The Litmus Partnership
Guide to Consumer Surveys

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Consumer
Insight

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Introduction

About this Guide

This guide is designed to provide a starting point for anyone who feels they **may benefit from conducting a consumer research programme - but may not know where to start.**

About Litmus

Litmus is the leading FM consultancy in the UK, working with business, education, hospitality and healthcare professionals. Our projects often include undertaking research to understand consumers' preferences. By doing so, we identify areas for improvement within existing operations - whether delivered in-house or contracted out - and gain important insight into what is required by consumers prior to writing a new contract specification.

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Get outputs that make a difference

Customer experience surveys have been around a long time. You may have done a few in the past. **But did you get the intelligence you needed?** Did the outputs help things improve? Was your community more content? Did you make the most of the opportunity to know what matters most to your people?

Whatever the service may be, catering, hospitality, cleaning, security, grounds maintenance or just the wellbeing of your team, you need to know what matters most to your people, how you're doing and how to do it even better.

Acting upon well executed and well analysed consumer insight programmes, customer research projects or community surveys – can transform services, facilities and environments. Just small changes can make a big difference to your community's contentment which equals improved loyalty, improved margins and improved business processes.

Everyone wins.

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Clear Vision

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Facilities related services are wide ranging - food and beverage, cleaning services, environment, safety and security, work/study/life balance are all central to daily routines, whether in business, manufacturing, healthcare or education. Everyone's different and each of us has our own priorities and preferences. It's complicated! The skill is meeting business and consumer needs at the same time.

You can't please everyone all of the time. But you can get close if you know what matters most, to the most. But how do you achieve this? How do you ensure your research will reveal the information you need? Information that will help you to manage the services more effectively and perhaps get more for your money whilst simultaneously gathering insight that will shape service changes to reflect the true needs of your consumers.

Take catering for example. These goals could be entirely financially led - a need to improve profitability, to increase footfall, take-up or average spend-per-head or a need to identify efficiencies that would reduce overhead without affecting the quality or the perception levels of a given service.

Or maybe it's all about the benefit you're providing. How can you align services entirely with your consumers' requirements? How can their wellbeing be improved? How can you attract non-users to use your service? Do your people feel safe and secure? Are they working in a clean, well-maintained environment? How would they describe their work/ study setting to friends and family? Is your organisation caring and well respected as a place to work or study?

Whatever the reason for research it's fundamental that you undertake the project with a clear vision of what you want to know, how the information you gather will be shared with respondents and how the outcomes might help shape future policy or investment.

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Audience

One size does not fit all

Determining the size of your population is straightforward on one level. Usually, everyone who is touched by a service is asked to participate.

However, even when responses are incentivised, not everyone will find the time to participate. And you will never know how accurate your results are until the responses are received.

Non-users

There is also one audience that really can't be ignored; your non-users. One of the most important audiences to ask about your facilities is the one that doesn't use them. Not only will non-user's feedback enrich your findings but often, simple cost-effective solutions are the answer.

Focus focus focus

Where time and resource allow, undertaking a series of focus group discussions, where the whole cross-section of your audience should be represented, will help you understand, at the outset, what the main issues are.

Through the focus group outputs, you will be in a strong position to construct a meaningful and relevant survey that empathises with your audience (both users and non-users of the services) and the strengths and the weaknesses of the services being researched. In other words, design the survey around what you know – not what you think you know.

Response rates

It's surprising how accurate a smaller response sample can be. For example, you would need 278 responses from 1000 invitations to achieve a 95% confidence level (with a 5% margin of error) – the minimum industry standard.

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Audiences to consider

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Users
- People that use or experience a service at least once a week

Non-users
- People that infrequently use or experience a service or actively avoid it

Demographics
- Dietary requirements (if catering related)
- Roles
- Location
- Personal demographics (gender, age range – these should include prefer not to say/define option)

[**...design the survey around what you know – not what you think you know**]

Competition
- Nearby places that offer similar services
- Ask your audience if, when and where they use as an alternative

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Mind the gap

The Satisfaction Gap

Survey fatigue can be a big problem. Today, we are repeatedly asked to spend time telling providers how they've done.

But, if audiences know a bit more about why they are being asked for feedback, they are more likely to respond.

They don't need lots of background. Tell your audience three things –

- ▶ why you are undertaking the research;
- ▶ what you are going to do with the results; and
- ▶ that you will be sharing the results (or a synopsis) with them.

By doing so, participants know they will be getting something back for their time and will be more willing to participate.

The best outputs are achieved by measuring satisfaction gaps - the differences between the importance and satisfaction ratings for an element of a service by each respondent.

Gap analysis techniques will yield the most insight because each issue researched will have different importance levels for individuals. **Most people will not have a strong view on an issue that is not important to them.**

And sometimes you may be surprised how satisfied people are!

For example, in a catering setting, someone who has chosen a vegetarian lifestyle will probably respond differently to someone who has chosen a non-vegetarian lifestyle when asked to rate both their satisfaction and the importance of a statement such as *"a wide choice of vegetarian options are always available at lunch time."*

> **The best outputs are achieved by measuring satisfaction gaps - the differences between the importance and satisfaction ratings for an element of a service by each respondent.**

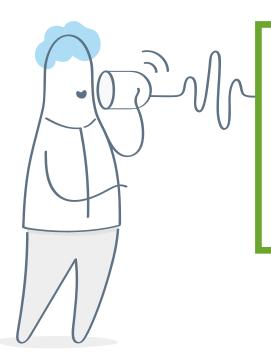expertise | passion | innovation

The Survey

Make participation as easy as possible, avoid too many open questions where the respondent is required to provide comments (because many will drop the survey if it becomes too difficult/too time-consuming to do).

Multiple choice can be an option, but rating relevant, non-leading statements for both personal satisfaction and personal importance is by far the best way to achieve accurate results.
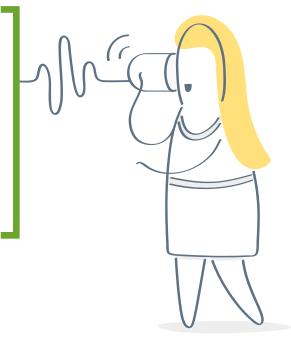
Capturing the demographic of your respondents is not essential but doing so can make the outputs more powerful. Capturing such information will depend on your organisation's personnel and privacy policies and should be optional under all circumstances.

The Nitty Gritty

Any response mechanism – digital or traditional - should be short and well-constructed, focusing on the key issues that arose from the initial focus groups. It's true that most programmes will have a core of common issues but there will always be certain areas that may be unique to a setting that need to be included because they were seen as important by the focus group.

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Engagement tip

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Updating your audience on initiatives that you have introduced or services that have been improved on the back of previous findings is a great way of getting support for a new survey as well as letting your consumers know **"you spoke, we listened."** ...And doing a survey every year lets you know how things are improving (or not)!

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Choosing the right question format

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Try to keep your questions "closed". A small number of "open" questions are acceptable, but many respondents dislike a requirement to "justify" any response they provide.

The right mix of questions will aid quick analysis by providing precise, unambiguous results, deliver an improved response rate and will reduce survey fatigue.

Open Questions
It's advisable to set a word count restriction on an open question to aid the analysis of responses.

Closed Questions
Use rating scales or multiple-choice options for best results.

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Delivery

Each audience will have different times of the year when it won't be as easy to respond as others. Take the education sector – there will be periods of study leave, residential trips and so on. Targeting your audience at a time that works for them will greatly increase the number of respondents.

Don't plan a single survey project. Always follow up at least year-on-year, because then you will see whether the changes you implemented following the initial survey to improve overall satisfaction have worked (or not).

Up Close and Personal

Most surveys today are distributed via e-mail, intranet and sometimes social platforms with the requirement to complete the survey online – usually via a link to a secure website.

Where the audience to be researched is relatively small and is in one place, **then face-to-face canvassing of opinion is often the most valuable method of gathering responses. Participants generally respond well to participation on a one-to-one basis.**

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Top tips

TOP TIPS

1 **Incentivise**

participation for increased response levels

2 **Distribute**

your survey as widely as possible via multiple platforms

3 **Send timely reminders**

to take part to your audience and advertise

4 **Avoid survey drop out**

and survey fatigue by keeping the survey simple and as short as possible

5 **Vary the types of response**

requested – a mix will always keep people more interested

6 **Analyse**

the results quickly and keep your audience informed

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Steps

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So you're going to do a survey. Here's our process for you to follow:

1 Focus Groups

Make sure all categories of your audience are included. Find out what matters most.

2 Research Design

Choose question types carefully. Keeping it short reduces survey fatigue dropouts.

3 Research Live

Distribute via popular channels that reach your audience.
Send out reminders.
Carry out face-to-face canvassing.

4 Analysis

Sort and analyse the data collected.
Create a report or presentation.

5 Results

Share results with respondents. State clearly your intentions following the survey.
Ask for their comments too.

6 Actions

Determine and implement an action plan that will deliver the required changes demanded by your audience and assign appropriate resource to do so. Advise your intentions clearly.

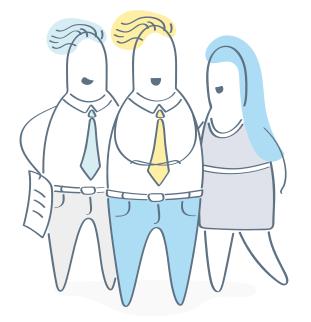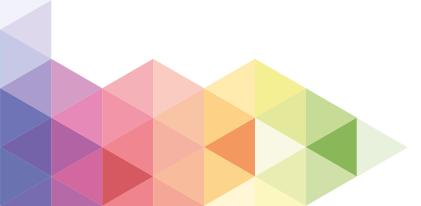expertise | passion | innovation

Next Steps

Our guidance is just the tip of the iceberg; it gives a flavour. We're fortunate to be in a position where we have been able to refine our approach following years of experience. And we're happy to help you refine yours.

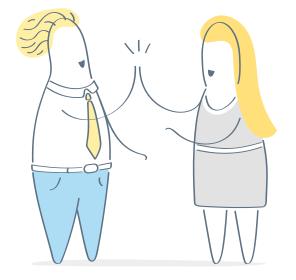To view an example output dashboard - click or tap **here.**

To view a short interactive presentation relating to Consumer Insight - Click or tap **here.**

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About Us

The Litmus Partnership

Litmus is the leading FM consultancy in the UK, working with business, education, hospitality and healthcare professionals by undertaking research on their behalf to understand their consumers' preferences.

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