



On-Line Surveys

By Heather Gray-Grant
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Law firm marketing today has two external forces pushing us toward greater use of the Internet for the practice of our craft. The first is the "Information Age" in general, which is forcing the administrative side of law firms to become more cost efficient, work in greater detail and provide services faster. To do so, we are expected to get into the minds of decision influencers and understand their thought processes. Short of hard-wiring their brains, the easiest way to do this is to ask questions. Unfortunately, when faced with thousands of interview subjects, this can be a time-consuming process, as can analysing the resultant data.

The second force is the cloud of September 11th, and subsequent terrorist activities including anthrax mail scares. A medium we previously trusted for the distribution of information, such as questionnaires, is now seen as carrying some degree of risk.

In light of these strong deterrents to effective information gathering, as well as factors such as speed, cost containment and efficiency, the Internet has proven to be a more powerful tool than anyone anticipated at the dawn of the information age.

A CASE STUDY:

The Vancouver office of Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP had been surveying our clients the old-fashioned way, by regular mail, for just over six years. While our initial response rate was very strong, participation had consistently dropped over the years as questionnaires became more commonplace. Yet the information obtained from this feedback mechanism is so valuable, we were determined to find a way to improve the response rate. At the same time, our Marketing Department did not have the time to micro-manage this project to the degree needed to increase

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that response rate. The solution came through a Vancouver company called ResponseTek (www.responsetek.com). They worked with us to build an on-line questionnaire which was sent to clients by e-mail. Responses were tabulated daily on ResponseTek's server, where we had access to the entire results, from the big picture all the way down to the smallest of details.

ResponseTek was also able to replicate our corporate image perfectly on the survey, include our questions in whatever format we wanted, and kid-glove handle the few clients who had never clicked through a hotlink before. Clients embraced this technology: 29% of them completed the survey, which was an 11% increase over the previous year, and our highest response rate in five years. By allowing ResponseTek control over the tactical implementation of this project, we were free to spend our energies on projects closer to our own expertise, where we could personally achieve greater ROI for the firm.

This project was so successful, we decided to work with ResponseTek to convert a number of other survey projects into electronic format as well. We're currently developing electronic surveys for staff

assessments, associate reviews, and we've just installed a Web feedback tool on our site. This tool acts as a project manager of site feedback, sending respondents' comments to the appropriate site section managers for action, and following up to ensure these issues have been addressed. (Try the survey out for yourself at www.fasken.com and click on "Improve Us" at the bottom left hand margin of the screen.)

ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE:

For those who like a more hands-on approach and don't require such a high level of customization and service, consider a site like www.zoomerang.com. This site charges a modest annual fee,

and includes over 100 templates of various surveys. You can easily change colours, edit questions, and select the rating systems. The site also files your e-mail distribution list for your future use.

Of course, each site member's information is password protected. LMA's (Legal Marketing Association) Mid-Atlantic Chapter used Zoomerang to query members about educational program preferences. The Chapter found this process to be straight forward, economical, and very successful in obtaining the information they required.

Darryl Cross, a marketing consultant for the Texas Electronic Commerce Association, has frequently used on-line surveys, including Zoomerang. His only negative comment on the product was that he feels the disclaimer at the bottom of each e-mail to survey recipients makes it look a little like spam. However he recommends firms not be too concerned in that regard. "Given recent events, I would suggest we'll see an increase in these kinds of communication alternatives due to the perceived danger of hard copy mail. It will make wide-scale e-mail distribution a little less evil than it was before."

BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU USE IT:

Electronic surveys can provide insight into big picture issues or trends as easily as they can identify specific comments or concerns by respondents. For this reason, they are frequently used to gauge client satisfaction,

understand membership needs, or assess individual performance. However, there are times when a more personal approach is better than a computer prompter. Marketer Audrey Kunycky parted company last fall with a major US consulting firm. "My exit interview consisted of an e-mail that asked me to rate general aspects of the firm on a one to five scale. Psychologically, it was very anonymous, clinical and official. If they really wanted to get to know my opinion they should have been able to probe a little deeper. There are some things that really should be done in person." As with any tool, the Internet's effectiveness depends on its appropriate use.

CONCLUSION:

Marketers and Administrators are only just beginning to explore the many ways in which the Internet can be used to help us achieve our objectives. On-line surveys are a natural starting point for converting manual operations into electronic ones, but it's only the tip of the iceberg. Once you discover the greater efficiencies and increased productivity that can be achieved through use of the Internet, it will only be a matter of time before members of your IT department become honorary members of Marketing.

Heather Gray-Grant is Marketing Director of the Vancouver region of Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP, and a President-Elect of LMA.

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