

The Impact of Survey Incentives and Survey Mode on Response Rates

Tami Buhr, Vice President
Kessie Avseikova, Director

Background

- Telephone survey response rates have been falling for the past three decades. The response rates of the Survey of Consumer Attitudes, a monthly national telephone survey, has seen its response rate fall from 79% in 1979 to 16% in 2013.
- Low response rates increase survey costs and threaten the validity of survey results.
- A survey will suffer from nonresponse bias if the people who respond are different from those that do not on concepts being measured in the survey.
- Response rates for other survey modes such as mail have not fallen as much and are typically higher than those of telephone surveys.
- Alternative modes, multi-mode, and survey incentives can help combat declining response rate trends.

Survey Incentives and Multi-Mode Designs

Survey Incentives are widely known to increase response rates. The most effective are pre-paid incentives followed by post-paid incentives, but both can be expensive. Sweepstakes are less expensive but typically less effective.



- Is there a sweepstakes design that is better than others? Are people more likely to respond to smaller or bigger prizes? Do the odds of winning matter?



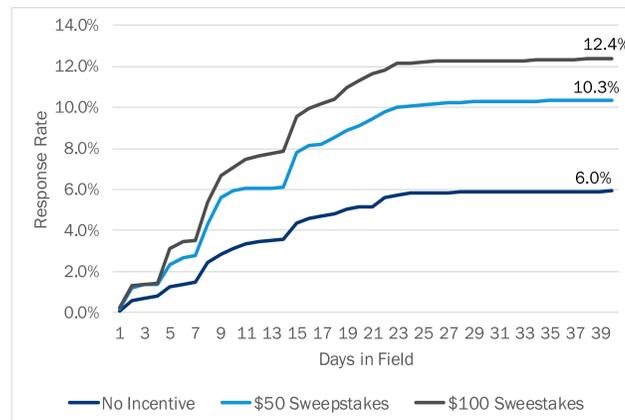
Survey Modes: Internet surveys are an alternative to telephone surveys. If we lack email addresses for all customers, can use “mail-push-to-web” approach alongside email invitations.



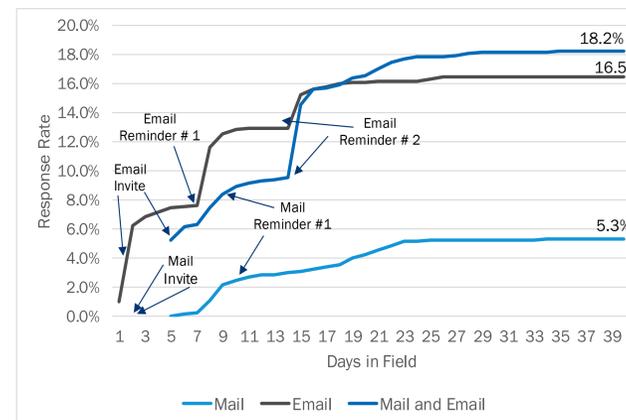
Experimental Design

Survey Mode	Incentive		
	None	10 x \$50	10 x \$100
Mail Only Invite – Online or Phone Response	Mail...None	Mail...\$50	Mail...\$100
Email Invite – Online Response	Email...None	Email...\$50	Email...\$100
Mail Invite or Email Invite – Online Response	Mail & Email...None	Mail & Email...\$50	Mail & Email...\$100

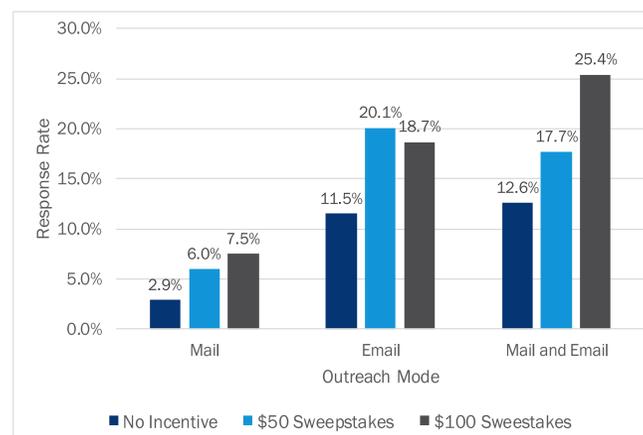
Results: Incentives



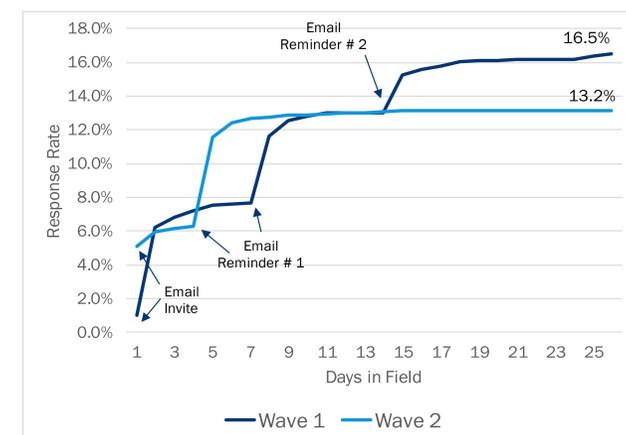
Results: Survey Mode



Results: Interactive Effects



Results: Extra Email Reminder



Take Aways

Study Target Population: Combined results of two surveys with residential customers who had participated in free CFL giveaway program.

Incentive Effects:

- Sweepstakes incentives boost response rates.
 - A \$100 sweepstakes doubled the response rate over no incentive.
 - A \$100 sweepstakes was only slightly more effective than a \$50 sweepstakes, controlling for survey mode.

Mode Effects:

- Mail combined with email invitations were the most effective form of outreach, controlling for survey incentive amount.
 - Email outreach alone was nearly as effective as mail + email and the costs were much lower.
 - If the evaluator does not have email addresses, mailed invitations asking respondents to complete the survey online or over the phone has lower response rates than email invitations – though similar to telephone surveys. This “mail-push-to-web” approach costs less than telephone surveys.

Interactive Effects:

- Mail + internet with a \$100 sweepstakes incentive had the highest response rate of all mode/incentive combinations. At 25%, it was eight times higher than the combination with the lowest response rate (mail only with no incentive).

The Impact of Reminders:

- Additional email reminders continue to increase the response rate though they have a diminishing effect. The first reminder boosted the response rate by 5.4 percentage points compared to 3.5 percentage points for the second reminder.

Overall:

- Email and mail push to web surveys are viable alternatives to telephone surveys. These different modes have higher response rates and cost less than telephone surveys.
- Incentives can have a big impact on response rates and do not have to cost a lot. As little as \$500 spent on incentives can double response rates.