

creative compost

Where Great Marketing Ideas Grow

Vol X, No. 25 ■

Spring 2009 ■

Published quarterly
by Fahoury Ink ■

www.fahouryink.com ■

The Unexpected Conversation Starter Using Surveys to Pump Up Your Marketing

You probably got your first one sometime in grade school. It likely asked what your favorite color was and if you liked so-and-so who sat behind you in math class.

Yes, surveys have always been a valuable way to gather information — we figured that out as kids. But most marketers don't use the survey to its full potential.



With so many companies now offering affordable online survey services, it's easier than ever to ask your customers to share their thoughts. And since people are more likely to respond to the convenience and accessibility of online questionnaires, your ability to gather valuable intelligence data through surveys is better than ever.

Collecting information is always an important function, and a survey certainly can do that, but it can also do much more. It can also take your marketing to the next level. By focusing on some basic points, you can maximize the value of your surveys and kick your marketing up a notch.

Know thy customer

The simplest use of a survey is to collect information about your customers. Maybe you have some profile data from your face-

to-face interactions, or basic demographics from your opt-in process, but a survey is a great way to gain a deeper understanding of exactly who your customer is — and how you can tailor your marketing to better capture their attention.

Keep in mind that asking too many questions can be a little daunting, especially in the early phases of the relationship. This person has taken the important step to begin an exchange with you, such as registering for special offers or your email newsletter. Probe for too much information and you risk alienating them before the relationship truly even begins.

Instead, focus your survey on its benefits to the recipient. It could be something tangible like a discount on their next purchase for completing the survey,

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If you haven't checked out usps.com in a while, stop by. From help with designing mail pieces to a free marketing magazine, the USPS is a surprising place to find some very useful direct marketing information.

One of the best tools the USPS offers is *Deliver* magazine. With how-to stories, case studies, and tips for more effective marketing, *Deliver* is a useful resource for anyone looking for information on direct mail best practices.

But what if you don't have clue one about how to get a direct mail campaign off the drawing board? The site has a direct mail primer that helps you come up with a budget, an offer, and an audience for your message. You can put together a mailing list and even create your piece, too, with a service called Click2Mail (click2mail.com).

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The USPS: An Untapped Marketing Resource

Yep, postal rates just went up. That's the not-so-good news. But on the plus side, the U.S. Postal Service is working hard to stay relevant to marketers in the digital age.

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One Year to an Organized Work Life

Surveys (from p. 1)

or intangible — like explaining how the information they provide will be used to tailor future communications or new products to their unique interests.

Of course, once you decide to ask some questions it's tempting to go overboard. Resist this urge! Instead, stay focused on one or two topics at most. Are you gathering "getting to know you" information? Asking for specific transaction feedback? Gauging the viability of a new product offering? Remember...ask for everything and you're likely to get nothing.

Be ready to react

If you're conducting a survey to gather feedback on your performance, it's important to have a follow-up plan in place. When customers take the time to comment, there's nothing worse than leaving them feeling unheard or ignored — especially when the feedback is negative.

Be prepared to address issues raised by your survey, and to keep your customers informed every step of the way.

Nick Magone, a partner at NJ-based CPA firm Couto, DeFranco & Magone (cdmcpas.com) used an online survey for the first time this year to gather feedback



about his firm's processes and performance during tax season.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of time people took to give us fairly detailed feedback," says Magone. "Was I happy to hear the criticism? No. Was it useful to the firm? Absolutely."

Magone was also glad for the opportunity to address specific concerns raised by clients.

"The survey uncovered some things we would never have had the chance to address otherwise. In the past, people might have simply taken their business elsewhere. Now, they can see that their feedback matters — that we're using their comments to improve our performance, which will hopefully strengthen our relationship with them over the long term."

Quick polling tools

In addition to full-service survey providers such as SurveyMonkey.com (our partner of choice), don't overlook the quick-feedback capabilities of tools like Twitter or LinkedIn.

You'd be surprised what you can learn in just 140 characters or less when you poll your connections or followers. Micro-blogging is a great way to test the waters when a full-fledged survey isn't necessary. And the near-instantaneous feedback can be invaluable when you're on deadline.

Creative ways to leverage surveys

In addition to beefing up your knowledge of your customers, surveys have an additional, often-overlooked value: as a mechanism for establishing thought leadership.

Earlier this year, Magone's firm conducted its first annual "Business Pulse Survey," which gauged the opinions of business owners and executives across a wide range of industries regarding the upcoming business climate for 2009.

Once results of the survey were in, the firm leveraged them in a variety of ways, from issuing a press release to offering a downloadable report on its website.

"By conducting the survey — and asking respondents to forward the link to their own contacts — we not only received a terrific cross-section of responses, but also got the firm's name in front of an audience we otherwise might not have reached," says Magone. "Prospects saw the firm in a whole new light."

Have some newsworthy survey results? Consider sending a link to bloggers who regularly cover your industry, or promoting the results via a pay-per-click ad to drive qualified traffic to your website.

Carefully constructed surveys have many benefits. The simplest and most important is that, when done well, they give you a valuable customer touchpoint to add to your marketing arsenal — and data you can use to solidify those relationships for many years to come.

USPS (from p. 1)

Need more information on sizes and rates? Search "Direct Mail Resource Center" and you'll be connected to information on all kinds of subjects, including proven techniques for reaching specific target audiences and the best ways to get your piece opened.

New programs such as Intelligent Mail Barcoding and MERLIN (Mail Evaluation Readability Look-up Instrument) help cut down on undeliverable mail and allow you to qualify for the best possible postal discounts. This obviously reduces the overall cost of your direct mail

campaign, especially with larger mailings when even small postage variations can be significant. Plus, you can work with design analysts to further improve the mailing efficiency and effectiveness of your promotion.

Obviously, today's USPS isn't the post office of old. They've taken it up a notch with resources and advice to help you do the same on your next direct mail campaign. Responding to the needs of your customer — an approach every marketer can respect.



Tools You Can Use

Channeling Your Inner Publisher

As with many other printed works, magazines can now be completely personalized. The new MagCloud service simplifies the process of printing and selling your own magazine title — or creating one to use as a premium or promotional tool.

This print-on-demand service from HP uses the company's Indigo technology to print four-color digital copies on 80 lb. stock with a saddle-stitched cover. There's no charge to upload and publish your work, but each magazine costs 20 cents per page to buy.

Magazines need to be created as high-resolution PDFs, so you need to call on the services of your favorite graphic designer. Other than that, if you plan to sell copies of your masterpiece, you'll need a PayPal account to collect your earnings.

Source: magcloud.com

A Better Way to Capture Brainstorming Brilliance

You're in a meeting and the ideas are flying. After the meeting, you realize there were some great concepts that simply evaporated once everyone left the table. That's where The Illustrated Idea comes in, as a "proven solution for enhancing, retaining and building upon spontaneous information."

How does it work? Ty Walls — the creative and intellectual force behind The Illustrated Idea — captures the ideas generated by your meeting in both words and pictures, then distributes them in PDF form to attendees. This ensures that information from your creative process isn't lost, but captured in a format that's informative and memorable.

Source: theillustratedidea.com, courtesy SpeakerNetNews.com

Flattered by Imitation? Not So Much

Online plagiarism is tough to stop. Just because you can copy and paste something doesn't mean it's up for grabs. Copyscape offers both free and paid services that let you stay on top of any unauthorized use of your website content.

Just enter your URL in the Copyscape search box and press "go." Copyscape then searches the internet for other sites that have replicated your content.

The site's premium service offers a more powerful search tool plus Copysentry, which automatically monitors the web daily or weekly and notifies you when your content has been lifted. Time to call your lawyer!

Source: copyscape.com

“There are some things one can only achieve by a deliberate leap in the opposite direction.”

Franz Kafka



Where Great Marketing Ideas Grow is published quarterly by:

FAHOURY INK

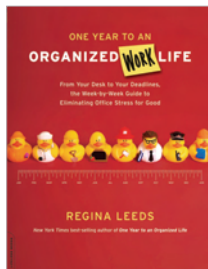
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One Year to an Organized Work Life

Regina Leeds
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"So much to do, so little time." This could be every marketer's mantra — dealing with slashed budgets, increased accountability, and new technologies popping up almost daily. If you're struggling to be more productive at work, take a minute to look at the big picture, says Regina Leeds in her newest book, *One Year to an Organized Work Life*.

At home and work, we get caught up in the chaos of daily living because we're only human. But with time, commitment, and a few smart strategies, we can experience less stress and find more time, both professionally and personally.

One Year to an Organized Work Life leads readers through a 12-month plan for eliminating the workplace stress caused by disorganization. Each chapter introduces an important component of the organizational process for the month — from making the most of your office space to dealing with priorities — then breaks it down into four weeks of actionable steps.

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Inside: Using Surveys to Pump Up Your Marketing

Book Review (from p. 3)

Each month also includes two “Zen organizing habits” — tasks for work and home that take just a few minutes and are worth cultivating. For example, Leeds recommends pausing each day to jot down three positive actions you took to make your work life easier. Periodically review your notes to celebrate your accomplishments and learn from your mistakes.

Each chapter of *One Year to an Organized Work Life* builds on prior tips and accomplishments, so your best bet is to start from the beginning — even if the calendar currently buried somewhere on your desk doesn’t read “January.”

Why get organized?

Your physical environment is a manifestation of your inner world of thoughts and feelings, says Leeds. Chaos in your life could be due to a lack of organizing skills, but it could also be a symptom of a lack of inner peace.

Look at it this way: Chaos is a demanding taskmaster that drains your energy. Getting organized is simply a better way to redirect the energy you’re already expending when you scramble to find an important file, recreate a misplaced document, or meet what seems like an impossible deadline.

Intrigued? Try these tips to tame your organizational bad habits:

Practice completion. Set a timer for five minutes and devote this time to straightening up your office — at the start or end of the day, whenever you are at your peak.

Stop striving for perfection. The quest for perfection really lets us off the hook, says Leeds, because if we can’t do something perfectly we end up doing nothing. Let it go and revel in the understanding that achieving perfection is impossible.

Figure out where your day goes. Yes, it’s a cliché, but spend one day tracking how

much time you really spend on various tasks. You’ll likely be amazed at your own creative time-wasters and procrastination tools, and better able to develop strategies for dealing with them.

Develop anti-procrastination tools. Simple habits, from staying hydrated to practicing daily meditation, can keep you focused and on track. Throughout the day, stop and periodically ask yourself, “Am I avoiding my real work?” Then drop the time waster and turn back to your mission-critical assignments.

As Leeds reminds us throughout *One Year to an Organized Work Life*, change isn’t about making a huge, difficult shift in our lives. It’s simply about switching one behavior for another. When viewed through this lens, you’ll find that work life organizational nirvana suddenly seems very achievable.