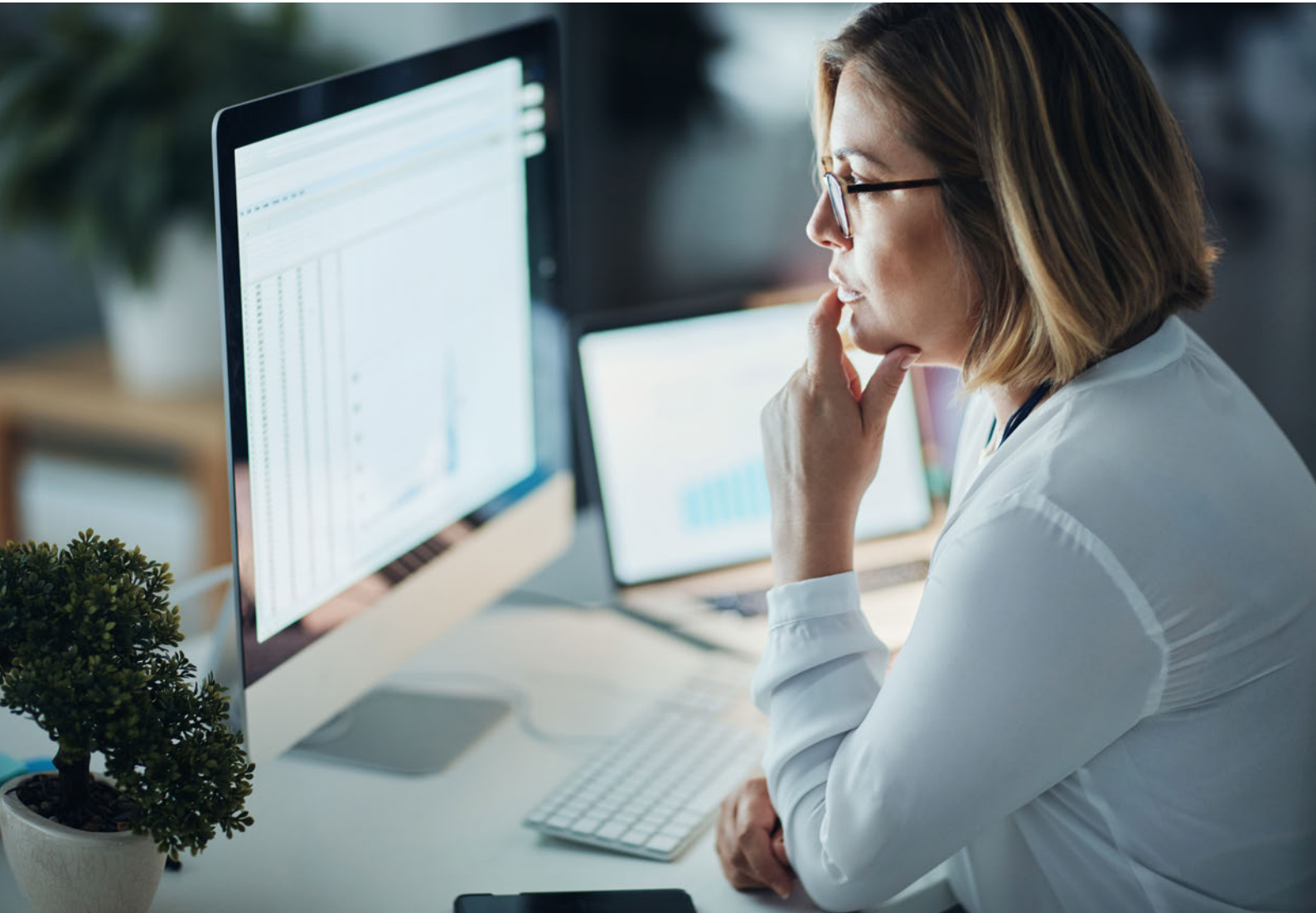


How Short Should You Make Your Customer Experience Survey?

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Most customer experience (CX) surveys are designed to be five minutes in length or shorter. However, we have seen a trend toward companies requesting even shorter customer experience surveys, often due to the impression that shorter surveys increase response rates. Their assumption is that customers are overwhelmed with surveys and therefore will only answer short ones. Is there empirical evidence to back up this perception?

What People Are Saying About Taking Surveys

To help us answer this question, we will use data from a 2019 study that we conducted of 1002 randomly sampled US participants. The margin of error for this study is approximately +/- 3 percentage points. What do the data say about the participants' views of survey taking?

- Survey respondents acknowledge that the frequency of receiving surveys has gone up (42%) or stayed about the same (50%) over the previous three years. Only 8% reported that they receive fewer surveys than three years ago. However, this increase doesn't

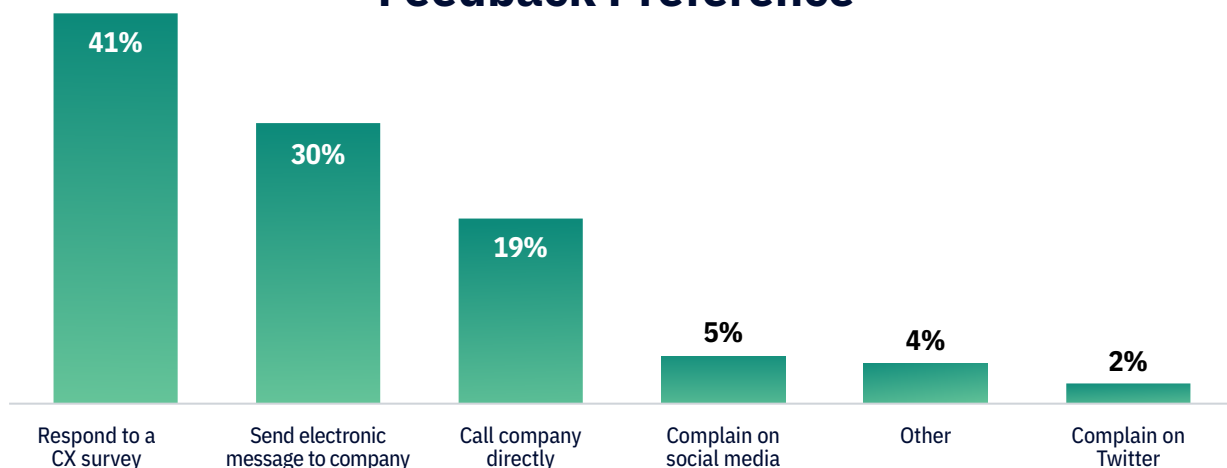
seem to have lessened customers' willingness to respond to surveys. 58% say their willingness to complete surveys has stayed about the same over the previous three years, 30% say their willingness to respond has increased, and only 12% say their willingness to respond has decreased.

- Also, the increase in surveying doesn't seem to be overwhelming for most customers. 71% say they receive two or fewer customer feedback survey requests per month, 18% receive three or four, and 11% say they receive five or more.

- Customers also seem to prefer surveys as a mechanism to provide negative feedback to companies. We asked customers, "What is your preferred method of providing negative feedback to a company when you have had a disappointing experience?"

As you can see in the chart below, responding to a survey was the most preferred feedback mechanism, even compared to other in-vogue methods like complaining on Twitter and other social media outlets.

Feedback Preference



How People are Acting When Taking Surveys

Survey Non-Response Stages

The vast majority of survey non-response does not occur because most survey abandonment occurs for reasons other than length. If that was the cause, we would see the most drop off at the point where people have responded to a number of questions and then abandoned the survey. This is simply not the case.

Below, you can review data from two fairly typical CX studies: one with a relatively high response rate (left) and one with a lower response rate (right). As can be seen in the diagrams, the vast majority of non-response occurs when potential respondents never open the survey after receiving an invitation. When abandonment does happen within

the survey, it occurs a bit more often on the first page of the survey as on all the latter pages. In other words, a high percentage of people who abandon surveys do so on the first page.

Voluntary Continuation

Some of our CX measurement programs are set up to ask a number of core questions and then ask respondents if they would be willing to continue answering additional questions. Depending on the survey and the type of respondents being surveyed, usually about 50% to 75% agree to continue. This seems to indicate that most customers are comfortable with longer surveys.

Determinants of Response Rates

Quite often, we conduct customer experience studies for our clients across multiple sectors. These studies can vary considerably in length. Looking across these studies, there is little evidence that short surveys have better response rates than longer surveys.

What is much more important in determining response rates are the type of survey (transactional vs. relationship); for transactional surveys, the type of transaction being measured (e.g., surveys of high-value transactions generally have higher response rates than surveys of lower-value transactions); the industry; and to some extent, the device the respondent is using to answer the survey.

The vast majority of survey non-response does not occur because surveys are abandoned due to length. If that was the cause, we would see the most drop off at the point where people have responded to a number of questions and then abandoned the survey.

100%

Surveys Sent

57%

Surveys Started

55%

Continued after first page

54%

Completed Survey

100%

Surveys Sent

32%

Surveys Started

25%

Continued after first page

20%

Completed Survey

What You Should Consider When Shortening a Survey

A lot of people say they want to shorten their survey because they aren't using all the information. While it is true that you should only gather information that you will use, you need to make sure that the information gathered isn't important to someone else in your organization.

Many times, when corporate research managers think about eliminating items, they are primarily thinking of

how their research department uses the information. They may forget about how other corporate departments (e.g., marketing, product development) or frontline managers use the information.

At the corporate level, departments often use CX data to identify frontline units that need improvement, provide field personnel with detailed information on how to improve those units, and identify corporate-wide

training needs, to name a few. All of these stakeholders and their use cases need to be taken into account when shortening a CX survey.

Also, we highly recommend you use a "Backward Research Process" when deciding what questions are needed. First, ask yourself, "What decisions do we want to make when we get our survey results, and what information do we want to be able to tell others?"

Our past research with frontline managers of auto dealerships found four primary use cases for CX information:



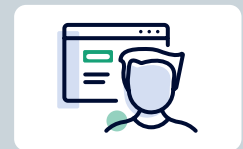
Tracking progress toward incentive payments



Identifying at-risk customers and attempting to intervene with them



Diagnosing which business processes are working and which need to be improved



Identifying employees that are performing well or performing poorly

Then, make sure to include questions to provide the information you need.

In many cases we have seen companies drastically shorten their surveys and then realize they can't tell their retail units what they need to do to improve

because they have removed most or all of their diagnostic questions.

There is also the general perception that surveys can be easily shortened by omitting questions about specific topics and using a general comment

field to capture that information.

Unfortunately, this is usually not the case because customers' comments are typically short, and they just talk about things that are top of mind. Therefore, each comment (i.e., each response) only addresses one or two issues.



Additionally, a high percentage of comments are often general in nature and do not address specific issues at all (e.g., “Thanks,” “It was good,” “No comment,” “Nice work,” “Terrible experience”). We use a technique that automatically asks respondents to expound on their comments or to drill into specific topics the customer may be talking about. While this helps in obtaining more informative comments, comments alone do not provide the breadth and depth of information you can get by asking specific questions.

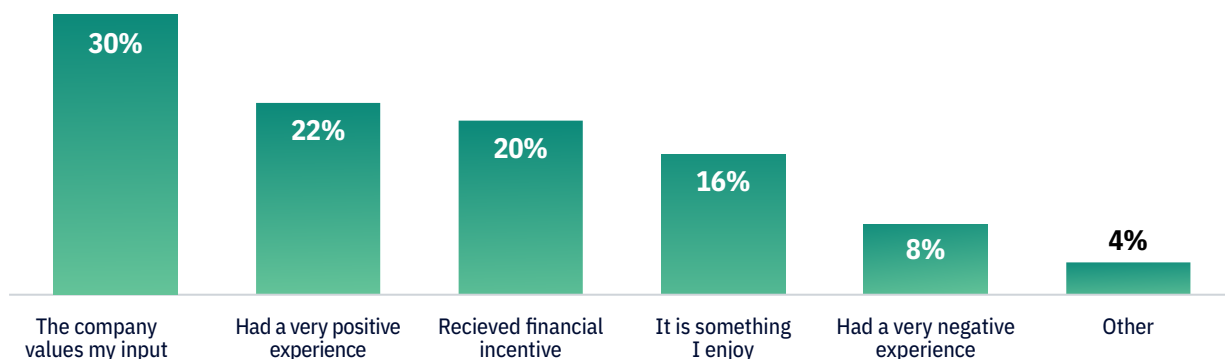
Best Practices for General Survey Design: Short but Complete

Usually, CX surveys should take five minutes or less. Ask as few questions as you can while also being sure to ask all the questions (within reason) that you need. When deciding what is needed, use a backward research process and take into account the needs of all survey stakeholders, including various corporate departments and frontline units.

Make Your Customers Feel Their Responses are Valued

Ask meaningful questions. Let respondents know why you’re asking and how their answers will be used. Respondents want to know that their answers are important. In the 2019 study referenced above, asked customers why they respond to CX surveys. As can be seen below, “Belief that the company values my input” was the most frequently chosen reason, more so than a financial incentive.

Reasons for Responding to CX Surveys





Ask the Right Questions to Support Your Employee Rewards Program

If your program is basing rewards off of your customer experience results, make sure to ask questions at the appropriate level to support those rewards. For instance, if rewards are given to salespeople, make sure to ask about the salesperson's performance specifically, not just the general experience.

For a reward program to be motivating, it is important that the participant (in this case the salesperson) has control over what is being measured. In other words, salespeople can control how they interact with their customers, but they may not be able to control other aspects of the experience.

Include a “Catch-all” Question

Include an open-ended question so customers can tell you anything they find important that you about anything they find important. Categorize these comments (either through automated text analysis or manually, depending on volume) to determine what you might need to ask about in the future.

A Shorter Survey Isn't Always Better

While “shorter is better” seems to be the mantra of the survey industry, shorter for shortness's sake is not a good thing. As our research has shown, there is little evidence that response rates and abandonment rates differ for surveys up to five or six minutes in length. Additionally, our study proves that respondents are willing to take longer surveys.

It is our opinion that failing to capture important information just to shorten a survey is a disservice to both your company and your customers.

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