

# Surveys

Ever wonder how well received your annual dinner event is? Looking to evaluate a new program? Need to collect data for a big research project? Surveys can be a huge help in understanding what your constituents think and how successful your programs are.

And good tools can be a big part of that. Online survey tools can be a very cost-effective way for delivering surveys and collecting and analyzing results through one central system. While they're not going to be the right fit for every research need (for instance, a paper survey is likely to get a much-higher response rate at an in-person event, and provide more accurate data among populations that are not as comfortable with computers), online surveys are great for gathering informal data quickly and easily.

There are a number of these tools available. How do they compare? Idealware spoke to three nonprofit staff members with extensive survey experience, consulted postings on a number of nonprofit listservs, and scoured reports and articles on the topic. Below, we walk through the online survey tools that have worked for others, and might work for you as well.

## What Do These Tools Do?

Pretty much any good online survey tool will allow you to easily define your survey questions and the possible responses using an online interface, and then send your constituents a link to answer the survey online. But some offer more sophisticated functionality that can be very handy when you're planning anything more than the simplest survey. What types of features might be useful?

- **Flexible survey look and feel.** A survey that has prominent branding for a survey tool rather than your organization can be off-putting to constituents and decrease your response rate. A package that allows you to update colors, font and header graphics can help you match a survey to your website or organizational branding.
- **Skip logic.** As you design more complex surveys, it's often useful to let respondents skip a whole section of questions that don't apply to them. Survey skip logic lets you define, for instance, that those who answer "no" to question 10 should skip to question 15.
- **Piping.** Piping allows you to pull answers from one part of a survey into another. For instance, if someone says in one question that they live in New York City, you can then ask them in a follow-up, "What's the best thing about living in New York City," filling in the name of the city from the previous question. More sophisticated packages allow you to combine skip logic and piping to customize surveys even further.
- **Randomization.** The order of a set of questions, or the set of answers to a given question, can often affect survey responses and thus the quality of your data. Features that automatically randomize the order of particular questions or answers will help avoid this issue.
- **Website integration.** While many packages create surveys in their own web page, some let you embed them into your existing website. This can be a particularly useful way to do quick, one-question surveys (called polls), or to gather opinions from web visitors in a longer survey.
- **Data analysis.** One of the primary differentiators between inexpensive packages and their more expensive counterparts is their ability to help you to analyze the data and understand the meaning behind the results. Most packages provide simple reports summarizing the answers to each question, and many will let you download them into Excel or another tool for further analysis. More advanced packages allow cross-tabulation to see the data relationships between different sets of questions, or complex statistical analysis.

Keep in mind that no software package can do the design work to ensure your survey will collect effective, high quality data. While it's easy to slap together a set of questions, designing a survey that will capture the data you need in a rigorous way is complicated — you'll likely benefit from consulting someone who has experience with survey design.

# Basic Survey Tools

A number of low cost online tools provide easy interfaces for building surveys and viewing reports online. These packages can be a great fit for smaller surveys where advanced question types, survey logic, and results analysis are not required.

- **SurveyMonkey:** SurveyMonkey offers a popular online hosted survey tool that works well for basic surveys. The free version might be useful for very small and informal surveys, but allows very little customization of the look of the survey, no downloads of reports or data, and can only collect 10 questions and 100 responses per survey. The Select version (\$16.99/month, or \$199/year) offers unlimited questions and responses, customizability, skip logic and the ability to export Excel and PDF files. The package's folder structure and "search by title" feature makes it easy to navigate through many surveys. Reports are minimal, but they allow you to export results to another application to do more serious analysis. Higher end Gold and Platinum versions (\$24.99/month and \$64.99/month) offer advanced logic features like question and answer piping, randomization, text analysis for open responses, and integration with IBM's SPSS statistical software.
- **Zoomerang:** Zoomerang is similar to SurveyMonkey in many respects, but offers in general a somewhat more powerful package for somewhat more money. Like SurveyMonkey, there's a very limited free package; the more useful Pro package is offered to nonprofits for \$149/year for unlimited surveys, questions and respondents, and a Premium package (\$449/year for nonprofits) includes mobile surveys, comparison reports, multi-user survey sharing and collaboration, and statistical analysis. The survey building tools are not quite as intuitive as SurveyMonkey's, and it can be more difficult to learn. However, Zoomerang offers more extensive reporting, with a flexible cross-tabulation report tool that lets survey administrators see the data relationships across any set of questions.
- **SurveyGizmo:** SurveyGizmo offers a low-cost (\$19/month) solution with some advanced features — it supports 1,000 responses per month, and basic logic — as well as a range of more advanced packages from \$49/month to \$160/month. At all levels, SurveyGizmo offers basic piping, fully customizable survey look and feel, and the ability to embed images and videos hosted on your own website. More advanced levels offer many randomization options (question options, questions per survey page, and pages themselves), skip logic, and more. SurveyGizmo offers an API for integrating survey functionality into websites, blogs and other applications, including integration with Salesforce.com.
- **PollDaddy:** PollDaddy offers surveys and polls that can be easily embedded into external websites and applications. The free package offers a maximum of 10 questions per survey and 100 responses per month, plus basic reporting. More advanced versions cost between \$200/year and \$900/year. Survey features are more limited than some of the other options in this category, with no skip logic or piping, but survey administrators have a lot of flexibility over the look of the survey, by selecting from pre-designed templates, or fully customizing the template by editing stylesheet code. Surveys can be delivered in pop-up windows, and results can be tracked via RSS feed.

## Lower-Cost Integrated Solutions

There are a number of inexpensive solutions that bundle in additional features outside of surveys and polls. These can be quite useful if you find that your survey needs often overlap with others — for instance, the need to send emails. However, the survey functionality within these integrated tools tends to be fairly basic, and they're unlikely to meet the needs of those looking for advanced survey logic or analysis features.

- **Constant Contact:** Although known primarily as an email marketing tool, Constant Contact offers "Listen-Up," a hosted survey tool with some interesting benefits. There's no free option, but fee-based packages are competitive with other lower-cost options, ranging from about \$10/month to \$150/month, depending on the number of respondents who will be answering surveys. Constant Contact offers more than 40 predesigned templates with some ability to customize. Surveys can include skip logic, and can be scheduled in advance. The tool also offers a variety of emailing and email management services, including contact importing, list segmentation and basic contact management. Reports are quite basic, but data can be exported for analysis in another tool.
- **FormSite:** FormSite offers a tool for building website forms — everything from simple "contact us" forms to evaluation forms. Although the focus is forms for feedback and test-taking, FormSite offers a basic set of survey

features, and may be useful to those looking to collect a lot of different types of information via web-forms. Features include multiple page surveys, question randomization, basic skip logic and piping. Surveys can be customized to match your website by someone familiar with HTML. They offer a variety of prices, including a limited free account, and packages ranging from \$10/month to \$100/month.

- **Moodle:** Moodle is a powerful open source course management software package primarily targeted at schools and universities. It integrates website content management and online course management with survey and test-taking solutions. The survey tools are geared toward those gathering feedback from students to assess teaching methods, and several verified survey instruments are provided for this purpose. Moodle may be appropriate for nonprofits running training programs or schools seeking an all-in-one website, course and survey management solution for their programs. The package is free to download, but will require substantial technical knowledge to install, configure, customize and support.

## More Advanced Survey Packages

If you are looking to conduct larger-scale research, marketing and feedback analysis projects, a more powerful survey package could provide welcome functionality. These tools offer significantly more advanced question formats, survey logic and data analysis. The more complex functionality makes them more difficult to use without training, especially for those without prior survey design expertise.

- **Qualtrics:** Qualtrics provides enterprise data collection and analysis for corporate, academic, and nonprofit institutions. The Qualtrics Research Suite provides data analysis support for cross-tabulation, conjoint analysis, subgroup analysis, time series analysis, and more. Annual subscription prices range from starter packages at \$5,000.
- **QuestionPro:** QuestionPro packages range from limited free versions to more advanced \$15-\$99/month options. The free package lets you re-use questions from one survey to the next, or pull questions from a standard survey template library. The more advanced packages offer unlimited surveys, questions and responses with skip logic, piping, randomization and even more complex survey logic, as well as multimedia and multilingual support. QuestionPro also offers an API to exchange survey data with outside applications, including a module for Salesforce.com integration.
- **LimeSurvey:** This is a powerful, free and open source survey package appropriate for nonprofits looking for advanced survey logic and analysis features and who have substantial technology support. Its range of features includes full customization of survey look and feel, support for 40 different languages, piping, skip logic, a library of available survey questions and blast emailing. The tool has a large support community and is under active development. This is an open source package that can be downloaded for free, installed on your own web server, and customized to your needs by a developer with knowledge of PHP/ MySQL. Although the tool itself is free, be prepared to bear the costs for your own web hosting, and the time it takes to properly install, configure, customize and support this product on your own.
- **Key Survey:** This is the most robust of the advanced survey tools covered in this article. Prices range from \$1,950 to \$5,950/year for single-user subscriptions. It offers a full set of features, including several unusually advanced ones such as LDAP integration to allow single-sign-on models for large organizations, role based permissions, support for "teacher/student" surveys, multimedia questions and much more. Key Survey also offers an API to exchange survey data with outside applications, with a module for Salesforce.com integration.

## Choosing the Right Survey Tool

Start by thinking about your needs. If you're just looking to get your feet wet with a quick survey, one of the free or low cost tools will probably work fine. In fact, a more sophisticated survey package is likely to just be considerably more difficult for you to use. On the other hand, if you're looking for survey software to support rigorous research, the more advanced packages are more likely to have the features you need.

Whichever type of package makes sense for you, take advantage of the free versions to take the tools for a trial run. While many of the advanced features are not available in the free trials, the vendor may be able to give you access to these features as well.

With a little care, you can choose a package that will make it easy to collect and analyze data. When that next annual dinner or research project comes around, you won't have to guess what people are thinking — you can find out!