

83 Surveys

Surveys are a method of collecting self-reported information from people about their characteristics, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, behaviors, or attitudes.

Surveys are a common method for collecting information from people, typically from large samples of respondents. They are an efficient tool for collecting a lot of data in a short time frame, typically with little cost, and are versatile in the type of information that can be collected. With large enough samples, results can be analyzed statistically.

While the term describes a broad approach, there are two dominant techniques for survey data collection within the method—*questionnaires*, either self-completed or read to participants and completed by the researcher; and structured *interviews*, conducted in person, by phone, or through various communication technologies.

Like any self-report instrument, surveys may not be an accurate reflection of true thoughts, feelings, perceptions, or even behaviors. This argues for the careful design and administration of surveys, and the use of complementary observations or other methods. For example, it is common to survey a wide base of constituents using questionnaires to gain a lot of information, and pair this with a smaller set of in-depth observations, contextual inquiries, or participatory design sessions.

There are various types of survey questions for interviews or questionnaires:¹

- Closed—forced choice, structured with limited response options
- Open—broad with no set response to encourage discussion or longer answers
- General—focused on big picture, broad spectrum issues
- Specific—focused on details particular to the situation
- Factual—with responses that can be verified by observation or supporting information
- Hypothetical—asks participant to speculate about behaviors or actions
- Judgmental—asks participant for his or her opinion, what he or she thinks about things
- Comparative—asks for a judgment on two or more alternatives
- Neutral—no value words used, remains objective
- Leading—to be avoided, suggests a correct or expected answer
- Blaming—to be avoided, suggests participant is wrong or at fault
- Request for suggestions—invites participant to suggest new ideas, opinions
- Request for questions—invites participant to suggest questions you have overlooked

The form of questions should be based on the inquiry, time constraints, and preferred response format.

1. Hackos, JoAnn T., and Janice C. Redish. *User and Task Analysis for Interface Design*. New York: Wiley, 1998.

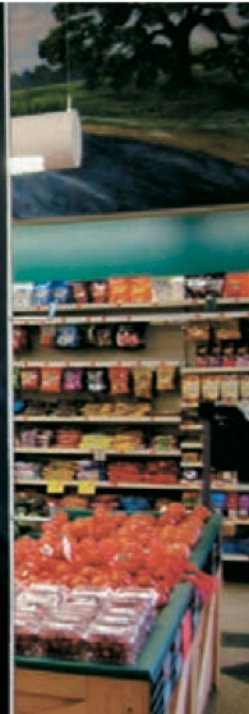
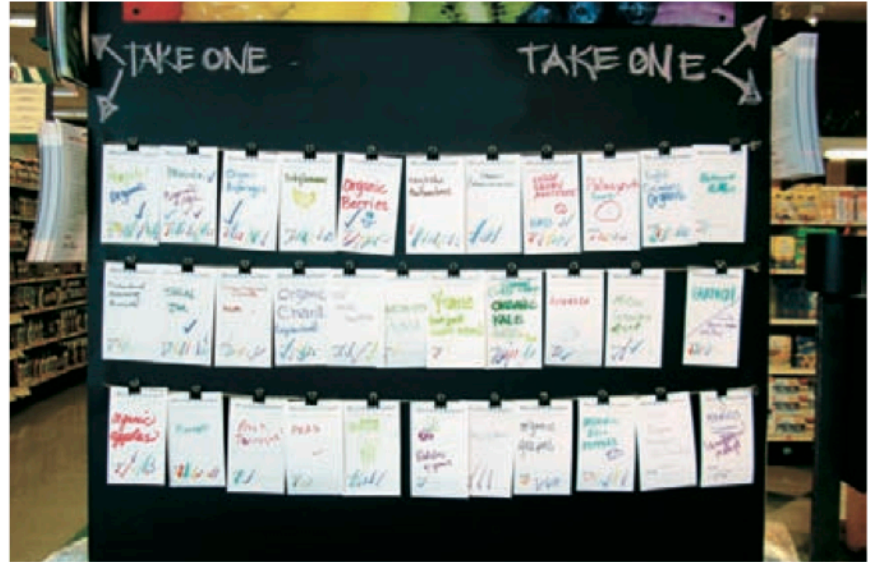
Behavioral
Attitudinal

Quantitative
Qualitative

Innovative
Adapted
Traditional

Exploratory
Generative
Evaluative

Participatory
Observational
Self reporting
Expert review
Design process



The "Produce Proposal Wall" provides a method of survey that allows customers to communicate what fresh fruits and vegetables they want available in the store, while fostering dialogue between grocery store owners and shoppers, and building a community around the topic.

Courtesy of Sarah Calandro © 2011