What is a customer survey?

A customer survey, or market survey, is a method of collecting information from current or potential customers by having respondents answer a questionnaire administered by telephone, mail, e-mail, or in person.
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Why are the advantages of using surveys?

Surveys are a convenient, relatively inexpensive method of gathering marketing information. The number of respondents surveyed may be small or large depending on the requirements of the research.
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What are some of the disadvantages of using surveys?

Surveys can be difficult to design, and depending on the dissemination method, costly to use. Also, to have an accurate sampling, survey respondents must be selected very carefully.
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How should I plan a survey?

Time spent in the planning stage can save time and money. Consider the following planning steps:

1. Develop a clear, detailed goal statement for the survey. What type of information do you need? What is your desired outcome? How will the information be used?

2. Based on the goal of the survey, design a questionnaire with specifications as to who should complete it. If the survey is to be administered by telephone or in person, be sure to include instructions for the person conducting the interviews.

3. Test the questionnaire by conducting several test interviews with people who can advise you about necessary changes. After making the changes, test the revised survey as well.

4. Start interviewing (or mail or e-mail the surveys).
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What kind of response can I expect?

Market survey response rates vary considerably. A number of factors influence the level of response you can expect. Consider these factors that improve response rates:

- Survey respondents with a high level of interest.
- Telephone the respondent prior to mailing or e-mailing the questionnaire.
- Personalize letters and envelopes.
- Enclose a hand-signed cover letter.
- Provide or promise an incentive for survey completion.
- Use first-class postage.
- Provide a postage paid, self-addressed return envelope.
- Develop a short, high quality, attractive questionnaire.
- If using e-mail, keep it short, and send only to a qualified list.
What kind of response can I expect? continued

The average return rates for market surveys can be between 10 and 20 percent of the total mailing. Some questionnaires have received up to a 75 percent response rate. In assessing the value of survey results, the amount and quality of the marketing information is compared with the costs of obtaining it.
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What kind of response can I expect? continued

Consider these additional ways to improve the quality of responses and response rates:

- Use nontraditional ways to structure questions on the questionnaire. This means strategically planning your questions in a creative way to elicit the information you are seeking without being obvious.

- Include a variety of formats for respondents to use. For example, instead of using five questions with agree or disagree answers, vary the type of answer that the respondent gives.

- Provide specific directions for each type of question. The format may be obvious to you, but if the respondent is unsure of how to answer questions, your questionnaire may not get answered. Number all questions.
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What kind of response can I expect? continued

Consider these additional ways to improve the quality of responses and response rates:

- Make sure your questionnaire is pleasing to the eye. Although this seems easy enough, many people do not keep the respondent in mind when designing a questionnaire. For example:
  - Use dark ink on light paper.
  - Select a clear, easy-to-read type style.
  - Use a short, attractive cover letter.
  - Use easy-to-read fonts on e-mails.
  - Help the respondents complete their responses by using lines, arrows, etc.