

Are Incentives Worthwhile?

Does the use of an incentive in surveys provide a benefit in terms of increased response? Typically yes. The specific increase will always depend on the type of incentive, nature of the market you are working in, survey subject matter and survey length. And it's difficult to predict the amount of "lift" you will receive so you'll have to make an educated guess. From there, you'll have to look at the cost and the anticipated benefit then make your decision.

Will just any kind of incentive work? No. There are several factors you need to consider before selecting a survey incentive. Most importantly, the incentive must have some perceived value to the respondent and create a desire and feeling of obligation to participate. Additionally, the way the incentive is administered can have an impact. For example, in some of our surveys an incentive is included as part of a survey kit mailing. In others, the incentive is not applied until after a completed, usable survey is returned.

If you don't have time to test an incentive, there are many different types of incentives that have been used with various levels of success. Among them:

- Cash
- Gift cards
- Checks
- Discount coupons
- Detailed summaries of the research

Look to use an incentive that will lift response without biasing distribution of the returns in any way. Tricky business to be sure. When choosing a survey incentive, be sure to select something equally desirable to all members of the sample, avoiding items that would attract more attention from a particular segment. For example, let's say you are doing a survey of library visitors. A bookmark may be more useful to heavy readers than light readers bringing in more returns from people who are heavy readers.

In general, money administered via cash, check or gift card seems the most effective at lifting response. Checks and gift cards are good and are stores of value, but there is work involved in redeeming that value, e.g. going to the bank and cashing the check. This said, money in some form does possess universal value, and is clearly useful to all recipients.

Are incentives ultimately worth the investment? Our experience indicates yes.

