

Does a Dollar Bill Help Lift Response?

What's the easiest way to boost your mail survey's response rate? Place a dollar bill in your survey mailing piece.

Over the years, we have included various types of incentives in mail survey kits. You name it, we've used it: Magnets, letter openers, coupons—whatever will fit in the envelope along with the survey questionnaire. What works best? The one-dollar bill.

If you're like our typical client, your first reaction may be, "Is one dollar enough?" Based on our experience, yes! And our recent test illustrates how much impact a dollar incentive can have.

In our test, we split our survey sample of professionals into two matched samples. Half of the survey sample received a dollar in the survey mailing; the other half did not.

Even we found the results startling—the dollar bill resulted in a 16-percentage-point increase in response rate. The response rate for the cell that received a dollar was 38%; for the cell that didn't receive a dollar, 22%.

Could you expect to see a lift in response rate by using a dollar incentive? Yes. How much lift? That is difficult to predict. The lift observed in our recent test may be at the high end, but a lift between five and 10 percentage points would not be unusual.

In the end, we suggest running a cost/benefit analysis to make sure incentive use, such as the dollar, is worth it. For example, if you would normally expect a high response from your population of interest, perhaps no incentive is needed. On the other hand, reaching for the maximum response rate is usually a good thing.