



StatNews #45

Web Administration of Surveys May 2001

Many researchers rely on surveys to collect their data. The usual methods for administering a survey include face-to-face, mail, telephone, and more recently, email. Each of these choices has advantages and disadvantages in terms of coverage of the population, sampling methods, cost, response rate and time frame. Cornell's Survey Research Institute (SRI) can help you administer some of these types of surveys.

With the increased development of the internet and web-based applications, it is now feasible to post your survey on the web where respondents can access it and fill it out. A web survey can reduce some of the cost and time disadvantages of the traditional survey methods. The main advantage of a web survey is that you will save time by not having to enter your data. When your sampled individuals have all answered the survey on the web, you will simply download a complete data set to your computer that you will then be able to directly import into a statistical package for further tabulation and analysis.

Before conducting a web survey, however, you should keep in mind that a web survey has some serious disadvantages. Its main disadvantages are that you may not be able to reach your intended population adequately and that you may obtain a very low response rate. Also, there may be bias introduced because different browsers do not result in the same layout for the survey.

After considering the advantages and disadvantages of each method of survey administration, if you are still interested in a web survey, there are new resources available to researchers at Cornell. As one of the many services offered by their technology support program, the Academic Technology Center at CIT recently developed a web tool that will allow researchers here at Cornell to conduct a web survey free of charge.

Regardless of the method of survey administration, many other issues need to be addressed if a survey is to be successful. A good starting point when developing a survey is to read Salant and Dillman's book, "How to Conduct your Own Survey." The staff of the Office of Statistical Consulting will be happy to assist you in making decisions about the best way to conduct your survey, including the method of survey administration and the sampling design and size. Some background on determining the sample size needed for a survey can be found in [StatNews #41](#).

Reference: Salant P, Dillman DA. How to Conduct your Own Survey. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994.

Author: [Francoise Vermeylen](#)

[Back to StatNews Table of Contents](#)