

## **What You Ask is What You Get: The Importance of Survey Design**

by Tami Buhr

An evaluation is only as good as the data on which it is based. How you construct your survey can affect the quality of your data. That is why it is crucial for evaluators to pay as much attention to survey design as to other areas of evaluation.

Let's examine some recent surveys on global warming to show how differently worded questions on the same subject can produce varying results. Each survey uses a different approach to ask the same question.

In late 2009, three national survey organizations asked adults in the U.S. about their belief in the existence of global warming and its causes.

Here's how they began their questioning:

**ABC News/Washington Post:** *You may have heard about the idea that the world's temperature may have been going up slowly over the past 100 years. What is your personal opinion on this—do you think this has probably been happening, or do you think it probably has not been happening?*

**CNN:** *Which of the following statements comes closest to your view of global warming? (A) Global warming is a proven fact and is mostly caused by emissions from cars and industrial facilities such as power plants and factories. (B) Global warming is a proven fact and is mostly caused by natural changes that have nothing to do with emissions from cars and industrial facilities. (C) Global warming is a theory that has not yet been proven.*

**Pew Research:** *From what you've read and heard, is there solid evidence that the average temperature on earth has been getting warmer over the past few decades, or not?*

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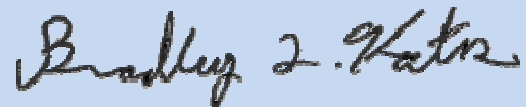
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### **Message from the President**

As 2011 begins, Opinion Dynamics continues its growth and commitment to exceeding the expectations of its clients. As many of you know, we recently welcomed Scott Dimetrosky as a Vice President, leading our new Boulder, Colorado office, and augmenting our energy evaluation skills. We also recently welcomed Lisa Gartland to serve as our new Director of Engineering, further broadening our ability to handle the most technical of evaluation and research efforts.

As part of our growth, we are moving our telephone interviewing center from Pennsylvania to Utah. In addition to maintaining our high quality interviewing standards, our new center provides other key benefits including a time-zone friendly area that allows us to handle fielding research on either coast, and enhanced bilingual capabilities.

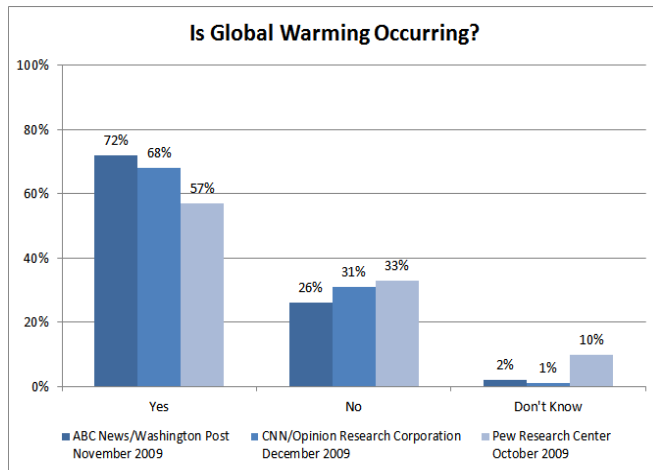
These changes allow us to keep working to our mission of providing cutting-edge strategic research, evaluation, and consulting services that deliver actionable results to our clients in the public and private sectors. We look forward to working with you in the upcoming year!



Brad Kates, President and CEO

## Survey Design – continued

Our graph below compares the results of the three questions, combining the affirmative responses on CNN’s question on the existence of global warming.



The same question, worded differently, can lead to different results.

Each survey finds that a majority of respondents believe global warming is occurring. However, because of the wording of the questions, the size of the majority differs.

The Pew Research Center asks for a definitive opinion: is there “solid evidence” that the earth’s temperature is getting warmer? Fifty-seven percent believe it is. One in ten (10%) do not know.

ABC News/Washington Post asks for a much less definitive opinion: is the world’s temperature “probably” or “probably not” rising? This “softer” question results in more people, 72%, saying that global warming is “probably” occurring while 2% say they do not know.

Like Pew, CNN also seeks a firm opinion by asking whether global warming is a “proven fact.” But the question muddies the concept by combining different issues in the same question. Whereas Pew and ABC News/Washington Post ask respondents only one

thing—is global warming occurring—CNN also asks about its causes. In this case, 68% of respondents say that global warming is occurring, with 45% saying it is due to emissions and 23% due to natural changes. Only 1% do not know.

A good rule of thumb when constructing a survey question is to ask about only one subject at a time. In the examples shown here, researchers should first determine whether people think the earth is warming, and then follow up to ask what they believe are the causes.

Word choice, however subtle, does affect the answers you receive, and, consequently, the data that you analyze. Asked in the right way, survey data can lead to actionable results; asked in the wrong way, questions can gather misleading or biased data that could lead to the wrong course of action.

Opinion Dynamics blends our market research skills with our evaluation expertise to gather unbiased, balanced data through survey questions that are worded to answer our clients’ key researchable issues. Balancing these two areas is critical, because what you ask is what you get.

*Tami Buhr, Director of Survey Analytics at Opinion Dynamics, has led survey design for national political and public opinion polls for leading news organizations, as well as numerous energy evaluations throughout North America.*

## Casting a Wider Net: Broadening the Definition of Behavioral Programs to Capture More Savings

by Anne Dougherty

Energy efficiency program administrators are increasingly recognizing the relatively untapped potential for behavior-based energy savings, and interest in behavioral programs has skyrocketed in the past few years.

However, concern over how to quantify the effects of behavior-based programs has prompted the proliferation of turn-key behavioral programs offering prescribed savings estimates. Such programs have



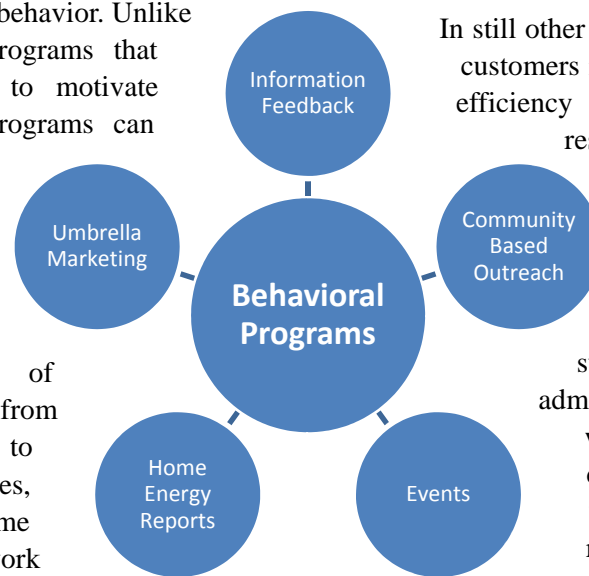
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become almost synonymous with “behavioral programs” but really only represent one form of behavior-based interventions. While such programs have proven that they can garner savings, relying on a single behavioral outreach approach leaves much of the savings potential untapped and often limits participation to select customer segments.

Our research has shown that the best programs, like the best evaluations, are tailored to the unique objectives and goals of program implementers. For this reason, the behavioral net must be cast wider to fully capture the savings potential of end-user behavior. Unlike traditional energy efficiency programs that rely on a single mechanism to motivate change (rebates), behavioral programs can shape end-user actions through diverse motivational appeals, outreach tactics, and program interventions.

At Opinion Dynamics, we evaluate a wide spectrum of “behavioral programs,” from umbrella marketing to neighborhood-based approaches, from online audits to in-home displays. These programs all work with the same goal in mind: prompting end users to make smarter choices around their energy consumption. The effects of these programs are all quantifiable, whether the goal is verifiable net energy savings or raising awareness.



the success of any behavioral program is to determine up front what the success metrics are.

In some jurisdictions, only energy savings is important. In those jurisdictions, approaches including experimental design and structural equation modeling may be used to measure success.

In other jurisdictions, the goal of behavioral programs is to increase awareness of energy efficiency options. In these cases, a pre- and post-survey measurement technique can provide the requisite information.

In still other jurisdictions, the goal is to channel customers into participating in another energy efficiency program in the portfolio (i.e., a residential rebate program). In these cases, it is important to coordinate evaluation efforts with rebate-intensive program evaluations to capture behavioral program success. This can include administering surveys across efforts as well as crossing participant databases to determine specifically which customers participated in a rebate program after having been exposed to a behavioral program.

In sum, our research demonstrates that program implementers need not limit their portfolio to commonly employed behavioral programs. Opinion Dynamics is leading evaluations of all these types of programs, and we have developed cutting-edge evaluation techniques to deal with them. Whether the metrics are based on program awareness, channeling customers into other programs, or engendering energy savings, we can use proven techniques to measure success.

*Anne Dougherty, Manager of Social and Behavioral Research at Opinion Dynamics, brings a diverse background in quantitative and qualitative methods in the social sciences, and is one of the industry’s foremost experts in evaluating behavioral and social marketing programs.*

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**Relying on a single behavioral outreach approach leaves much of the savings potential untapped**

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We have developed innovative methods to quantify effects from these behavioral programs, which are integral to the overall success of behavior-based programs. One of the key attributes that helps define

## What's New at Opinion Dynamics?

*Opinion Dynamics is pleased to welcome the following senior members to our team.*



**Scott Dimetrosky** joins us as a Vice President working out of our new Boulder, CO office. Scott is a 20-year energy industry veteran with a background in market research and quantitative methods. He is a leading authority on energy efficiency portfolio evaluations, including assessing impacts for residential programs.



**Dr. Lisa Gartland** is Director of Engineering, working out of our Bay Area, CA office. Lisa brings more than a decade of experience auditing, monitoring, modeling, and calculating the energy savings of a wide array of efficiency measures in residential, commercial, and industrial buildings. She also led the implementation of several energy efficiency programs including the Peak Energy Program, Savings by Design, and the Building Tune-Up program.



**Anne Dougherty** has been named Manager of Social and Behavioral Research. She will continue to lead our behavioral research projects including developing and implementing cutting-edge methodologies, as well as consulting with clients on issues related to starting up behavioral program efforts.



**Jenn Mitchell-Jackson**, Vice President of West Coast Operations, was elected to serve on the board of the California Energy Efficiency Industry Council. The Efficiency Council is an industry trade group representing non-utility companies that provide energy efficiency services and products in California.



**Mary Sutter**, Director of Energy Evaluation, was recruited to provide her expertise to an advisory group offering technical assistance to grantees of the DOE's Smart Grid Investment Grants (SGIG).

## Events

*Watch for these Opinion Dynamics speakers:*

### AESP National Conference and Expo—Hilton at Walt Disney World, Orlando, FL, January 17-21



**Tami Buhr**, "The Impact of Cell Phones on Evaluation Survey Quality"—Wed., Jan. 19, North Ballroom, 10:30 am-Noon



**Bill Norton**, "Have the Inmates Taken over the Asylum?" Panel Discussion—Wed., Jan. 19, North Ballroom, 3:30 pm-5:00 pm



**Laurence Bloom**, "Demand Response Customer Experiences: Lessons Learned from ComEd Cycling Events"—Thu., Jan. 20, South Ballroom, 8:30 am-10:00 am

### Utility Web Week—Hyatt Regency, Pier 66, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, January 25-27



**Tom Fisher** will address the topic "Do Online Energy Audits Impact Customer Behavior?" at this upcoming conference. Joining Donald Frazier of PPL Electric and Robert DiBella of Aclara, Tom will discuss the results of a rigorous billing analysis completed by Opinion Dynamics.

### New Telephone Interviewing Center

We're moving our dedicated Telephone Interviewing Center from Philadelphia, PA to Orem, UT. This new location gives us easy access to an outstanding workforce and offers a time-zone friendly area that will allow us to handle fielding research on either coast.

## Opinion Dynamics Corporation

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