10 DECISIONS YOU SHOULD MAKE TO IMPROVE YOUR

DATA COLLECTION PRODUCTIVITY

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Can you share your questionnaires for approval?

Questionnaires are important documents or viewable forms that must be right. Many questionnaires need to be approved, checked or viewed by different people before they are put to use. Having tools that facilitates this saves time, but also reduces errors that can take time to fix.

How much time do you spend making the questionnaire look good?

Online questionnaires should be clear and easy to understand. They don't need to look especially appealing unless they are being embedded, for example, in a company's website. Making questionnaires clear and easy to understand is an important part of the production process. You need software that makes this easy rather time-consuming and intricate.

How do you test questionnaires?

Being able to test questionnaires easily is also an important part of the process. Tests should be carried out for clarity, comprehension etc. Software that facilitates these tasks will always gain an extra point or two in usability.

EASE OF USE

How easy is it to import lists/texts?

Responses to questions are often a list of standard responses or come from a list in, for example, an Excel spreadsheet. Transferring this information easily into your questionnaire using your data collection software is one example of many that will improve productivity significantly.

How easily can you make changes?

Making changes to questionnaires, particularly after fieldwork has started, is always problematic. How problematic this becomes can be become a serious productivity issue, particularly for large CATI set-ups where interviewers may not be able to work. Client demands or the fixing of errors will become necessary for time to time; the effort involved in such changes needs to be considered.

TYPE OF SOFTWARE

Scripting or GUI (graphical user interface)?

Scripting languages offer huge productivity gains in most cases, but they need skilled users who are properly trained and who will using the software for a significant part of their time. GUI software may be slower to use, but errors will be reduced and staff time may be easier to estimate. What works best for you?

Free/budget software or top of the range?

If it's your first survey, use something that is free or cheap. If you are expecting to handle large volumes or have regular work, it is worth evaluating the benefit of using more expensive software. Estimating time staff spend and costing this in a spreadsheet can be revealing and signpost you to being more productive.

THINKING ABOUT DATA

What happens to the data next?

Whether your role is to provide data only or to analyse and report on the data, the next step with the data is important. It's important to consider what is and what might be needed as working with data can be time-consuming and error-prone resulting in poor productivity.

How much control do you have over the data output?

Some data collection tools only output to CSV file format, for example. Unless this is what is always required, you may be causing problems for yourself. In most cases, as a minimum, data collection software should output to Triple-S, Excel, CSV, SPSS format and ASCII. There should be controls over which data is exported and, preferably, tools to control how the data is laid out. Of course, if you are doing everything, including analysis and reporting, in one system, this may be less of a problem - unless a client demands something more portable!

How easy is it to have mixed mode data collection?

Being able to collect data in more than one mode can be important. Maybe, some respondents would prefer to complete a paper questionnaire. True mixed mode software will store all the data in one common format. Some multi-mode data collection tools may store each data type in different formats, making combined analysis time-consuming or almost impossible.