

# Introducing the Internet/ Telephone “Hybrid” Survey



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Internet technology has created an opportunity for a new form of scientific intellectual property survey — the Internet/Telephone Hybrid survey.

This new type of scientific survey works for special conditions and if executed properly takes advantages of the positives of both telephone and Internet surveys while minimizes the negatives of each and produces very valid, reliable and cost-efficient results.

The Internet survey has the major advantage of allowing respondents to view images and answer questions based on those images. Using one of the free Internet survey formats, the survey can be created quickly and efficiently. The Internet survey also tends to be very cost efficient and results from Internet surveys are gaining increasing prestige as they are recognized

by the courts. The major disadvantages of the Internet survey include:

1. Lack of control. There is no way of determining how the respondent is interpreting questions. It is difficult to ask “probe” or follow-up questions and there is a complete lack of personal touch.
2. There is a need for relatively large incentives to encourage respondents to participate.
3. The need to obtain respondents’ e-mail addresses. This is generally accomplished through the use of panels, which are individuals who have expressed a willingness to participate in Internet surveys. Such panels generally carry a very high price tag.

The telephone survey is far more labor intensive in that it requires actual live people to ask the questions and record the answers. The answers then have to be tabulated and coded. There is generally no need for an incentive. Telephone surveys enjoy a high degree of acceptance by the courts. Telephone lists are easy to acquire although they can be a bit costly depending on the relative target market. A major problem of the telephone survey is the inability to show images.

The “hybrid” survey — the combination of both the Internet and telephone surveys — takes advantage of the pluses while mitigating the minuses of each, but only highly selective situations can make use of them. One such situation presented itself to me and while I can’t reveal the names of the parties involved and the nature of the case because of confidentiality, I can provide the basic brush strokes of the methodology.

The products in question were expensive, bulky, heavy units purchased by a highly selective audience from very specific types of retailers. It was mandatory that the survey show the products in high detail. Because the target market was so selective, it would have been impossible to do a mall intercept study because so few of the members of the relevant target market would be found in shopping malls. A pre-recruit was a possibility, but it would have been prohibitively expensive to schedule members of the relevant target market to come into

a research facility, and you would have to replicate the research environment in four or more venues across the country.

Here is how the survey was executed:

1. We acquired an e-mail list from a vendor that included the names and e-mail addresses of subscribers to a number of trade publications that served the target market in question.
2. We then sent an e-mail invitation to these individuals inviting them to participate. Included in the e-mail invitation was a “screener” questionnaire. If the individual was willing and qualified to participate, they provided a phone number and time when they could be contacted.
3. A separate Website was created solely for the purpose of showing the images of the products in question.
4. A live interviewer phoned the prospective respondent’s telephone number, verified that person was on the phone and re-screened them to make doubly sure they qualified for the survey.
5. Upon a second favorable screening, they were giving the Internet address of the special Website created for the survey.
6. Once connected to that Website, the interviewer guided the respondent through the questionnaire making use of the image provided on the Website. When specific images come onto the screen, questions were asked and follow-up or probe questions were also asked.
7. The completed questionnaires were transmitted to an independent company for tabulating and coding of the verbatim answers.
8. Names and phone numbers of the respondents were transmitted to another independent company for validation. Some 40 percent of the surveys were validated. Everyone who was contacted by the validation company recalled participating.

The results of this scientific survey were outstanding in that it conclusively proved the research hypothesis. This type of survey was so effective only because of the following:

1. The requirement of showing images of high-priced bulky products.
2. The highly selective nature of the relevant target market.