

Creating Online Surveys

This tech guide will provide tips and general how-to information for creating an online survey. It will also highlight ways library staff can utilize this tool to better market and get in touch with their teen patrons.

What?

For the purposes of this tech guide, an online survey is a Web-based version of a traditional survey such as a mail or telephone survey. Online surveys are a cost-effective and, generally, unbiased way to collect opinions, interests, views, preferences, and factual information about a large number and wide variety of teenaged patrons.

Why?

Just as with any other user group, understanding teen patrons, their needs, wants, likes, and dislikes is essential to excellent library service. Online surveys provide a dynamic, affordable, and easy way to find out what libraries should be doing to better serve this age group. They are a great way to reach a large number of teens at once. They are also an excellent tool for attracting teen patrons to the library's website. Results can be easily and quickly collected and compiled.

How?

Online survey tools exist for all shapes, sizes, and budgets. Get started by evaluating online survey software tools such as:

- www.surveymonkey.com
- <http://info.zoomerang.com>
- www.createsurvey.com and
- www.freeonlinesurveys.com.

Most online survey tools will provide an option for educators and nonprofits to test or use their software for free. If the software is fee-based, most will provide a discount to educators, students, and nonprofit organizations. Many online survey tools include survey templates and design tools to help you easily build a survey.

Once you have a general idea of the software you will use, begin building your online survey. A full-scale survey will consist of **five sections**:

1. Survey title
2. Purpose of or brief explanation about the survey (i.e., Why are you conducting this survey?)
3. Deadline (i.e., How long will the survey be posted?)
Note: Detailed information such as this is not needed if you're doing a brief quick poll such as on Hennepin County's site.
4. Body of the survey (i.e., the questions)

5. Thank you (e.g., Thank you for helping us or Thank you for your input. Stay tuned for more information about _____.)

As you continue to build your survey consider the following:

1. Topic – What is the topic of the survey? What are you trying to find out?
2. Simplicity – Online surveys must be defined, clear, and concise. If your questions are too complicated and difficult to understand, teens will not complete the survey.
3. Type – Determine the type of question that is best suited to answer the topic determined in #1. For example, are you using close-ended questions (these have a finite set of answers such as multiple choice, rank order, or scaled questions), open-ended questions (there is not one definite answer), or a combination? Be cautious of including too many open-ended text questions as they are difficult to record and interpret.
4. The questions – Look online to get ideas from others who may have conducted other teen surveys. In order to keep teens' attention, keep the number of questions to under 15 (10 is ideal). A survey should take less than five minutes to complete.
5. Test – Have a staff member and preferably a teen review the survey for you. Did they have questions? Did they have trouble understanding anything? Revise your survey accordingly.
6. Post – Create a link on your school or public library's teen website to the survey. Put it front and center to grab attention.
7. Market and publicize – This is the key to getting a good response rate and the feedback you're looking for. Remember, word of mouth is the best form of advertising. Get out there and tell teens about the survey and what it's about. Send out an email with a link to the survey. Get them excited! Equally important, educate all staff about the survey and have them "talk it up" to teen patrons.
8. Focus Groups – Improve response rates by incorporating focus groups or teen discussion groups into the mix. Get them excited about a topic and encourage teens to take the survey as a follow-up to in-person discussion.
9. Prizes – Use prizes as incentives (e.g.,



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Help us better serve you and get a chance to win a gift certificate, etc.). Prize awards should be timely. Personally contact recipients,

10. Act – Regularly monitor survey results and, after assessing, be sure to act on feedback. One of the best forms of public relations is responding to your teen patrons' comments.

For additional information on this topic:

SmartGirl

www.smartgirl.org

A website for girls all about surveys. Although it is a girl-oriented site, it is a great resource for sample surveys and general ideas.

WebJunction Equal Access – Online Library Survey

Examples For Teens and Youth

<http://ea.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=13444>

Includes several links to sample surveys. For other ideas see Hennepin County (Minn.) Library's Quick Poll www.hclib.org/teens, Queens (N.Y.) Library Teen Spaces Survey www.teenlinq.org, and Crenshaw (Calif.) High School's website Survey www.lausd.k12.ca.us/Crenshaw_HS/welcome/survey.html.

LibrarySupportStaff.com

www.librarysupportstaff.com/4surveys.html

Excellent compilation of resources related to online surveys for libraries of all types.