

Five Reasons Not To Design Your Own Survey...

Reason #1: Survey design requires expertise.

Survey design and administration requires some basic knowledge if you are going to obtain results that are reliable enough to make important decisions. This begins with knowing what you should measure. Do you measure programs? Attitudes? Behaviors? Then you need to decide what kind of scale to use. Yes/no? Disagree/agree? Should you rank items? Or rate them? There are issues of administration. How do you get a good response rate? How many is enough? Finally, there is the issue of analysis. Do you only want frequency counts? Percentages? Where do you need the data broken down by categories such as age, gender, involvement, etc? What correlations do you need to run?

Reason #2: Survey design is time-consuming.

Even with the right expertise, a committee of three or four persons generally finds designing a survey from scratch to be a very time-consuming endeavor. This can be avoided by assigning the work to one person, but this negates what a library is often trying to accomplish by designing its own survey in the first place: an instrument with broad input. And after the survey questions are crafted and the instrument is formatted and printed (or posted on the internet), you still have the work of distributing it, publicizing it, doing the data entry, and analysis.

Reason #3: Survey processing requires special software.

There are a number of steps in survey administration that require special software. If you are going to post the instrument on the web, you have to have a server that will host that for you. If you run a print survey you will need data entry software and a check program. (Reliable data entry requires a double entry which creates two files that are then checked against each other.) After the data entry, a statistical analysis will need to be conducted. This either requires a person with a statistical package such as SPSS-PC or SAS or a person with an advanced knowledge of spreadsheets.

Reason #4: Survey design is expensive.

Designing your own survey not only requires considerable volunteer labor, it generally requires significant staff support. This usually amounts to 20 hours of work or more just to generate the survey and bring it to a point where it can be distributed. Additional staff time may be required for data entry and report generation. Many leaders have calculated the cost of developing their own survey and have concluded that it will cost the organization two to three times the price of purchasing our service.

Reason #5: You may not know what your survey data means.

After you receive your results, you may not know if a given score is high or low. For example, if 80% of respondents indicate they are generally satisfied, is that good or not? If 10% of respondents indicate they want the library open more hours is that a problem, or is that just the way it is in libraries?

The instruments provided by Holy Cow! Consulting have been developed with input from a large number of persons across your family of organizations. They have a track record of effectiveness. They come with step-by-step instructions and technical support. And with a large database behind each one, we know what is typical, what is to be celebrated, and what is a potential problem.