
Web Survey Software: Choosing the Appropriate Product

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MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

Why is this topic important?

- **Increasing use of web surveys as access to the Internet increases**
- **Increased availability of commercial web survey software**
- **Need for cost- and time-efficient options for clients**
- **This is based on our company's experiences**

Mathematica's Current Products

- **Three products to meet client needs**
 - **Blaise IS**
 - **WebSurv2**
 - **Opinio**

Blaise IS

- **Powerful computer-assisted interviewing system and survey processing tool for Windows**
- **Multiple modes accommodated with one instrument**
- **Single real-time database for data storage**
- **Requires a programmer to develop for the web**
 - **Complex formatting can be costly**
- **Can be integrated with our Survey Management System**
- **Currently not 508 compliant**

WebSurv2

- **Developed by Mathematica ~12 years ago and allows for custom programming**
- **Used on some very large web-only surveys**
- **Allows complete flexibility of design but can be costly**
- **Includes a Designer that allows a non-programmer to do initial screen design work**
- **Can be integrated with our Sample Management System**
- **Is 508 compliant**

Opinio

- **Commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) software with basic web survey functionality (skips, fills, error messages, etc.)**
 - Additional plug-ins are available
- **Designed for straight forward web-only surveys**
- **Good flexibility in terms of survey design (layout, color, fonts, etc.)**
- **Non-programmer can do set-up**
- **Cannot be linked to our Sample Management System**
- **Currently not 508 compliant**

Factors Determining Choice of Software

	Blaise IS	WebSurv2	Opinio
Mode	Multi-mode	Web only	Web only
Complex Data validations	Yes	Yes	Partial with plug-in
Error messages	Soft, hard	Soft, hard	Soft only
Multiple languages	Yes	No	Yes
Index page for navigation	Yes	Yes	No
Print responses	Yes	Yes	Yes, with plug-in
Skip from sample load data	Yes	Yes	No
Looping	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not optimal
508 compliant	No	Yes	No, but may be possible

Factors Determining Choice of Software (continued)

	Blaise IS	WebSurv2	Opinio
Skips based on responses from more than one item	Yes	Yes	No
Need for customization	Yes, significant	Yes, significant	Yes, minimal
Linkage to sample management tools	Yes	Yes	No
Staff expertise	Programmer	Programmer	Non-programmer
Time available	More time consuming →		Least time consuming
Available budget	More expensive →		Least expensive

Three Examples

- **Survey of college graduates**
 - Web, mail, and phone
 - Complex eligibility screener
 - Extensive sample management
- **Survey of service providers about services, income, and expenditures**
 - Web only
 - Need to validate numeric responses
 - Desire to self-clean using a combination of hard and soft edits
- **Survey of health IT grantees**
 - Web only
 - Need link to pdf of grant summary
 - Basic skips
 - Use of pre-fills

Lessons Learned

- **Multiple products required to meet diverse client needs**
- **Selection of product requires clear assumptions about what is needed**
 - Staff training required to fully understand the different products
- **Cost and time requirements extend beyond the programming of the web instrument**
 - Sample load
 - Invitation and reminder emails
 - Back-end data preparation
- **Need to be very careful if there is any chance of changes to the web survey after going live**

Questions?

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