



Survey incentives for research:

As online advertising research evolves, it is critical to re-examine all tools available for improving survey recruitment efficiency and completion rates. In research relying on live Web recruitment to supply sample for studies, respondent incentives can boost survey starts and reduce the number of abandoned surveys. Careful consideration must be applied to selecting the right incentive that increases survey participation without pricing this methodology out of the market.

When research conducted via live Web recruitment was first establishing a credible foothold, most surveys were conducted without any offer of incentives. However, use of incentives was a common practice in most other methodologies even though the value and award types varied. Traditional market research conducted via telephone almost never offered an incentive. In-person research (face to face) frequently used compensation that varied from a low value tangible prize to a cash payment to respondents meeting the sampling criteria. As online panels evolved, they quickly normalized the practice of paying respondents a small amount to compensate them for their time.

Live Web recruitment based research has not yet fully embraced incentives, though more recent research suggests the need to re-evaluate this practice. Based on the research study described herein, Safecount has concluded that, to prevent further participation decline, survey incentives will be necessary for live Web recruitment surveys.

Why do respondents take surveys?

It is important to consider the reasons respondents give up their time to complete surveys. The basic premise endorsed by researchers and touted in survey invitations is that sharing one's opinion is a rewarding experience. Many respondents genuinely enjoy giving their opinion about brands and services they favor as well as those they purposely avoid. Because incentive payments rarely exceed the average hourly wages of a represented population, one or more intrinsic benefits must exist for one to consider spending time to complete a survey. Ever present among the non-tangible reasons that respondents complete surveys is that people want to believe that their viewpoints matter.

A sense of self-importance and the desire to have one's opinions and criticisms be valued by society is an important reason that survey respondents spend time taking surveys. Participating in research studies gives respondents a chance to be heard as an expert by attentive ears, even from within the framework of a quantitative survey. Respondents enjoy feeling as if they are helping improve the companies and organizations with which they interact. Communicating the message that interviewees are helping these entities in an important manner can satisfy the human tendency to be helpful. One form of indirect incentive — charity donations for survey participation — deftly capitalizes on this trait.

However, these reasons alone are becoming less effective in attracting and retaining enough respondents to overcome increasing survey disqualification and drop out rates among live Web respondents. In order to meet the changing demands of the research industry it is necessary to consider monetary incentives.

Monetary incentives most commonly take the form of direct cash, check or electronic payments; gift cards; or prize drawings. Each format has its own pros and cons. Direct payments with valuations above \$10 can be very effective with large segments of most common sample populations. However, with all but very small sample sizes, this type of incentive will drive the operational costs of a study far beyond most clients' budgets. Lacking a solid precedent which adds a per-respondent incentive to the total study cost, most clients will not easily accept the additional cost. Furthermore, fulfillment of individual incentives requires project management resources which increase expense as well as risk of error. Finally, using direct incentives for live Web recruitment can increase the risk of exposure to gamers by increasing their motivation to seek and exploit security weaknesses for profit.

Fortunately, sweepstakes and prize drawings provide a solution to the need to offer survey respondents compensation for their time in a cost-effective manner that mitigates risk of attracting scam artists.

Survey Incentives for Live Web Recruitment Research

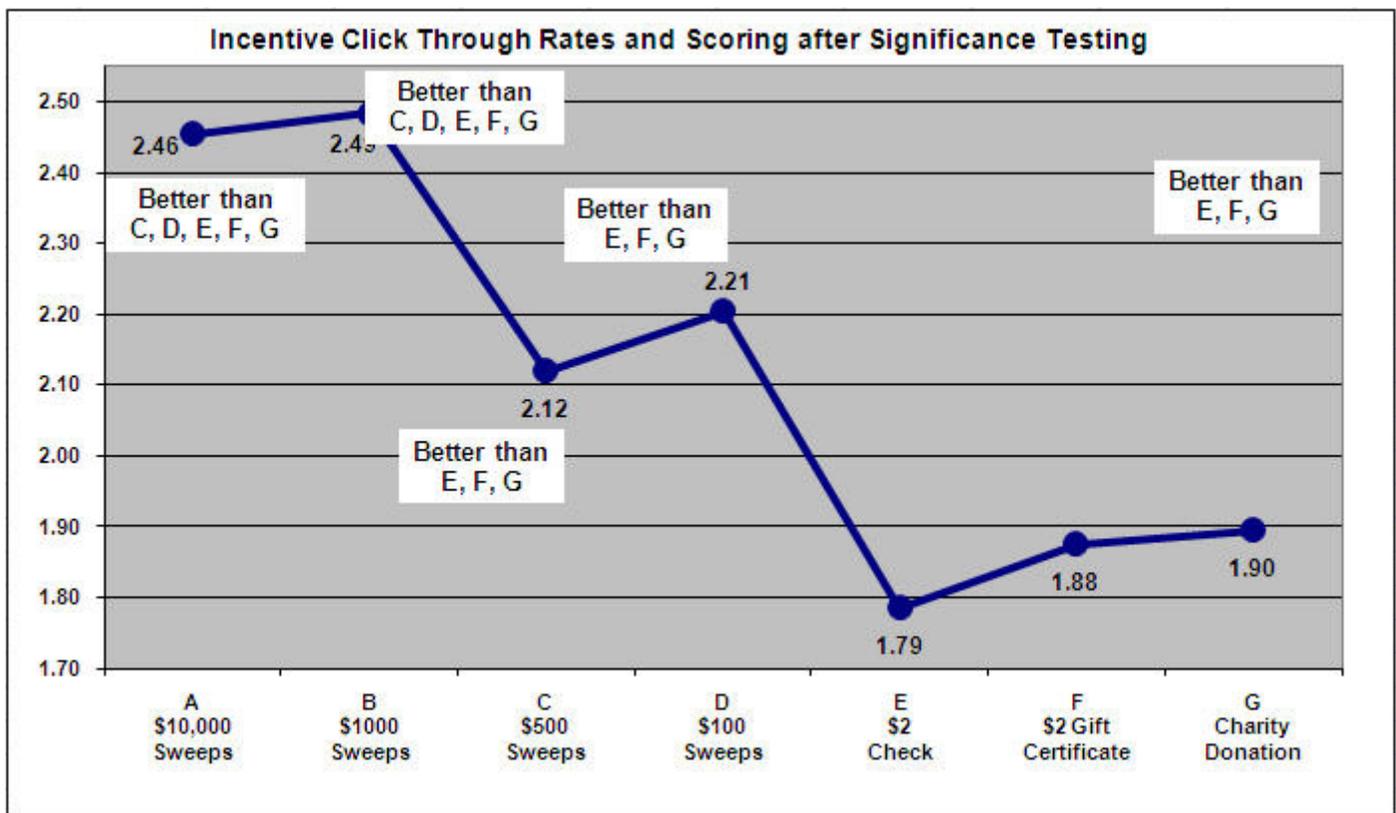
Safecount Conducts Incentive Research

Safecount conducted a research study to gain a better understanding the type of incentive that would best draw respondents into a survey and hold their attention through the final question. The study was conducted via live web recruitment run simultaneously on a major daily newspaper and a major women's lifestyle portal, each with national reach.

The incentive offerings tested included sweepstakes valued at \$10,000, \$1,000, \$500, and \$100, as well as a guaranteed \$2 payment, a \$2 gift card and a \$2 charity donation. The survey and invitations were identical except for the references to the incentive. The questions in the survey itself were typical of those found in common branding studies. All cells were recruited simultaneously.

Overall Findings

The sweepstakes yielded better click-through results than any of the other tested incentives. Significance analysis testing confirmed that the four sweepstakes offers outperformed the direct incentives. Of these, the \$10,000 and \$1,000 drawings were essentially tied as the highest producers. These sweepstakes produced an average of 34% higher click-through rates when compared to direct payments and charity donations. There was no evidence that the \$10,000 drawing would justify the greater administrative costs when compared to the \$1,000 sweepstakes offering.



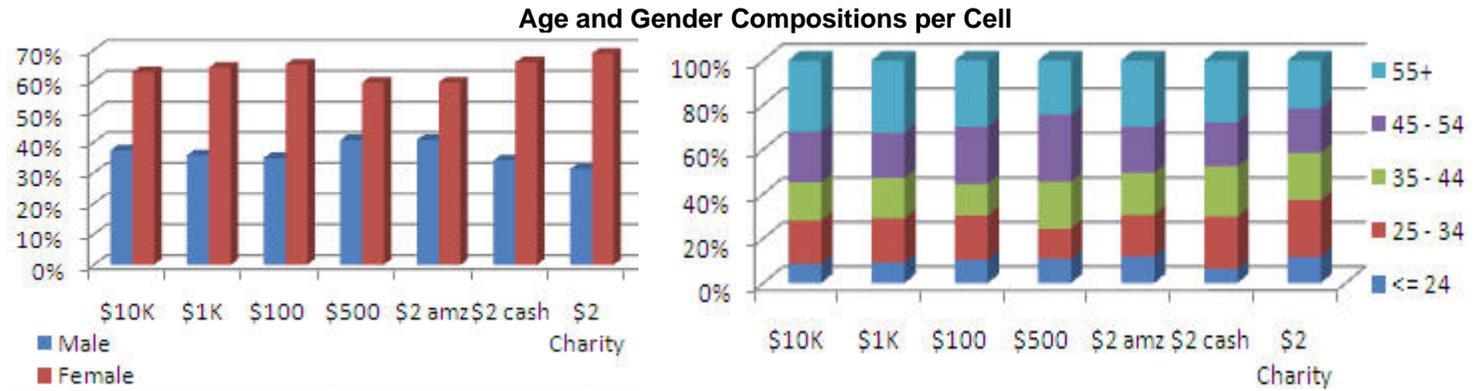
Age & Gender Considerations

The cell demographic compositions were allowed to fall out naturally. There were no quotas or other mechanisms used to influence the age and gender split among the seven cells. The demographic compositions were comparable across all seven cells. Incentive performance was analyzed using the following breakouts: male versus female, age (<=24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+), and ten age/gender sub-groups. Survey data results from the study's advertising awareness questions were also comparable across each cell and produced no surprises.

Self reported incentive preferences mirrored the overall results across all individual age/gender groups. In all categories, the sweepstakes' greater potential payoff scored higher than the tested direct incentives. Though reported incentive preferences should be taken into account, more weight should be placed on the actual invitation click-through and survey completion rates associated with each incentive offering. With both click-through and completion rate metrics, the \$1000 Sweepstakes offering generated the most cost effective results, especially among the difficult to reach younger age/gender groupings.

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The study's findings did not rule out using demographically targeted incentive offerings to tailor recruitment plans and attract specific groups within the online population. It is possible that custom incentive programs could be used to recruit different sample segments. However, this approach would result in an increase in cost and complexity, which may render online recruitment less attractive to research clients. When broken out into these age and gender categories, the differences in response rates to the varying incentives did not appear significant enough to justify the increased administrative cost which would be required to run separate incentive programs at this time.



* Overall age and gender profiles mirror the combined compositions of the subject sites.

The results of this study do indicate that sampling in live web recruitment can be boosted by the introduction of an incentive without negatively affecting or invalidating survey results.

Summary and Recommendations:

The changing live Web recruitment research climate, a result of more-focused marketing campaigns, increased average survey length and stricter qualification criteria, has driven up the number of willing participants required to start a survey. Competition for potential respondent attention is compounded by survey invitation limits set by publishers wanting to restrict the number of respondents drawn away from their content and advertising for any purpose, including ad research studies. Any invitation worth using must be compelling and effective in convincing potential respondents to commit the valuable time required to participate in a research survey. To realize the goal of improving research recruitment efficiency in a manner that does not conflict with the competitiveness of live Web recruitment or the budget constraints of end clients, implementing the following is highly recommended:

- For sites that do not specifically prohibit an incentive, incorporate a monthly \$1,000 drawing that is shared among all surveys completed that month. Respondents would earn a single entry for each study completion.
- For sites that prohibit collection of email address or sweepstakes, offering a limited choice of national, non-controversial charities is an acceptable alternative to the better-performing sweepstakes offering.