions
- Easy installation
- Wizards to guide you through survey design and implementation

2 Question Formats

A survey's goal is to gather information. Look for a survey software application that allows you to ask a variety of questions with a variety of measuring options. Formats to consider are single response, multiple responses, write-in response, and rating (for example "on a scale of 1-5, please rate the following"). A good software application will let you create your own scales or pick from a library of pre-written (and customizable) questions.

3 Web Survey Options

Look for robust web survey options in your software application. If your organization has a web server you can use, make sure the software can run web surveys on it (you may need to contact your IT group for help determining this). If you don't have a web server, check to see if the software vendor can host web surveys for you.

A good web survey should be able to support some of the following:
- **Branching** or **Skip and Hit** patterns that allow your respondents to be directed to a new set of questions based on their response(s).
- **Data validation** of write-in responses, "must-complete" questions, ranking scales, and other options that help ensure the respondents answer the survey properly.
- **Save** and **Resume** capabilities that allow respondents to save their responses and continue later.

- **Password entry** options and **e-mail invitations** that limit who has access to the survey.
- The ability to display lengthy scales as **drop-down lists**.

4 Distribution Options

Depending on age, location, ability, and economics, your survey participants may prefer to complete a survey in one format instead of another. For example, a survey for an entire college campus might best be distributed over the web using student email addresses as invitations, but course evaluations for in-person classes might be best done with scannable forms. Older or very young respondents may prefer a physical, printed form to a survey on the Internet.

If the data you receive needs to accurately reflect the feelings and opinions of your survey population, you should avoid skewing your data by forcing your survey participants into one survey method. Look for survey software that allows for different modes of survey delivery. Even if you are currently only conducting online surveys, you may need to expand into to expand into other survey options like paper, kiosk, and network.

Ideally, the software you choose should allow you to distribute the same survey using multiple methods, and be able to collect responses from all methods into the same response database.

5 Automating the Data Collection

You should also consider your survey volume and need for data accuracy. If you have a large-volume paper survey and would like to automate the data collection process, look for software that can design, print, *and* collect data from scannable forms. Using a high-volume, rapid Optical Mark Read (OMR) or image scanner can save immense amounts of time and money otherwise spent entering data by hand. A scannable survey allows you to conduct the survey on bubble forms and collect large volumes of data very quickly, with over 99% accuracy. If you need this option, look for software that has the scannable form design option built into the survey design.

Web surveys are also a great way to automate your data collection process. A good software application will let you put your survey online and either collect the responses automatically via e-mail or with data files stored safely on the web server.

6 Sampling Features

Due to cost and practicality, many organizations survey a sample of their respondent base. A sample provides a representative selection of respondents that should reflect the view of the entire audience. To ensure accuracy, look for software that includes random, stratified, systematic, and cluster sampling.

7 Respondent Lists and Pre-populated Demographics

Your survey software should allow you to import a respondent list from another software program or your email address book. This reduces the time associated with manually entering the respondent data. It is also helpful if the survey application supports pre-populated demographic information from your respondent list. When responses are linked to this existing data, you can ask fewer demographic questions in the survey (shorter surveys are almost always better) because you already have the data. Having this data gives you more options when you generate reports.

8 Tracking Respondents

In your survey, you may want to track who has and has not responded. A higher response rate means more reliable data. An effective survey software application should let you send reminders to non-responders to increase participation. Tracking these non-responders in the software application provides quick access for follow-up correspondence.

In addition to tracking who replied, you should also be able to limit replies to one response per respondent. This is especially important for online surveys because it prevents duplicate responses from skewing the data and giving you inaccurate results. Using passwords and cookies should be potential options for preventing multiple replies from a single user.

9 Reporting and Analysis Options

Designing and implementing a survey is important, but viewing the results is the fundamental reason you are conducting a survey. Choose software that allows you to analyze your data and provides user-driven views of the results without having to export the data to another tool. Likely, you do not know in advance exactly what you need for reporting and analysis options, so look for an application that delivers robust and functional reporting and analysis options, without requiring you to be a statistician.

10 Proven Customer Support, Training, and Other Professional Services

There are several survey software options available but you should also consider the value of a trusted, reliable company as part of your decision. As easy as a product is to use, you may still need help and need to work with an established vendor to provide necessary assistance. You should also have access to online and on-site training and support so concerns can be quickly resolved using online help or through a readily available telephone staff. Truly full-service survey partners should also be able to offer form printing, mail shop services, scanning services, and survey consulting.

How Can Scantron Help?

Scantron has 40 years of experience in building solutions that allow companies to measure various areas of their organizations—customer satisfaction, employee training and enrollment, and quality initiatives. We can provide all of the pieces of your program, using one of our flexible survey application: SurveyTracker Plus.

To be successful, you must consider and manage the distinct aspects and phases of a survey:

DESIGN   ADMINISTRATION   DATA COLLECTION   REPORT & ANALYSIS

- ### Design
  An intuitive and effectively designed survey is a critical building block for success. Well-designed surveys, regardless of format, help increase response rates, minimize survey costs and improve data accuracy. You can design surveys for the web with e-mail invitations, on scannable forms and as kiosk campaigns. The goal is to ensure that, regardless of collection method, you can consolidate the responses into a common database.

- ### Administration
  When administering a survey, flexibility is key to that survey's effectiveness and efficiency. Surveys are most effective when they're administered using multiple distribution methods. In other words, there's no single delivery method that serves as a magic bullet to produce high response rates. For real data with real meaning, a survey must reach the audience in a format that is both convenient to your responders and cost-intelligent to your company.

- ### Data Collection
  Data collection is one of the most complex aspects of survey administration. Gathering responses from survey participants can appear daunting to even the most seasoned professionals. Participants may be responding by paper, kiosk, disc or web. All of this data has to be collected—quickly and accurately—into a common database for reporting and analysis. Scantron recognizes this challenge, and offers the tools necessary to make the data collection phase as straightforward and reliable as possible, while saving time and money otherwise spent on data entry personnel.

- ### Reporting & Analysis
  Surveys are conducted for the response data. If you're like most survey professionals, you inevitably want to look at data from several angles. Being

able to filter the data, then display it in a variety of clear and informative reports allows for more thorough analysis. Scantron understands that the more quickly you can put reports in the hands of an organization's influencers and decision makers, the more quickly change can be affected.

Further, Scantron provides a full-service print and mail shop that can produce and send your surveys. Our printed forms are guaranteed to scan, and our mail shop offers a variety of services including pre-sort and USPS Critical Mail™ to ensure your surveys are delivered to the right recipient at the right time. We can also help you design the form and scan the responses, freeing your staff to focus on the survey results.

With Scantron, you can choose exactly the package of software, hardware, services, and forms to give you a total survey solution. We provide you with powerful functionality, depth, and breadth—notable attributes in the survey industry.

Contact us today to find out how the power of Scantron SurveyTracker Plus can help!

Contact Us:

1.800.722.6876
www.scantron.com/surveytracker
Scantron Corporation. 1313 Lone Oak Road, Eagan, MN 55121