

How To Conduct Your Own Research and Use It To Make More Sales

By Karon Thackston

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I received an email from a prospective client the other day. It was disturbing. The message stated, "...my customers aren't buying and I don't know what they want anyway. I'm adding new product lines all the time but nothing seems to work." I could feel her frustration.

In my reply to her, I asked a few questions. "Did you do any research prior to opening your business?" "Have you done any sense?" "If so, did you ask your prospective clients what they wanted?" Most business owners would love to get inside the minds of their clients but think it costs a lot of money to hire a professional research firm. They're right... it does! But who said you had to use one of those firms? You can easily conduct your own research and use that information to make more sales.

Without doing any research, you are left guessing. What's more, you will most likely spend more money in the long run from making poor business choices than you would if you conducted your own research and were then able to offer your customers what they wanted.

Surveys have been around practically since the beginning of business. They are a fast and effective tool for gathering information that can help you improve your company in a number of areas. If done right, surveys can give you exceptional insight into what your customers want, where your business is falling short, and how you can turn things around in order to bring new customers in and keep current customers buying.

Let's look at a few "rules" for conducting a simple survey in order to get the response you need at a price you can afford.

Make It Worth Their While

With everyone screaming for your attention these days, many people simply don't have time to answer every survey they receive. In order to gain the attention of those whose input you need, you'll have to provide some sort of incentive. In a survey I conducted about a year ago, I simply asked for the help of those I contacted, explaining what I was doing and what the information I collected would be used for. The response was "usual"... about 1%. However, in a recent survey I conducted, I offered the opportunity for participants to enter a drawing for \$100 cash. The response rate significantly jumped. I received an 8% response to this survey!

Small businesses might balk at a \$100 prize, but consider this... that \$100 provided me with a way to gain the information I needed in order to increase my advertising sales and to offer new products and services that I KNEW would be purchased. Considering the return on investment, \$100 in prize money was an excellent investment!

Be Honest

No one likes to feel they are being taken advantage of. And with so many people seeking to gain personal information these days, most consumers are reluctant to offer it. When you tell your survey participants what you will do with the information and why you need it, many will be glad to cooperate.

In the case of my most recent survey, I honestly told the participants that I needed their input to improve the quality and content of the newsletter I provide for them. I also told them I needed their expertise on product offerings I was considering. All true. A good percentage of them were accommodating.

Keep It Anonymous

People are always more likely to provide personal information when they don't have to disclose their identity. With this past survey, I set up an online poll where the entrants could fill out the form and then click to a separate link in order to enter the contest. This way they knew there was no way I could make a connection between who entered the contest and what their specific answers were.

By offering protection of their identity, my survey participants became more willing to give information they would not have if I required them to provide their name, address, phone or email.

Make It Easy

Most people are rushing around at such a fast pace that they simply don't have a lot of time to complete research requests. That's why it is vital that your survey be easy to answer.

I almost always select a multiple-choice format. The participant can simply check off the boxes that apply and be done in a flash.

If your customers have Internet access, you might be wise to select an online poll for them to use. One of my favorites, because of its ease of set-up, is Bravenet (<http://www.bravenet.net>). They provide a huge selection of resources for Webmasters including their Vote Caster feature for surveys and polls. And... they are completely FREE.

If your customers are more easily reached via mail, be sure to provide a self-addressed, postage paid envelope for the return of the survey.

The easier you make it for customers to participate, the more response you will receive.

When worked in combination with each other, this formula makes for a simple but effective plan to collect the information you need. With it, you can improve your product or service offerings, increase your level of customer service, alter your policies to be more customer-friendly and develop a business environment where you can make more sales!

Most buying decisions are emotional. Your ad copy should be, too! Karon is Owner and President of KT & Associates who offers targeted copywriting, copy editing & ezine article services. Subscribe

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