

When In Doubt, Ask!

By Paula Morrow

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In the rush to get online, have you ever found yourself skipping over the research fundamentals, like our Online Wannabe?

For instance, do any of the following sound familiar?

Online Wannabe: (checking off the list) OK, signed up for a few affiliate programs, posted the provided websites...I know there are a lot of people online just like me, and I KNOW they'll want this.

(time goes by....but nothing happens)

Wannabe: Ah, c'mon! EVERYONE needs this product - it's a sure thing! Everyone says so! Maybe if I place more ads - I'll just stick a classified in this one - it has tons, so I'm sure a lot of people are reading it.

(...still nothing)

Kindly Online Mentor-Type: Maybe you should do a little research into your market - have you done a survey? Do you know what your market wants? Have you asked at the forums and discussion boards? Have you checked out your competition's ezines?

Online Wannabe: Research! Big yawn! It's boring, and I'm busy. I don't have time to do all that...You know, this online stuff isn't as easy as I thought. And I'm running out of money. Maybe I should go back to my old job...

OK, enough of this...bottom line: skip your research, and you lose. And not just your money; ultimately, you could lose your business.

Regarding surveys, have you ever done one? They are a quick and popular method for getting inside customer's heads, to discover their problems (that you could solve!) and what they really want. They've been around forever, and for good reason: they work.

If you have an existing business, aside from valuable customer insight, a survey could also uncover problem areas that you may not be aware of. Fix these, and you have a great opportunity to bring in new customers while keeping current ones in 'buying mode.'

Granted, doing a survey online comes with its own set of challenges. With everything moving at

light-speed, you'll need to figure out how to grab their attention. Offering an incentive for participating (a free bonus, a cash prize, a product discount) is one proven method for improving the rate of response.

If you're new, and don't have a customer list to survey, you have a few options. For example, if you've a good track record (and the moderator clears you first), you MAY be allowed to conduct a quick survey in a forum. If you want to post a survey on your web site, Bravenet has FREE surveys and polls that can be easily integrated (<http://www.bravenet.net>).

Other things to keep in mind with surveys:

* Keep It Honest. Tell the participants your goals behind the survey. What you'll be using the information for (product development, whatever). Be upfront.

* Keep It Anonymous. People will always feel more free to really tell you their thoughts if they know they won't be identified. Guarantee that the information will be kept confidential and not sold or abused in any way.

* Keep It Quick And Easy. A fast multiple-choice poll or survey, that takes minutes (not hours), will have a better chance of getting answered. If you want, include a field at the end for participants who want to give additional comment. But try not to make typed answers mandatory.

Doing your research at the beginning helps avoid headaches later on, and will make your business profitable, faster!

Paula Morrow heads <http://www.idealmarketingcorp.com> . She specializes in public relations, information marketing and creating cashflow systems. Her newsletter, IDEALProfits, is now read in 12 countries. Subscribe and receive 5 BONUS ebooks! <http://www.idealmarketingcorp.com/subscribe.html>

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