

Survey tools for non-statisticians...

Tool Review: SurveyMonkey

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Online Resources:

[SurveyMonkey](#)

I can't talk about other programs because I started with SurveyMonkey several years ago using the Basic-Free program. I mean, it cost nothing so what's to loose. The Free version limits the size of the survey (10 questions per survey) and the number of responses (100 responses per survey), limitations that the 'pay-for' versions do not have. But, it was free and I needed something to handle small surveys so it was the perfect option.

Since that time, I have upgraded to what is now called the "Select" version at \$17/month at \$204 annually. That version allowed me to have an unlimited number of questions and responses for each survey. It also provided some custom design features, enhanced security, and the ability to export to Excel (or in Open Office in my case). It also allowed me to print reports in pdf format.

I have now upgraded again to the "Gold" version at \$25/month at \$300 annually. Along with the features of the other two versions, I can now do a custom redirect after the online survey is completed (all versions allow for a print out of the survey which allows for manual distribution but requires someone to input the survey online in order to have SurveyMonkey do any analysis). This version also offers for greater connectivity between questions and randomization. Perhaps most importantly for me though, is the fact that Survey Monkey now provides Text analysis for open responses. A nice aside to that is that if you are with an organization that is already using SPSS for data analysis, this version and the Platinum (\$65/month at \$780 annually) both allow for easy integration with SPSS.

SurveyMonkey is not for online surveys alone. The fact that it does allow for online presentation and input can reduce a lot of the work on staff and extra costs of printing and/or mailing. Many jurisdictions still have a large portion of their populations that do not have internet access in the home. While they may have access at a public library or such, that doesn't mean that they take advantage of it. There are also a lot of people who still choose not to use the internet. With SurveyMonkey I can make a printed version of the survey for distribution via mail or handouts at meetings/public venues. These can then be filled in by the respondent, sent in to me, and then I input their data into the online version. (Ya gotta trust the person doing this input!)

How can SurveyMonkey help to make sure that your survey/questionnaire is a good one? All you need to do to answer that question is click on the "help" button after you've logged in. They provide you with Tutorials, Frequently asked questions, and various documents. Of those documents, the User manual and Best Practices for Survey Design have been the two that I use most frequently although I have printed out a copy of their Accessible Survey Guide as well to have it readily accessible.

The "Best Practices for Survey Design" is essentially a 36 page primer on how to construct a survey. (I wish I had this document when I was taking statistics, it would have made the process considerably less painful!) It is written in a nice "plain text" style that is easy to understand and it takes you through the process of designing a survey from the beginning of the process when you decide you want to use a survey for some issue to sending out your survey. They do offer an additional service (there

is a fee for this) where you can send in a survey and they will review it and help you make needed corrections.

You can also draw upon a bank of survey templates that are provided, copy and adapt a survey that you have already done for other use, or create a whole new survey. If you choose to use one of the expert survey templates, there are various categories to choose from and several templates in each survey. Each survey template has a name and by clicking on it you will get a list of the questions contained in the survey. Simply review the questions to see if they apply. For instance, in the category of Education there are a total of 9 templates covering input on different topics from specific groups and specific focuses. There is even one asking for students to provide input about High School sports. Others ask for teacher, student, and parent input on various features of the education process.

If you are located in a jurisdictions where "events" are something you really count on to generate revenue, it is well worth looking at the 3 event surveys. There is an Event Planning Template that is useful in determining if people are planning on attending, ease of registration, and what you may be expecting from the event. It even includes information on any dietary restrictions the person may have when the events include meals/snacks. Although clearly designed for the types of events where there are speakers and presentations, this basic concept could easily be applied to more social types of events. Think of how easy it would be to have vendors simply fill in a survey form giving information as to they types of products and price ranges they may be carrying as a way in which to help you design the layout in an open environment. There are also templates available for Post-event feedback and for RSVP and Contact Information.

Human Resources couldn't get much easier than using SurveyMonkey for exit interviews, employee evaluations, department performance, employee benefits, employee performance, employee satisfaction, management performance, supervisor performance, and team performance. These are all available in expert templates that are essentially ready-to-use.

Two of my favorites are in the Community category and are the Neighborhood Feedback and the Neighborhood Events templates. In fact, I may have to use a couple of them in my citizen-side surveys. Oops! I guess I forgot to mention that part. You see, when government doesn't do things or does them in a less than desirable manner, there may well be citizens who will decide to take matters into their own hands. Such citizens will do their own surveys and publish their results on the facebook, blog, or webpages. SurveyMonkey makes it incredibly easy for the average citizen to do just that! Of course, nothing prevents government agencies from tapping into those concerned citizens and getting them to help government develop workable surveys so long as you are on common, non-threatening ground. The neutrality of SurveyMonkey can provide that venue. Simply use the SurveyMonkey guidelines for developing a survey as the common ground and sit down to work out the specifics.

SurveyMonkey is always looking for ways to improve their product without making it too complex or cumbersome. One of the best examples of that is a fairly recently added "Question Bank". For those designing their own surveys, this "Question Bank" is a bank of questions to choose from which were written by professionals in the field specifically to minimize bias and provide the most accurate responses. This bank is essentially comprised of questions that are commonly used in surveys and are organized according to general category like: Demographics, Education, Events, Human Resources, Miscellaneous, etc. All you need to do is find a question that fits your need, select that question, and add it to your survey.

Where the Templates offer a predetermined list of questions, the Question Bank allows for a custom fit for your area. It does take a bit longer because you'll need to look through the lists of questions, but they can be easily modified to apply to a specific jurisdiction, to areas within the jurisdiction, or to certain departments.

Since most jurisdictions will want to have some basic demographics on most every survey that is sent out, this is easily accomplished by using either the demographic template (simply remove or modify the questions that are not applicable) or using the question bank (again modify questions as needed) and develop a basic survey for demographics. Save that survey and when you get ready to do your targeted survey, simply make a copy of that survey and then add the questions that you would like to see asked.

Once the survey is designed, SurveyMonkey allows for several ways in which to reach respondents. You can:

- email your own messages or place on a website by using the link information provided by SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey will provide you with the exact text to be added to email as a link (this can be customized), and the html code to embed into a webpage.
- you can send SurveyMonkey a list of the email addresses to send to and a copy of your survey along with any message you wish and have them send it out for you. (This is a bonus for smaller jurisdictions where the opportunity for bulk emailing might be limited)
- embed into your website the actual survey page, and invitation to take the survey popup, or a popup containing your survey when someone visits a specific page of your website (you define the size of the survey based up the height and width you set up)
- or, type in a message and click to load to facebook to post both the message and survey to facebook. There is also a link listed so that you can manually add to facebook.

Of course, you can always use the option to print out your survey. This will allow you do download a printable version of the survey in pdf form. Then you can distribute the printed survey and wait for them to return. Once returned, you can then manually input the data received into SurveyMonkey.

Once you've received all of your data (or if you're like me and can't stand the suspense and check it while it is still open), you can analyze the data using SurveyMonkey. You can even leave the survey open for additional responses while you simply analyze the data that you already have. I'm afraid that I am one of those who tracks it over time rather than waiting until it is closed because I am also noting the dates when news articles on the topic appear. This gives me an idea of how people respond to the news article and I can take that into account when it comes time to really look at the data.

SurveyMonkey does some of the basic analysis for you. For instance, using the results provided, I can quickly see that while 56.7% of all respondents to this survey already shop farmer's markets, 98.9% of them would shop at one in this jurisdiction, if one were available. 69% of respondents felt any market opened there should be open 2 days per week as opposed to 31% feeling that one day per week was sufficient.

Using the Text Analysis feature on the questions of what products people would like to see sold at this proposed venue, I can go to either a list view (where I need to add categories and tag the responses to match the different categories) or I can take the easy way out and do a "Cloud View". On the "Cloud View" the desires of people fairly shout at you. They want Fresh, Locally grown Fruits and Vegetables, some eggs would be nice, along with some Crafts and Honey. They specifically want Corn, Celery, Cabbage, and Strawberries, preferably grown in small home gardens.

The Analysis features go on from there to some nice cross-tab structures. If, however, you are looking for more advanced statistical procedures, they are not here. For that you need to download the data for excel spreadsheet. That is easy enough to do with this system. However, you really need to have someone who knows their stats

to take hold of this alligator to wrestle. It is even easier to twist and outcome with statistics than it is with basic survey results. But, there are always those of us citizens who will be around watching for exactly that to happen.

For the most part, the package provided by SurveyMonkey will more than adequately meet the needs of any surveys generated for the public. Once you've got the results analyzed, then you need to look at them pretty closely. In the Text Analysis discussion above, it was noted that citizens wanted Corn, Celery, Cabbage, and Strawberries that were preferably grown in small home gardens then brought to the Farmer's Market. I think that most people would realize that is a reasonably unlikely scenario to develop. It would take an awful lot of backyard gardens and dedicated hobby gardeners to produce enough of those items to keep a Farmer's Market alive. However, that does give you information that you can find useful in educating the public about what is available and why. Perhaps it would inspire you to set aside one booth that was only for those products grown by "backyard gardeners". Careful, thoughtful use of the data you receive can lead the way to a wide range of possible options to make things happen in a realistic manner.

As I noted at the onset, I cannot address any other products providing this service simply because it has provided me with everything that I need. I suggest that you take the time to do a Google search to find some of those options. Be careful when you do this that you take the offered information with a "grain of salt," unless it comes directly from the company providing the product, because I did such a search and came up with rates that are no longer accurate, some companies no longer exist, and some are now offering options that are not included in the reviews provided.