

Online Surveys in the Oilfield



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Gelb
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Overview

Each year, millions of employees and consumers complete online surveys that provide insight on customer satisfaction, employee feedback, product development, message testing, and more. Online surveys are the most widely used tool in marketing research because they are efficient, cost-effective, and versatile.

Gelb has conducted qualitative and quantitative research for a wide variety of clients, and specializes in strategic marketing in the oilfield.

In this paper, we examine the advantages and disadvantages of online surveys, our experience utilizing online surveys, and research panels in the oil and gas industry. Properly done, using online research panels yields valuable market intelligence and enables tracking of changes within the industry.

Advantages

Online surveys are efficient. They provide quick turnaround compared to other forms of interviewing. Interviews conducted via telephone, mail, or in person often span weeks of time due to respondent inaccessibility. Interview personnel most devote a significant amount of time to contacting respondents and scheduling a convenient interview time, particularly with time zone changes and regional holidays. Conversely, online surveys allow researchers to simultaneously process multiple interviews at any hour of the day (or night) yielding larger numbers of qualified responses that can be generated quickly. The survey can be taken from any location, so it can be programmed in multiple languages and distributed around the world.

Online surveys are cost-effective. The cost of programming and hosting an automated online survey is much lower than paying a firm to conduct interviews individually. Most costs of online surveys are incurred as part of the programming process, meaning that incremental increases in responses do not yield corresponding increases in cost. Once the data is gathered, the feedback is automatically input into a statistical program for analysis. This also minimizes interviewer bias or errors that stem from data entry of mailed paper questionnaires.

Online surveys are adaptable. Unlike paper questionnaires, online surveys provide the ability to customize question and answer choices based on a respondent's previous answers (called branching). Beyond telephone interviews, online surveys allow researchers to include photos, videos, or audio clips as part of the process. These additional functions are especially useful for research in ad and message testing, showing concept descriptions for product commercialization and brand equity measurement.

For example, online surveys allow many varieties of product features to be presented, which facilitates more complex studies and designs. By using experimental design, respondents can measure certain variables while keeping other variables constant; this allows respondents to rate a variety of product attributes. In adaptive conjoint analysis, respondents evaluate product or service attributes to arrive at the ideal feature or a specific product or service.

Online Surveys in the Oilfield

Online surveys also allow researchers to implement a tracking system to study industry trends over a period of time.

Challenges

Despite the many advantages to online surveys, there are some inherent disadvantages. Researchers must use caution to ensure that their online surveys are secure, user-friendly, and technologically viable. Without an adequately managed online panel or customer list, researchers are not available to qualify respondents. A good online survey must be secure and available only to those who meet the given criteria. For this reason, researchers must take steps to ensure panel integrity. At Gelb, we are the exclusive managers of the Gulf Research Panel, a global database of over 60,000 engineers and other decision-makers. This panel is pre-qualified, which means they have been predetermined to meet the criteria based on their entry into the panel. It is also the only energy/oil and gas specific research panel that is BPA-certified. This means we verify the qualifications of every individual in the database instead of relying on site licenses. The next section of this paper discusses the Gulf Research panel in more detail.

An incentive, such as a prize drawing or monetary rewards, is often offered to respondents to motivate them to take the survey. Respondents who want the incentive may complete surveys multiple times or modify the information that would otherwise disqualify them from taking the survey. There are ways that a survey's programmers can make it secure, such as making it invitation only, using open-ended questions to detect misuse, and blocking IP addresses from questionable respondents. It is therefore important to prohibit self-selecting respondents for surveys. For example, if a respondent selects the same answer for every question or provides an open-ended answer that does not make sense, researchers are tipped off that there may be an issue with data validity, and can delete that set of responses.

Another challenge of online surveys is creating surveys that are user-friendly. Online surveys don't allow for additional probing by the interviewer. This can be especially problematic for open-ended questions, in which respondents may not fully understand the question or explain the answer. This lack of interaction between the respondent and the market researcher makes it especially important for surveys to be easy to understand; they must have clear directions, wording, and formatting. Researchers can't force a respondent to complete the survey, and the respondents may terminate the survey without completing it if they are having difficulty understanding or viewing the questions. Programmers must use caution to ensure that online surveys are easy to navigate and respondents are able to view them on diverse computer systems. Therefore, a research firm with experience in the oilfield is a must for a well-executed questionnaire.

Research Panels

Marketing research panels are groups of respondents who have already been recruited to participate in research. Research panels can be used for focus groups, online surveys, telephone surveys, and other market research techniques. As discussed in the previous section,

Online Surveys in the Oilfield

survey security and respondent qualification is essential to obtaining valid survey data. A research panel that is managed appropriately provides researchers with access to a target population who is prequalified. Properly managed research panels uphold respondent anonymity, as well as monitors and limits the number of surveys a respondents takes.

The Gulf Research Panel

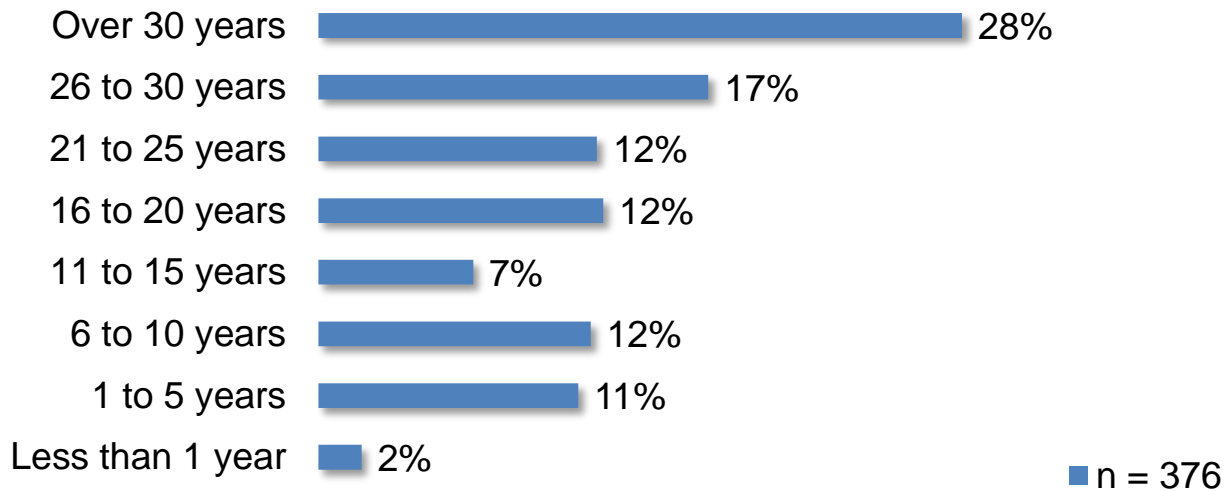
The Gulf Research Panel, which utilizes an opt-in database of over 100,000 readers of *World Oil* and *Hydrocarbon Processing*, is jointly managed by Gelb and Gulf Publishing Company. Gulf Research is the premier provider of market intelligence for the upstream and downstream oil and gas industry. Gulf Research provides leading oilfield service companies such as Baker Hughes, Halliburton, Schlumberger, and Weatherford with market knowledge and insights about marketing strategy, brand equity evaluation, and technical needs within the industry.

There are currently over 60,000 decision-makers on the Gulf Research panel who have opted-in to complete our surveys. This is a high quality research source because respondents have been pre-qualified by Gulf Publishing. In order to qualify for the research panel, respondents must subscribe to a Gulf Publishing trade journal. In order to obtain their subscription, readers must have a relevant position within the oil and gas industry. *World Oil* uses the BPA Worldwide audit service to ensure the accuracy and quality of circulation members. BPA Worldwide is an independent, not-for-profit organization that audits the circulation of publications; BPA auditors examine the circulation files to make sure they are correct and current. This third-party information verifies that we are truly reaching the target market. Additionally, demographic information is collected upon panel member registration, and is confirmed in several online surveys over the year to ensure appropriate criteria are met.

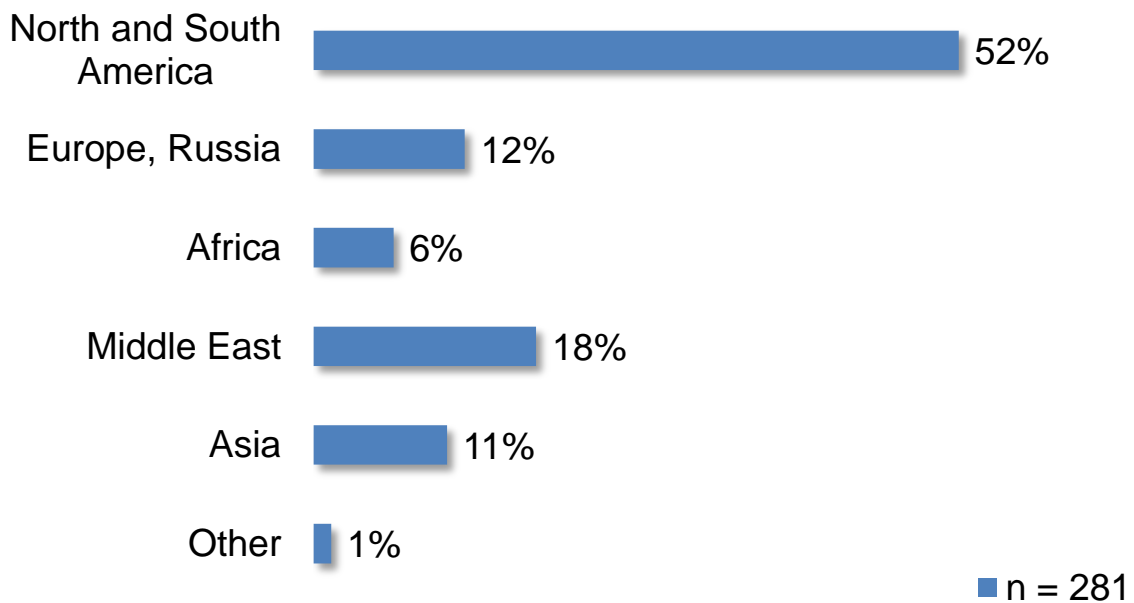
Gulf Research panel members hold a variety of positions worldwide, and have a wide range of experience (see charts below). Respondents do not receive direct payments for completing surveys to adhere to corporate ethics policies, but are eligible for incentive drawings for items such as gift certificates or electronics. These respondents are motivated to respond because of their industry experience and commitment, and provide high-quality responses to open-ended questions. Gulf Research surveys are user-friendly and adaptable for respondents who hold various positions and work with many products and services. The use of respondents who are directly involved in the industry enables us to overcome many security challenges associated with online surveys, and obtain high-quality data about trends in the oilfield.

Online Surveys in the Oilfield

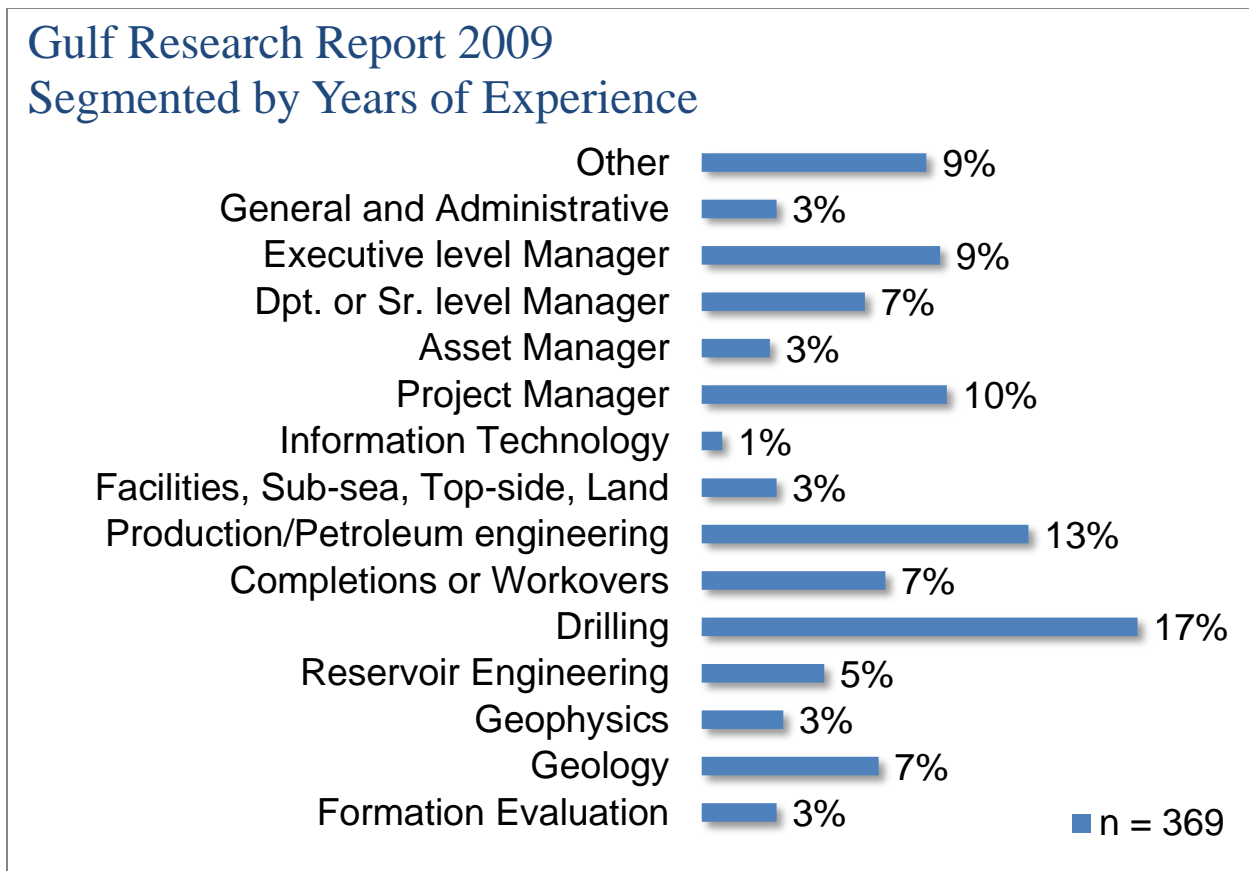
Gulf Research Report 2009 Segmented by Years of Experience



Gulf Research Panel 2009 Segmented by Geographic Responsibility



Online Surveys in the Oilfield



Conclusion

It is evident that online surveys are efficient, cost-effective, and adaptable. However, marketers must use caution to ensure that their online surveys are secure, user-friendly, and technologically viable. Online surveys can be effective in the oil and gas industry with the appropriate experience, prudence, and panel. Through our reliable Gulf Research panel, we have been able to interview thousands of personnel involved in the oil and gas industry. We have provided multiple organizations in the oil and gas industry with a cost-effective assessment of market opportunities, particularly in helping identify and prioritize market segments. These organizations then use this information to configure their pricing/product/service offers and make a positive contribution towards meeting their corporate growth objectives.

Online Surveys in the Oilfield

About Endeavor

Endeavor Management, is an international management consulting firm that collaboratively works with their clients to achieve greater value from their transformational business initiatives. Endeavor serves as a catalyst by providing pragmatic methodologies and industry expertise in Transformational Strategies, Operational Excellence, Organizational Effectiveness, and Transformational Leadership.

Our clients include those responsible for:

- Business Strategy
- Marketing and Brand Strategy
- Operations
- Technology Deployment
- Strategic Human Capital
- Corporate Finance

The firm's 40 year heritage has produced a substantial portfolio of proven methodologies, deep operational insight and broad industry experience. This experience enables our team to quickly understand the dynamics of client companies and markets. Endeavor's clients span the globe and are typically leaders in their industry.

Gelb Consulting Group, a wholly owned subsidiary, monitors organizational performance and designs winning marketing strategies. Gelb helps organizations focus their marketing initiatives by fully understanding customer needs through proven strategic frameworks to guide marketing strategies, build trusted brands, deliver exceptional experiences and launch new products.

Our websites:

www.endeavormgmt.com

www.gelbconsulting.com

www.gulfresearch.com