

Do Follow Up Survey Invitations Help Lift Response Rates?

Whether you are conducting a survey by mail or online, the question exists about the value of following up. If it's a mail survey, there is a tangible cost to the follow up. With an online survey, not so much cost, but there is still time involved to make it happen. So, overall, is following up with non-respondents a worthwhile endeavor? Our experience would indicate yes.

Our process for following up happens because of our unique ID system. Every survey sample member is assigned an ID so that we can plot during data collection who responds and who does not. With a mail survey, non-responders typically will receive a postcard/letter reminder or a second survey kit. If an online survey, we'll usually send out reminders at day 5 of the timeline and possibly a second reminder on or about day 10. So what happens?

On the mail side, what actually happens depends on the nature of the follow up. If it's a postcard or letter reminder, on average, you can aim for a 2% to 7% lift to response. If you send a full-blown survey kit, and even add an incentive, 7% to 15% would not be an unusual result. With an online survey, response to the follow up will be all over the map, depending on the nature of your audience and survey content. This said, it's not unusual for a first reminder to add 3%-5% and the second reminder, if deployed, another 1%-3%. (Please note that the percentages indicated are the percent response added of the original sample size.)

As in the financial world, past performance and past histories don't apply evenly in the survey business. What we do know is that following up does help add responses. You will have to weigh all factors together, including the time you'll spend and hard costs (e.g. postage if a mail survey), to assess how the follow up process might work in your circumstance.

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