

Cut Through A Crowded Marketplace:

15 Ways to Increase Online Survey Response Rates



The following tactics for increasing response rates to your online surveys merge insights from industry best practices and specific Zarca platform attributes.

+ 1. Increase respondent convenience by keeping the survey as short as possible. To increase survey participation, make your invitations concise and straightforward.

If you already have information about respondents (name, age, gender, organization, title, etc.), don't make them enter this information again. Zarca's Pre-population tool allows you to easily personalize your invites and surveys with known personal or demographic information.

+ 2. Craft an effective email subject line and begin emails with an engaging question. To immediately grab attention, don't use a dull subject line. Avoid the word "free," as many unsolicited emails use the word "free" in their subject lines. To keep Spam filters at bay, use original language.

An example of an employee satisfaction opening line could be, "How would you rate the work-life balance of your work place?" Or, in a customer loyalty survey invite, you could pose the question, "Why are you a loyal customer to XYZ Company?" The point of the opening line is to connect with your audience in a way that immediately captures their attention and communicates how much you value their opinions.

+ 3. Maintain a personal tone. Bulk emails are easy to deploy but not very effective. Take some time to personalize your emails in a friendly, welcoming tone that doesn't just sound like a sales pitch.

+ 4. Brand and personalize your emails. Personalized emails are an effective way to relate to your stakeholders. Zarca's software allows administrators to quickly personalize a survey invitation with the receiver's name, company, city, gender, etc. In addition, brand your message with the look-and-feel of your organization's website and logo. A personal touch goes a long way towards generating a higher response rate.

+ 5. Target the message and offer meaningful incentives. The content and tone of your email should be crafted based on your audience (first-time respondents vs. past respondents, executives vs. employees, customers vs. vendors) and should reflect your audience's specific interests and needs.

Research increasingly shows that small incentives (coupons, free or low-valued merchandise) are not as effective as offering to share the survey results and explaining how the feedback will impact your organization's decisions.

+ 6. Offer multiple methods to access the survey. Zarca utilizes direct links, redirect and copy/paste URLs, which allow participants to access surveys in a variety of ways. For individuals who don't have an email address, the survey administrator can send them a unique key to the survey via fax, telephone or postcard. For organizations that administer paper-based or telephone surveys, Zarca allows those responses to be seamlessly imported into the platform and aggregated with online responses.

+ 7. Send reminders to increase the response rate. You can easily send intelligent reminders to those who have not yet responded to your initial survey invite. You should not, however, send more than two reminders or send reminders to those who have already responded.

Zarca's Touch Rules Manager helps you automate these tasks by keeping track of how many invites/reminders each person has received, their response status and the number of surveys they have taken in a certain amount of time.

+ 8. Keep your email database up-to-date. People change their email addresses frequently. To keep your list accurate, you should monitor the emails that bounce back or are undeliverable. You should also offer a way for survey participants to update their contact information in the email or survey.

+ 9. Communicate the privacy policy, data security and anonymity. A common factor that affects survey participation is how much individuals trust your organization. Clearly communicate your policies on safeguarding personal information and remind participants that you will not sell or share survey information with any third party. A strong sense of trust will maintain a healthy, long-term relationship with your survey participants.

You should have a line in the body of your email that describes the extent that you will address security issues. Zarca has an anonymity feature that blocks survey administrators from seeing any personal, identifiable information. This is especially useful for sensitive surveys, like those that monitor employee satisfaction. Zarca also uses 128-bit SSL encryption of survey response data when it is being transmitted.

+ 10. Determine the best time to launch. Send emails when people are most likely to receive them and will respond. This takes an understanding of your specific survey audience. Studies have shown that the best time to send an email is mid-week on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 2:00 -3:00 p.m.

+ 11. Give the option for text-only email. Since not every email server allows HTML emails or emails with images/multimedia, always include a plain text alternative. Zarca gives administrators the option to send HTML or plain text invites/reminders, as well as the option to embed the survey directly within the email.

+ 12. Do not deceive your audience. A topic that's regulated by the Can Spam Act (2003) is the fact that you must be honest about the contents and topic of any email. For example, a subject line that says "Free Credit Score" will annoy individuals greatly when they realize the email actually has nothing to do with the subject line.

+ 13. Enable respondents to save surveys and to opt-out. To minimize participant drop-out, offer a way for participants to save their survey and return to it later. Analyzing the stopping points is also a useful way to gauge the optimal length of your survey. Zarca's surveys have a setting that allows respondents to save their progress and continue later.

The Can Spam Act (2003) requires businesses to include a clear way for recipients to decline participation (opt-out) for both legal and etiquette reasons. Zarca's invites/reminders provide fully-customizable opt-out messages.

+ 14. Do not send the same survey twice. To discover the best survey methods, try using several different subject lines, content, branding, etc., to see what is most effective. Whenever you try something different, monitor any changes in response rates and compare them with previous survey initiatives. Zarca's Distribution Manager allows you to instantly track response rates as you receive survey responses.

+ 15. Test emails before sending. Before launching your email invitations test and preview all aspects of the survey experience. Zarca's Test Invites feature allows you to send practice invitations to you, coworkers, supervisors, etc., to test the functionality of your survey before it's live. If possible, you should also try to send test invites to different email servers to identify any problems.