



Design Research

What are you designing? A product, a business, a newsletter, a new gizmo, a professional service, a city park, a new corporate image? For almost any design challenge, surveys can be used to gather design input from potential users; input to help you create a design or to retool your design so it has stronger and more intuitive appeal.

Design research examines preferences and behaviors that can impact a design or make it more usable or more marketable. For example, if you are designing programs to educate the public on best environmental practices, a survey of the knowledge level, beliefs, and behaviors of the public will identify elements that need to be included in the program, how to focus your message, and who you need to reach. If you are designing an RV Park, a survey of RV Travelers will tell you which amenities they most appreciate and what will encourage them to visit your park. Design research is really just common sense; a "reality check" to insure your design is on the right track and appropriate to your market.

In addition to identifying elements of the initial design, surveys can give you reactions to a concept: Is it a good idea? Can individuals see themselves using it? Which features do they like or dislike? Do they believe in the concept or do they have doubts? Surveys will also help define the market for a product and identify particular market niches. They can also provide a first cut at market size and pricing. Focus groups may be used to follow-up a survey and give you a better "feel" for how people react to a concept.

Once a product is in the marketplace, it is, in effect, being tested all the time by real consumers. Surveys can be used to find out how well the product compares with the competition; how it rates on quality, price, size, packaging, value, and other factors. Surveys can also measure perceptions. Does the product or service do what it claims to do? Results of such testing may be used to improve the product or service and make marketing more effective.

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