



Fact Sheet No. 11: Online Surveys

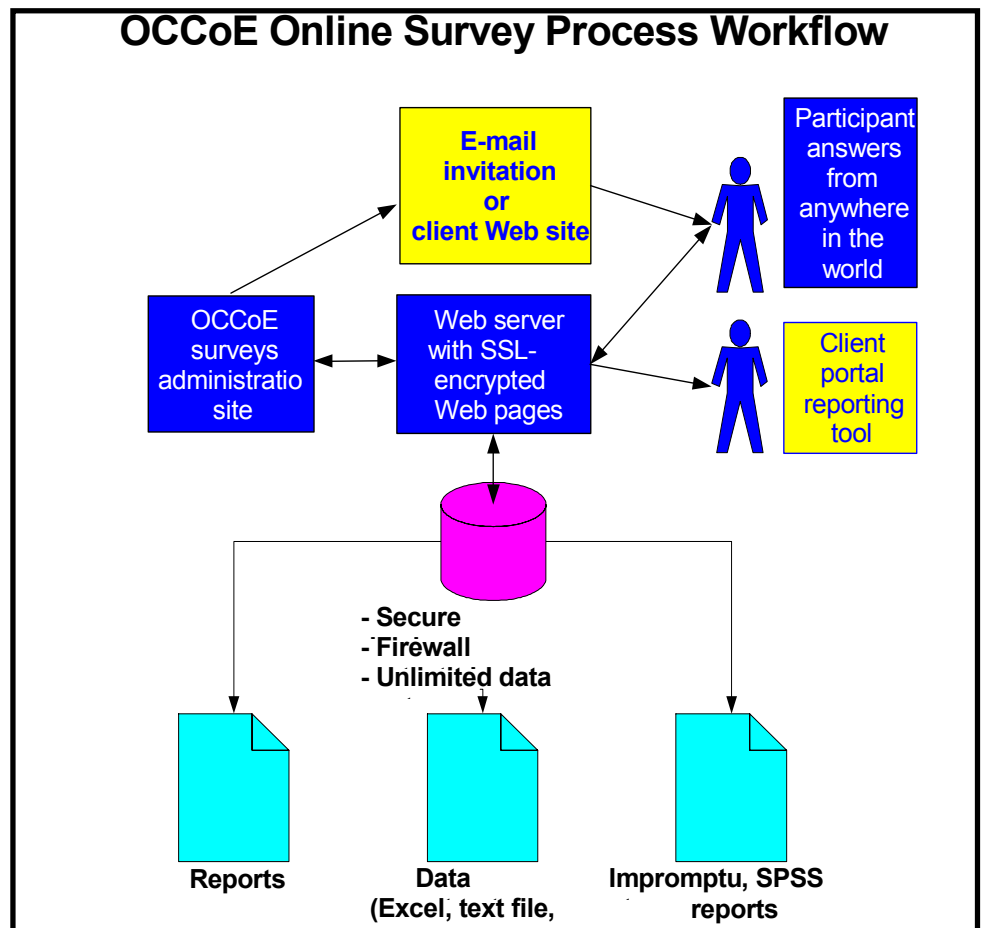
Overview

Online surveys are tools used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from various audiences. They can serve many purposes, including identifying a group's characteristics, measuring attitudes and describing behavioural patterns. Information gathered can be factual or objective (feelings, beliefs, opinions, future intents, etc.). Online surveys are useful for collecting information from well-defined subject areas. This information can be analysed, disseminated and used to aid in decisions and designs.

The surveys are administered over the Internet, as a Web form. Respondents complete the survey at the time most convenient for them. Completed surveys are then instantly submitted to an electronic database where they are compiled and stored. The database of information can then be used to generate reports with statistical analysis.

Key Considerations

- Online surveys are highly adaptable and can be tailored to meet the needs of a diverse clientele.
- Surveys can be composed and completed in both official languages.
- Federal government departments use online surveys because they have the potential to reach audiences across a range of geographic locations at a minimal cost.
- Surveys offer great potential to accelerate and simplify the process of collecting market research on clients, employees, stakeholders, etc.
- Online surveys allow data rollup to be automated much more than with paper or telephone surveys. Data collected is much easier to distribute and there is a reduction in error.
- Surveys are re-usable and can be helpful for tracking long-term trends.
- Surveys are often distributed by e-mail and typically require no additional software outside of a standard Web browser with JavaScript.
- Online surveys can offer greater anonymity than phone, paper or in-person methods.



Some Challenges

Accessibility

Online surveys can be adapted to meet accessibility requirements.

Design

Careful design and clear wording ensure high response rates and accurate results. Respondents must be familiar with the survey context and terminology. Clients must ensure that appropriate terminology is being used.

Anonymity

The Government of Canada is committed to protecting Canadians' personal information. Privacy should be addressed and taken into consideration during the design and implementation of online surveys. Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) provides resources and information on this matter.

Application

Online surveys are typically used in the early stages of policy development, when participants are least engaged in the process.

Surveys can be used at any stage of a consultation process as a measurement of satisfaction, effectiveness and/or success.

Examples of Use

Public Works and Government Services Canada conducted an online employee satisfaction survey in 2004. The survey, administered through e-mail, was used to gather information in an online format. This facilitated the rapid compilation of data and results.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) has completed over 70 internal surveys using the survey software Perseus, in areas such as employee and client satisfaction, second language testing and course evaluations. PSC also implemented a 360° feedback survey and used various online questionnaires to collect feedback from both the public and stakeholders involved in issues.

Industry Canada's Prairie and Northern Regions have conducted employee satisfaction surveys since 1998 using the online format. Certain questions on the survey remain the same from year to year, which

allows Industry Canada's human resources officers to track response trends efficiently.

In 1996, Statistics Canada drastically shifted its means of communicating, as it was determined that the Internet had become the primary means of distributing surveyed information. Every month, approximately 1 million Canadians were accessing the Statistics Canada site and staying online for an average of 20 minutes. Statistics Canada, which administers surveys through numerous outlets, has achieved a reputable image as a champion of online surveys. The organization conducts approximately 350 surveys annually, covering a broad range of Canadian citizen activities. The electronic information gathered by means of the surveys is published through a number of communication media and reaches a diverse audience.

Complementary Tools

Web-based discussions, forums and document-sharing tools

These processes allow participants to submit postings or documents on a given topic. The posts, organized in threads, can be viewed and responded to by all, which results in an asynchronous discussion. A Q&A forum could help clarify any ambiguities in a survey, which could in turn elicit higher response rates. These tools can be used during a range of stages of the policy-making process.

Webinars

Webinars—online meetings with presentations, voice, live chats and whiteboard functions—could be used as a method of communicating a survey's context before it is launched, or as a follow-up to communicate the survey results.

This fact sheet presents ideas from the Innovatec Conference "Internal Consultations: Tips, Tools, and Tactics" held in June 2005. A full report is available from the

Online Consultation Technologies Centre of Expertise

www.onlineconsultation.gc.ca

