



# Best Practices for Newsmaker Surveys

An Analysis of 3,073 News Releases, 2013-2019

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Surprisingly, most news releases about surveys omit essential information that journalists are trained to ask for. For instance:

- Only 86% of this year's news releases analyzed by Researchscape reported the sample size of the survey.
- Only 50% reported the dates the survey was open to respondents.
- And only 35% reported the mode of data collection.

Make sure to review every news release for [the information journalists expect](#).

While journalists recognize that surveys of businesspeople are smaller than surveys of consumers (the most common size of a B2B survey is 300 respondents vs. 1,000 respondents for B2C), they often confuse quantity of responses for quality. Design surveys to use quota sampling and weighting to improve the representativeness of the results and reference this in the release (only 3% referenced quota sampling and only 7% referenced weighting). As a proxy for quality, journalists prefer third-party surveys. As business and technology journalist Erik Sherman said of research firms: "I know if they start messing up that it will damage their professional reputation."

Journalists also prefer recent surveys, yet only 25% of news releases were published within 30 days of completing survey fielding.

In an era where much coverage comes from blogs, newsmaker releases often fail to provide ready resources for bloggers. For instance, only 11% included charts, while a similar percentage provided infographics. Bloggers are used to linking to sources, yet many news releases don't provide a survey center on a website to link to; bloggers often copy news releases wholesale but don't want to reveal that by linking to the release itself. Blogs provide a great way to get your message across in your own words, provided you give bloggers an additional resource to link to.

Survey news releases fail to support lead-generation efforts. Only 23% link to a lead-generation form, where a prospect can download a PowerPoint deck or a white paper summarizing the story.

For a minimal additional investment in process and some added care in crafting the news release, agencies and marketers can do a much better job leveraging the considerable investment that goes into surveys.

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## INTRODUCTION

Surveys are a proven and effective method of generating publicity for organizations. For many businesses, in fact, surveys can lead to coverage that would not be available for their product or corporate news alone. Incremental updates to products, staff changes, new offices – while important to the organization – generate little publicity. Stories that can place the organization in the larger context of sweeping changes, backed up by recent data, resonate more with journalists; for instance, here's [a survey from Symphony](#) that positioned them for a lead role in the *Fast Company* article "[This is why no one responds to your email.](#)"

Too often publicity strategies that incorporate surveys suffer from errors and omissions that reduce the likelihood of wide media coverage. Yet implementing best practices for newsmaker surveys is not particularly expensive. Most news releases simply fail to provide the information that journalists need to decide whether a survey is worth reporting on.

Researchscape International conducted a content analysis of over 610 news releases that provided survey results and were published in October 2019. Altogether, the Researchscape database contains 3,073 news releases, dating back to 2013. This research has identified common mistakes that can be readily anticipated and addressed in order to maximize the return on investment from your own surveys.

Based on this research, our five-step process for writing effective survey news releases follows.

### Process for Effective Survey News Releases



## Goals for Effective Survey News Releases

Long-Term Goals	Short-Term Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build brand awareness</li> <li>• Demonstrate thought leadership</li> <li>• Develop content for a content marketing strategy</li> <li>• Generate leads</li> <li>• Improve search engine ranking of your site for key terms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support for a product launch</li> <li>• Enter a new region</li> <li>• Leverage a holiday or event for coverage</li> <li>• Build interest in a conference presentation</li> </ul>

## 1. SET GOALS

Setting a goal focuses your efforts and saves time and budget that might have gone to extraneous details. Common goals for newsmaker surveys might serve either the long term or short term.

### 1) Long Term

- a) **Build brand awareness** – To build brand awareness for its funding solutions, BlueVine [surveyed 1,000 small business owners](#) about the likelihood of a recession. Symphony’s newsmaker survey led to it being included in [coverage about its chief competitor](#).
- b) **Demonstrate thought leadership** – PDI, a software developer targeting convenience stores, turned to [a paired consumer survey and retailer survey to develop thought leadership in industry publications](#).
- c) **Develop content for a content marketing strategy** – Evergage has published six annual studies on marketing personalization, in order to generate content for [executive articles, blog posts, ebooks, and webinars](#).
- d) **Generate leads** – Developing leads among niche audiences can be difficult. [One Door surveyed 300 U.S. retailers to drive lead-generation efforts among merchandisers](#), for its third annual survey for this purpose.
- e) **Improve search engine ranking of your site for key terms** – HealthPocket, a health plan comparison website, [used a survey](#) to improve its ranking for the keyword “physician search”.

## 2) Short Term

- a) **Provide support for a product launch** – Dell used a survey of video gamers to draw attention to [its launch of new Alienware laptops](#). When the startup Seed launched an app for freelancers, microbusinesses, and other SMBs, it shared a survey of small business owners that revealed that 32% aren't separating their personal and business banking. This led to coverage in [Business News Daily](#), [Bank Innovation](#), and other publications.
- b) **Enter a new region** – Opendoor used [a survey of local homeowners](#) to announce its expansion to the Orlando market.
- c) **Leverage a holiday or event for coverage** – Monetate did [a back-to-school shopping survey](#), Express Employment Professionals did [an employee survey for Labor Day](#), and DaySmart Software pitched [its survey for National Relaxation Day](#). As the last example shows, almost anything can be tied to an event!
- d) **Build interest in a conference presentation** – NCR published the results of its [traveler experience survey](#) to drive traffic to its booth at the Passenger Terminal Expo.

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## 2. DESIGN AND FIELD THE SURVEY

Writing a questionnaire for a newsmaker survey is different than designing a customer satisfaction or general market research survey: such surveys are often academic, clinical, even boring—in contrast, with a newsmaker survey you are looking for punch and attitude. For instance, in [its survey about the challenges of home selling](#), Opendoor found that 27% of home owners would rather get a colonoscopy than sell a home, preferring a literal pain in the ass to a figurative pain in the ass!

With your goals in mind, your team should brainstorm the possible headlines that you would love to see, if the results warrant. Let your team's imagination go wild, envisioning the results that would best drive coverage.

Where academic discipline *is* important is when it comes to question wording. Many common problems can lead to inaccurate survey results and will reduce your credibility with reporters, including asking [leading questions](#) or encouraging [acquiescence bias](#). Good question wording is as much art as science; for instance, [one tiny survey](#) (18 words!) reviewed by Researchscape suffered from five different problems that would affect results. Once your questionnaire is drafted, make sure a professional market researcher reviews it for errors and rewrites it where necessary before you collect responses.

### One Questionnaire, Multiple Releases

A well-designed questionnaire can provide material for two or three news releases. For instance, [a monthly Bankrate.com survey](#) provides an update on financial security, using a battery of standard questions, but also includes some topical questions; trend data and the topical questions are often reported in separate news release.

On average, a survey news release reports the findings from five questions (not including demographic questions). Not that you need as many as five questions: 15% of news releases reported on a single question! A 15- to 20-question survey can easily be leveraged to provide content for three or four news releases.

One way to get more content out of a question is to discuss statistically significant differences by subgroup. A DaySmart Software survey of [1,763 U.S. small business owners](#) was designed from the outset to build overall awareness in publications looking horizontally [at small businesses overall](#) as well as vertically-focused publications like [Pet Product News](#) (covering the 230 respondents in the pet services industry) and [Massage Magazine](#) (covering the 590 spas and salons surveyed).

As another example, Spot On reported [differences in dog owners](#) by Census region and by major metropolitan areas. Consumer studies often break out results by demographics; for instance, our respondents have already answered detailed questions, enabling you to break out results by gender, age, state, region, race/ethnicity, Hispanicity, educational attainment, employment status, household income, household size, marital status, and presence of children under 25 at home – all without needing to ask those questions in your own survey.

When [Intermedia shared its study](#) on ransomware, the firm pointed out differences by type of company: “Managed Service Providers are more concerned than others about ransomware attacks this year: 23% of MSPs are extremely concerned, compared to 10% of IT consultants and 0% of VARs.”

Which of the following best describes your company?					
	Total	Managed Service Provider	Value-added Reseller	IT Consultant	Other
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<b>Total</b>	100	24	5	67	4
<b>Not at all concerned</b>	5	9	7	↓ 3	17
<b>Slightly concerned</b>	24	20	21	27	8
<b>Moderately concerned</b>	33	29	29	34	42
<b>Very concerned</b>	24	20	43	25	17
<b>Extremely concerned</b>	13	↑ 23	0	↓ 10	17

↑ indicates cells that are significantly greater than all other cells in this row at a 95% confidence level.

↓ indicates cells that are significantly less than all other cells in this row at a 95% confidence level.

## One Questionnaire, Many Purposes

Marketing budgets are often tight and must be stretched to accomplish different goals. While most newsmaker surveys are conducted solely for purposes of generating content and publicity, that does not have to be the case.

- One Researchscape client planned a newsmaker survey to promote a product launch but had lingering questions about pricing and messaging. Respondents were given a price test and were asked which message resonated the most.
- Another Researchscape client needed to understand how their installed base differed from the wider market and fielded some questions for internal use only.
- Many clients conducting expensive B2B research want to understand brand awareness, attitudes, and usage of their brand and its direct competitors. Given the difficulty of reaching these executives, leveraging the survey for multiple purposes maximizes the return on investment.

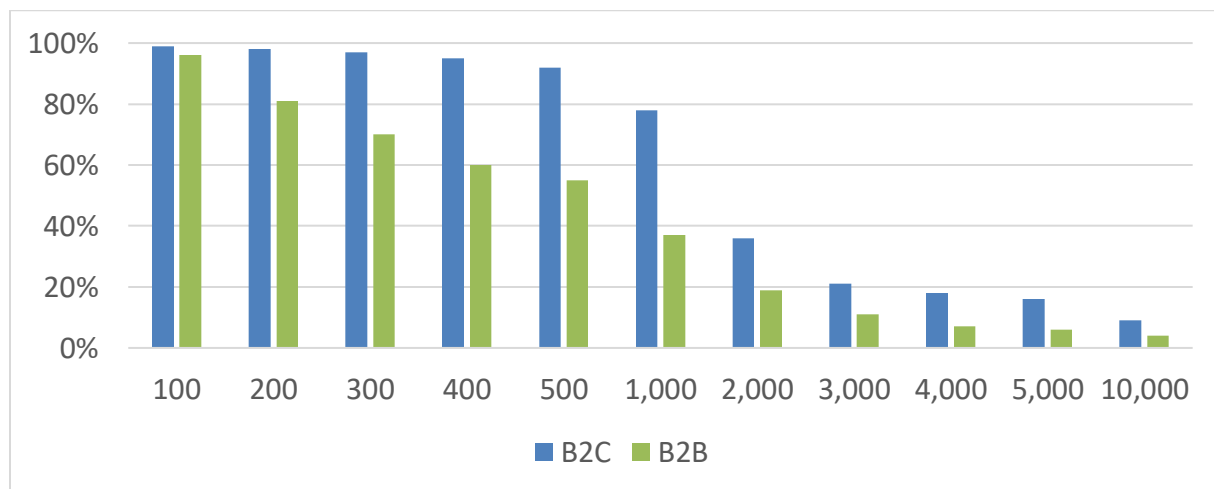
In each of these cases, these other questions were omitted from the PR campaign and were not reported as part of the results.

## Sample Size

The typical survey reported in the corpus of news releases has 1,000 respondents (mode), with 97% having 100 or more responses, 77% having 500 or more responses, 60% having 1,000 or more responses, and 28% having 2,000 or more responses.

B2B (business-to-business) surveys do typically have much lower sample sizes than surveys of consumers, voters, or employees in general. The median size of a B2B survey is 508 respondents vs. 1,127 respondents for a B2C (business-to-consumer) survey, but this average is skewed by a few large studies: the most common size of a B2B survey is 300 respondents vs. 1,000 respondents for B2C.

### Sample Size of News Releases - % of Surveys with At Least X Responses



*Sample Size: 2,823 news releases*

The more responses, the greater the credibility with reporters. For instance, Kate Sullivan, editor with the UK publication [Tech Radar](#), commented on a survey saying, “The research only took in the opinions of 641 people so it’s not exactly something we’re going to submit to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.” The good news is she wrote about the survey – the bad news is she questioned its quality. For most reporters, consumer surveys with 1,000 responses cross a threshold that adds to their credibility.

Large response sizes are often necessary when behaviors to be observed are small: for instance, out of 2,037 U.S. adults surveyed on behalf of the Network Branded Prepaid Card Association (NBPCA), just 91 respondents (6%) used [prepaid debit cards for everyday transactions](#). Another reason for large sample sizes is for meaningful comparisons between subgroups. If you want to compare users of five different products, you want to make sure you have sufficient users of each product to make comparisons. Or, if you want to report tailored results by country, you want to make sure that you have hundreds of responses in each country that you are reporting on. For instance, [Dell surveyed over 500 gamers per country in 11 different countries](#) (and six languages) in order to pitch the results in each country: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, New Zealand, UK and U.S.

Oddly enough, 18% of news releases about surveys failed to disclose the sample size at all, one of the most basic elements that should be disclosed. Another 2% of releases spoke in generalities such as “100+ responses” or “nearly 80 respondents”; this portrays the research as amateurish.

## Sampling and Mode

“The challenge with online surveys is they are not as randomized as a well-done telephone survey. But—you can get a wider audience online than you can in a sociology survey with 19-year olds who need \$20.” — *Michael Fitzgerald, journalist*

For representative results, better to have a well-designed sampling strategy than thousands of responses, but this is a distinction that most reporters ignore and that many researchers, in the interest of minimizing costs, obscure.

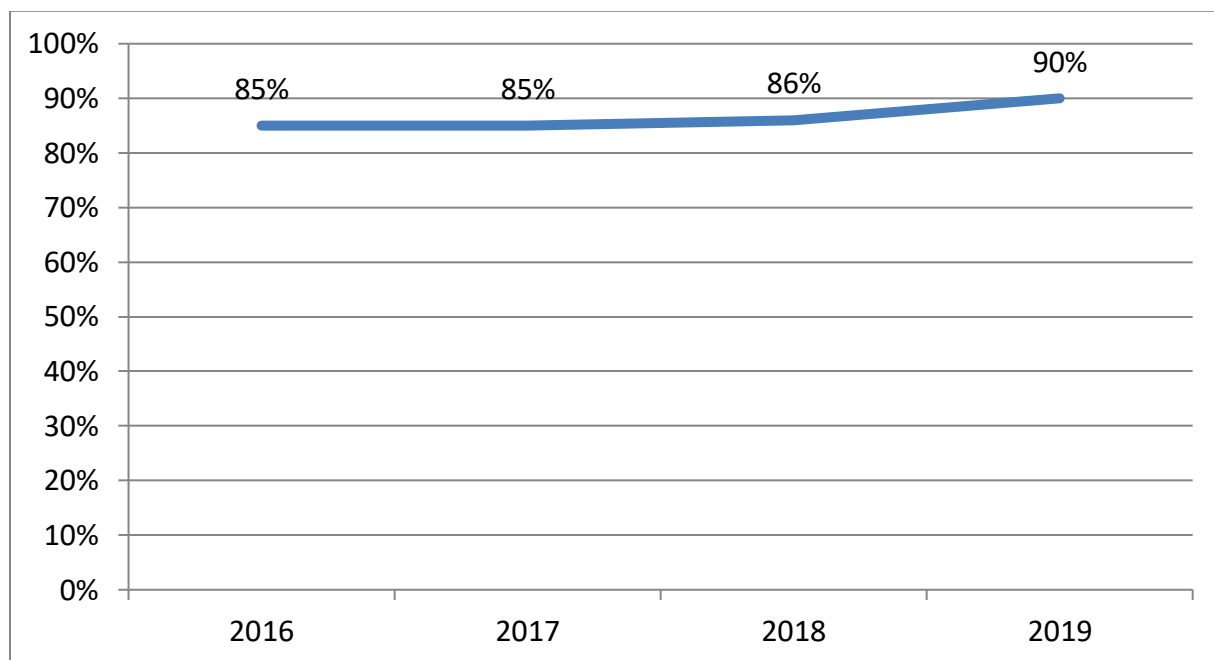
Probability sampling of telephone and cellphone numbers produces the highest quality and most representative results, but telephone surveys cost up to four times as much as nationally representative online surveys – cell phone numbers must be dialed manually (automatic dialing is legal for landlines but illegal for cell phones) and an hour worth of calls are required for every completed interview. Probability-recruited online panels are rare, and expensive to access, but provide the highest quality of web research.

Unlike telephone surveys, online surveys vary widely in representativeness, from opt-in web polls that are only representative of those who participated to sophisticated online surveys designed to be representative of the U.S. population in general. Different algorithmic techniques are used to improve the representativeness of online surveys, including web-site intercept surveying, sample matching, and statistical weighting.

A common misunderstanding is to interpret *random survey* as simply a survey of random people, or a survey of a randomly selected subset of a list. Randomness is not sufficient; everyone should have a known chance of being selected. A random subset of an ecommerce company's list of all customers is a true probability survey, but a *retailer*, in contrast, doesn't capture the email address of most walk-in customers and can't do such a survey. (Retailer surveys are often of loyalty members.) Online panels that randomly assign respondents to specific surveys don't have access to everyone in the populations they study.

Larger news organizations have statistics departments that will evaluate surveys before reporting on them and will help reporters put online surveys in context. In fact, many media companies themselves now conduct online surveys and publish the results.

### The Rise of Online Surveys



Source: Researchscape,  $n = 1,016$  news releases

While online surveys have grown in popularity, and now represent 90% of newsmakers surveys published, some reporters are still skeptical of such research. The following types of online surveys are less likely to be written about:

- **Those conducted using the sponsoring organization's web site.** "Forget it! It may be statistically representative of their customers, but it may not even be that," said business and technology journalist Erik Sherman. "I don't trust opt-in surveys."
- **Those done by the organization itself rather than with a third-party research firm.** "I don't automatically assume anything from Harris, for example, is okay, but I am more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt," said Sherman. "I know if they start messing up that it will damage their professional reputation."

- **Those with raw, unmodeled results.** While journalists willingly acknowledge that they are not experts when it comes to statistical modeling, they look for methodologies that improve the representativeness of the collected data.

Each of the above concerns about online surveys can and should be addressed. Reporters frequently write about those online surveys that follow research best practices. “I want to know that the research was done professionally. Online may be the only practical way,” said Sherman. “If the results are interesting, I will put in the caveats.”

Quota sampling is one practice that improves the representativeness of online surveys, by dividing the population into buckets (called *cells*) by age, gender, region, and other demographic variables and then recruiting respondents to fill each bucket. For instance, since 15% of U.S. adults are Hispanic, a survey might try to recruit 15% of its participants from the Hispanic community. And so on for each demographic. Only 3% of 2019 surveys referenced used quota sampling. For more representative results, look for firms that use quota sampling, sample matching, or selection-bias modeling.

Once the survey results are in, weighting can be applied to treat responses from some respondents as worth more than responses from other respondents in order to be even more representative of the overall population. For instance, for a survey interviewing 100 Americans ages 18 to 64 with 60 males and 40 females responding, the proper proportions for that age range should be 50/50. To correct for this, a survey researcher would weight each male’s answers to be worth 0.83 of a response and each female’s answers to be worth 1.25 responses. Now the survey results should better reflect the target population. Of surveys published in 2019 news releases, only 7% were weighted (13% of consumer surveys).

In 2018, Pew Research Center [demonstrated that weighting](#) improves the representativeness of opt-in consumer research and the value of weighting by many more demographic questions than standard practice. Of the weighted surveys referenced in this corpus (of the 157 that were weighted), 88% were weighted by age, 80% by gender, 75% by region, and 51% by race. Only 45% were weighted by Hispanicity and 42% by educational attainment, which both need to be weighted as adults without college educations as well as Hispanics are underrepresented in online surveys.

For international research, possibilities include weighting by national population, weighting by incidence of the targeted subgroup (e.g., product purchasers), and weighting by market revenue, depending on the goals of the research. For instance, weighting a study by population can exaggerate the role of India and China ([37% of the world’s population](#)) for many markets.

## Responding to Early Returns

The first 75 responses to a survey are highly predictive of the final results of a survey: final statistics rarely change materially (more than plus or minus 10 points) from these initial findings ([assuming quota sampling](#) is implemented independently for the first 75 and the overall survey).

Reviewing early returns provides an opportunity to retire questions that aren't supporting the desired headlines and to add new questions suggested by the preliminary findings. While new questions will have a smaller sample size than others, this is no different than what happens for questions that are part of skip patterns for respondents to which they do not apply.

The ability to respond and adapt to preliminary results provides another opportunity to maximize the ROI for a newsmaker survey.

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## 3. DEVELOP CAMPAIGN ASSETS

Most survey news releases simply include a summary of key findings of the survey, without accompaniment. Modest additional effort can create news releases that are more likely to be picked up.

The quality of survey news releases remains low, with releases failing to answer the most basic questions that journalists and bloggers have:

- Only 86% of 2019 news releases reported sample size.
- Only 50% reported fielding dates.
- Finally, only 35% reported the mode of data collection.

## Optimizing Releases for Reporters

"Surveys are great for me for a blog post or for shorter, more compact, newsy things," said Fitzgerald. "Ideally, I want a survey that has the appearance of independence, but they are usually company surveys. I don't have the time to go through the questions to see if they are balanced or asking questions the way an independent researcher would ask them. I want transparency, some sense of its statistical value, what the sample size is, whether it is a one-off or something comparing to earlier periods. I'm looking for timeliness, something that supports my beat, that I can use as a standalone item or that opens a question for a feature. I don't have the time to do too much work—the publicist should highlight the data and put it into context."

Some assets to help busy reporters:

- **Exhibits** – Only 11% of 2019 releases included charts and graphs, either as attachments embedded in a multimedia news release or as links from the release (as distinct from infographics, covered separately below). Those that did include

exhibits often had low quality graphs unlikely to be used by reporters. Charts with simple, professional formatting can easily be embedded into a story; garish, branded charts in unusual color schemes are less likely to be used. Surprisingly, quite a few exhibits fail to include the sponsoring organization's name.

- **Topline Results** – Only occasionally offered, these documents include the question wording and the answers selected for each question for the overall sample. Some include demographic breakouts by question; some don't. "I want to see what the questions are and what order they are asked in. This is a classic source of bias, unintentional or intentional," said Sherman.
- **Methodology FAQ** – While most releases include a paragraph about the survey methodology, in the interests of space such statements are often short and don't answer all the questions reporters are trained to ask. "Too many releases don't include a methodology section," said Sherman, "or what they do include you could write on the back of a matchbook and write it around the logo! Think about the questions that a journalist would ask and answer them. If there are weaknesses in the methodology, then just be ready to admit it." Concurred Fitzgerald: "I like to see in a press release language that is carefully couched that uses shades of gray. I will give a little more credibility to someone who acknowledges in some form that they are not making sweeping claims about their study. Sweeping claims just raise red flags. Pew Research tries to be very careful and point towards what they think the data indicates, saying 'We think you can apply it more broadly to represent some aspect of society.'"

#### What Journalists Are Trained to Look For

1. Who paid for the poll and why was it done?
2. Who did the poll?
3. How was the poll conducted?
4. How many people were interviewed and what's the margin of sampling error?
5. How were those people chosen? (Probability or nonprobability sample? Random sampling? Non-random method?)
6. What area or what group were people chosen from? (That is, what was the population being represented?)
7. When were the interviews conducted?
8. How were the interviews conducted?
9. What questions were asked? Were they clearly worded, balanced and unbiased?
10. What order were the questions asked in? Could an earlier question influence the answer of a later question that is central to your story or the conclusions drawn?
11. Are the results based on the answers of all the people interviewed, or only a subset? If a subset, how many?
12. Were the data weighted, and if so, to what?

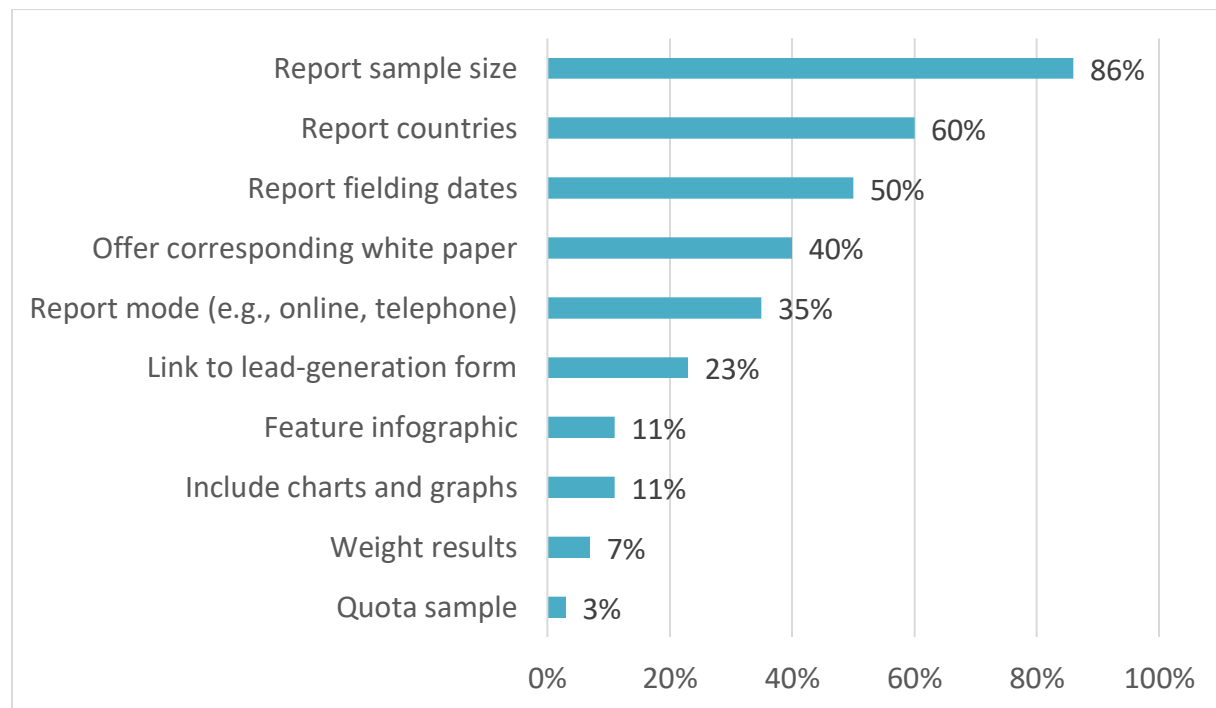
The American Association of Public Opinion Researchers and the Poynter Institute train reporters to ask the above questions about survey research results. Although less often cited, the National Council of Public Polls (NCPP) has published its own list of questions

for journalists to ask about surveys. This list serves as a useful FAQ for reporters on why the questions are important: [20 Questions A Journalist Should Ask About Poll Results](#).

“What’s the sample size? What was the response rate? What were the questions? What order were they asked in? Are you introducing bias?” asked Sherman. “I am capable of asking any and all of these questions. It depends on the survey.”

Failure to answer these common questions can lead to your news release simply being ignored. According to Robert Langkjær-Bain, former editor of *Research Magazine* and now a freelance journalist, “It’s important to know who’s behind the survey and what their agenda is. If I receive details of a survey without clear information on who sponsored it, I’m unlikely to be able to use it. It’s also important to know how the sample for a survey was recruited. If it was done from an opt-in survey posted on a company’s website, or promoted via social media, or if participants were invited from the company’s own database of contacts, then obviously the results are going to be skewed. If details like this are not made clear, then I’ll generally assume the worst and not use the material.”

#### Properties of 2019 Survey News Releases



Sample Size:  $n = 610$  news releases

## Optimizing Releases for Bloggers

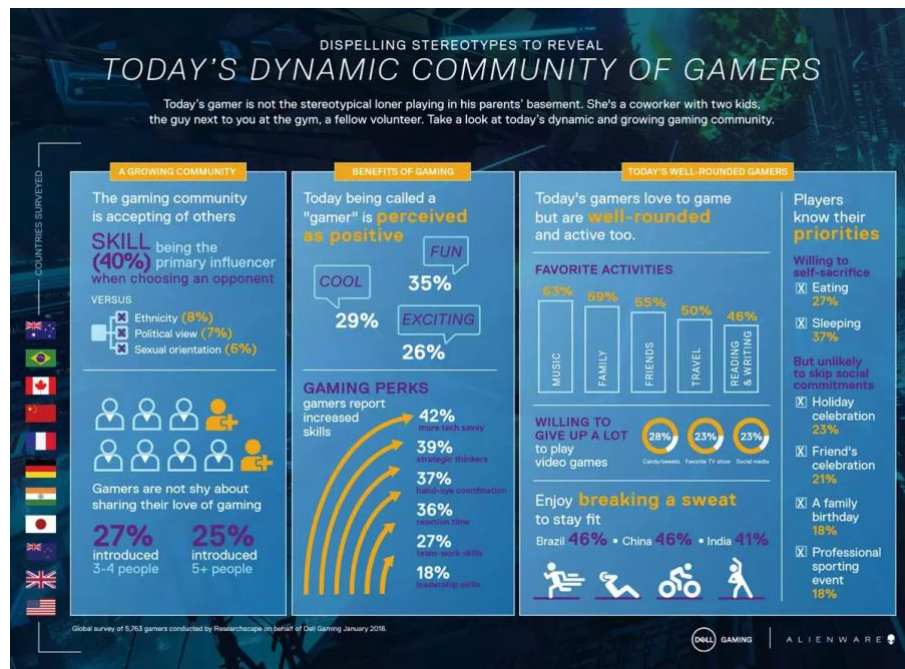
Bloggers, in general, are even more pressed for time than reporters and are more likely to cut corners when reporting on your news release. All the resources you provide for reporters will assist bloggers, but they are more likely to use infographics than reporters are. Infographics – in the popular sense of multiple charts and graphs artfully combined into a single long image file – are a recent trend: only 11% of 2019 survey news releases included infographics or links to infographics.

News releases that claim to have infographics have illustrations that range from the simple (a single graph) to PDFs. A true infographic is in a web-ready graphic format such as .PNG, .JPG or .GIF that incorporates multiple data points.

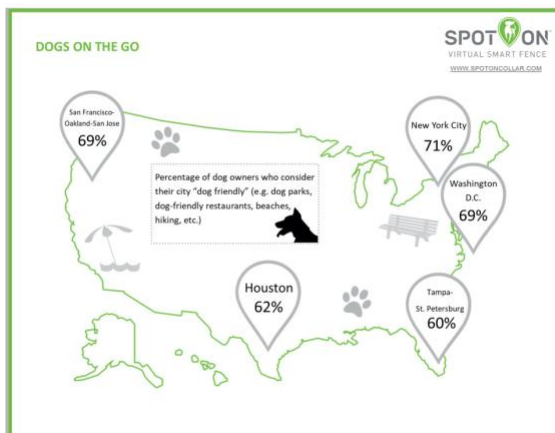
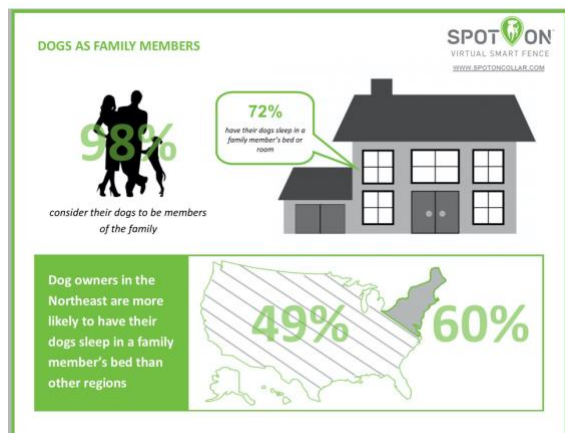
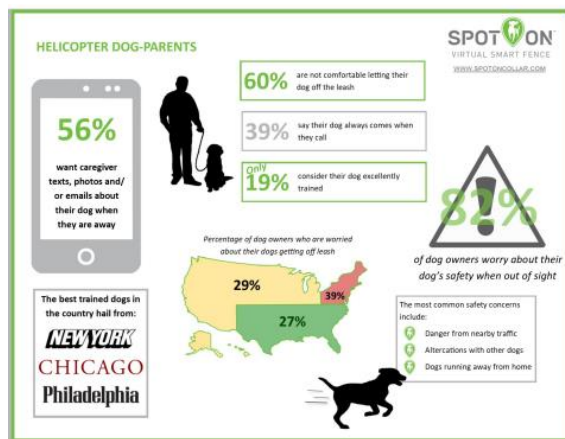
Some news releases even feature embed codes so that bloggers can simply copy and paste a snippet of HTML to incorporate an infographic into their story. For instance, a BuyVia survey on the Apple Watch that was picked up by Business Insider and [syndicated on CNN](#) included this:

Copy and paste this code to embed this infographic on your site:

```
<a href="http://www.buyvia.com/blog/buyvia-survey-reveals-consumer-wish-list-for-smartphone-features-infographic/" target="_blank"></a><div style="background:#56c018;width:600px;padding:10px;color:#fff;font-
```



A sample Dell infographic is shown above. SpotOn developed a series of infographics:



An emerging trend Dell took this a step further and used Ballyhoo Blue Workshop to develop a [video infographic](#).



Bloggers, far more than reporters, are used to linking to other sites. Many news releases with surveys don't offer any pages to link to. Publish a post to your blog or a page to your website summarizing the survey, preferably in a different format than the news release itself. (So that a blogger, copying your release and making minor edits, doesn't have to reveal his or her wholesale borrowing of your wording.)

Pitching bloggers isn't enough. Also pitch prominent podcasters, as RFP Associates did with the [Agency Leadership Podcast](#) for its survey on [best practices for hiring a PR agency](#) (also covered in [O'Dwyers](#)).

### Optimizing Releases for Prospects

Ultimately publicity is about generating business for organizations, yet most press releases aren't optimized for this. Only 19% of 2016 survey releases linked to a lead-generation form (up from 7% in 2013) to capture a prospect's contact information in exchange for a white paper with more detail about the survey, despite the fact that 38% of survey news releases offer a corresponding white paper (up from 19% in 2013).

While creating a white paper sounds daunting, and some are rich, professionally written and well-designed ebooks, many white papers are simply PowerPoint presentations of the survey results, with an introductory slide, one slide per question, and a methodology slide. A quick "white paper" in this format is better than not offering a white paper at all and may be more likely to be read in its entirety than a narrative format anyway.

#### 4. WRITE THE NEWS RELEASE

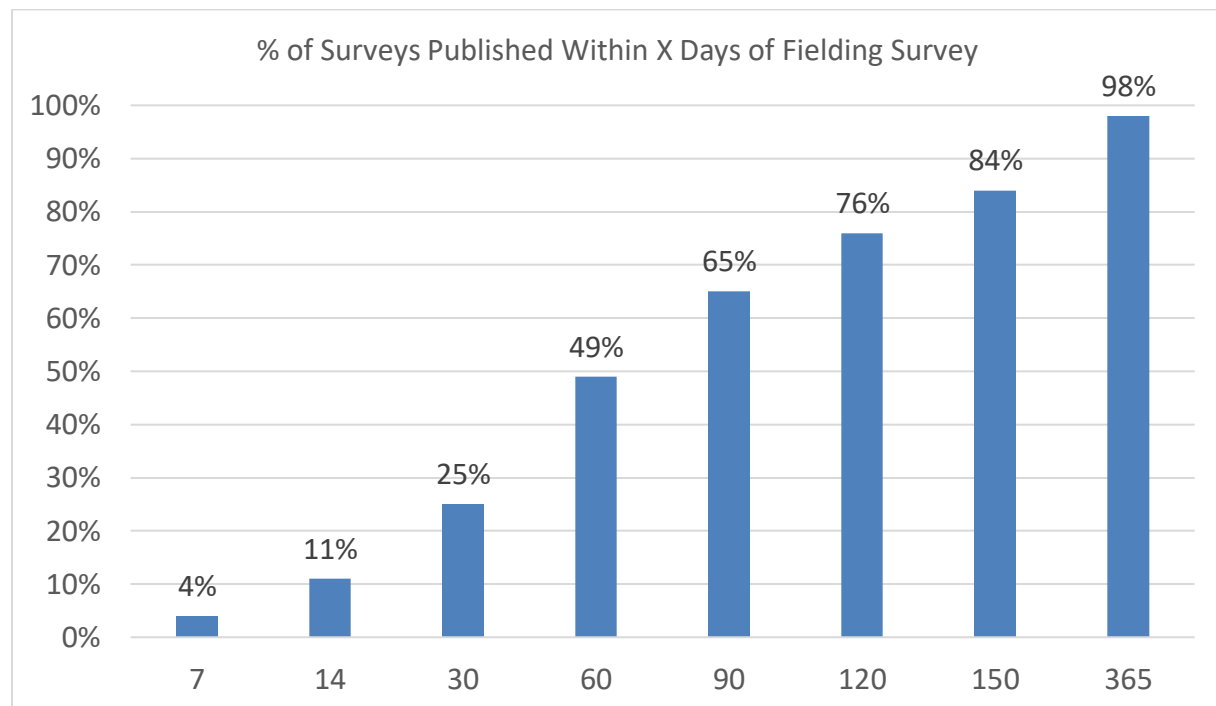
Finally, with the campaign assets in place, it is time to write the actual news release or series of releases and schedule them for distribution.

How timely is the typical news release? Only 4% were published within a week of closing fielding of the survey, while a quarter (25%) were published in 30 days. Altogether, nearly half of these news releases were published within two months (60 days) of the survey completing fielding. The median length of time was 62 days.

Quite a few survey releases tied to specific holidays or events are published just a day or two prior to the event, providing too little time for reporters to find them, research them, and write about them.

Journalists prefer timely content; make sure to partner with a survey agency that can use research automation to rapidly deliver you topline results and crosstab mining.

##### Timeliness of Survey News Releases



Source: Researchscape, n = 1326 news releases

Of course, survey news releases should follow typical best practices for news releases in general (see, for instance, the PRWeb paper, [Writing Great Online News Releases](#)).

However, survey news releases have their own unique needs, in part due to the statistical material they present. Sherman said, “Pitching bogus or misleading stats is bad. Due diligence, even of what clients tell you, is ultimately smart.”

Here are some common mistakes made when reporting survey results:

- **Overgeneralizing.** Claiming “X% of widget vendors use the cloud” is an exaggeration of how representative most online surveys are: better to write “X% of widget vendors surveyed use the cloud.” Projecting incidence rates to an overall business population is much more difficult than projecting to consumers.
- **Being overly precise.** Even the most representative survey results are only accurate within a range of sampling error (e.g., [plus or minus 3% at 95% confidence](#) for a probability survey of 1,000), so the reported 50% might be anywhere from 47% to 53% in the overall population, and sampling theory says that there is a 1-in-20 chance that it’s any number at all. Reporting the results of your online survey to one or two decimal places simply comes across as amateurish: don’t write “15.67% of respondents prefer strawberry” but round to a whole number instead (16%, in this case).
- **Claiming a margin of sampling error.** More news releases than not include references to the margin of sampling error, yet this only applies for probability samples (typically telephone surveys). The American Association of Public Opinion Research says this claim is misleading for online panel surveys. Instead, report a [credibility interval](#).
- **Reporting on questions with too few respondents.** Sometimes the questionnaire, which had a great set of questions for respondents who answered other questions in a certain way, simply doesn’t collect enough results for that section to be useful. For instance, one survey discussed the 25% of Internet-using centenarians who use online dating; when you did the math on the percent of centenarians who use the Internet, it was clear this was referring to a single respondent!
- **Failing to disclose the basics.** In our review, we found 14% of the 2019 releases analyzed didn’t even disclose the number of people surveyed – as basic a requirement as you could have. Only 35% specified the mode of the survey (e.g., whether it was online, over the telephone, or in person); 50% failed to disclose the dates when responses were collected. Altogether, only 29% of news releases specified all three of these three basic requirements. Answer these common questions in the release to spare the busy blogger or reporter the need to contact you.

Finally, here are general mistakes that are especially applicable to survey news releases:

- **Not linking to resources.** For resources that you won’t be attaching and distributing with the release (it often costs more to embed graphics and PDFs for distribution by a wire service), provide links in the release to exhibits, an infographic, the white paper, the methodological FAQ, and the web page you want bloggers to link to in their story.
- **Missing the point.** It’s easy to get caught up in the details and forget to state the meaning and impact of the survey results—the ‘why’ the survey was conducted.

Your survey is ready to be published! You are well on your way to improving the amount of coverage you receive.

### Checklist for Effective Survey News Releases

Design and Field the Survey	Develop Campaign Assets	Write the News Release
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select a narrow goal</li> <li>• Brainstorm story ideas</li> <li>• Write questionnaire to support story ideas</li> <li>• Have professional researcher review questionnaire</li> <li>• Hire telephone research firm or program online survey</li> <li>• Use quota sampling to improve representativeness</li> <li>• Pause for preliminary results and last-minute edits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weight the survey data</li> <li>• Create summary of topline results</li> <li>• Prepare 2 to 4 charts and graphs</li> <li>• Develop infographic</li> <li>• Write FAQ for methodology</li> <li>• Create resource section of website for this survey</li> <li>• Write white paper</li> <li>• Create download form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft the release according to standard best practices</li> <li>• Don't overgeneralize</li> <li>• Don't be overly precise</li> <li>• Claim sampling error only for telephone surveys</li> <li>• Don't report on questions with too few responses</li> <li>• Include survey details</li> </ul>

## 5. ADAPT AND RE-USE

You've pitched the survey, gotten coverage in the press, built brand awareness, and generated leads from the results.

A great way to leverage all this work is to do it again next year!

Evergage, now in its sixth year of conducting marketing surveys about real-time marketing and personalization, generates coverage on an ongoing basis, as recent [articles](#) (2) and [blogs](#) (2, 3, 4, etc.) attest. [One Door surveyed](#) 300 U.S. retailers to drive [lead-generation efforts among merchandisers](#), as its third annual survey for this purpose.

Reporters like trend reports too. "I prefer surveys that compare results to earlier periods because they are more than a snapshot in time," said journalist Michael Fitzgerald, who frequently writes about innovation. "They are also conducted with a little more objectivity: you can say what you want to say with certain questions but now you have to at least be consistent."

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## NEED HELP?

Survey news releases make special demands on marketers and PR staff outside of ordinary releases. Researchscape International is here to help, whether you need us to do an entire survey project for you or just give you some assistance:

- **Questionnaire design** – We can write the questionnaire or just review the questionnaire before you field it, ensuring that it follows industry best practices on research.
- **Survey fielding** – We have fielded surveys in over 60 countries, to representative consumer populations, narrow sectors, and niche audiences.
- **Automated reports** – We use ResearchStory software to generate automated executive summaries, frequency reports, verbatim analysis, and crosstab data mining.
- **Written reports** – We can write a 40- to 80-page formal report documenting topline results along with the most newsworthy crosstabulations by demographics, attitudes, and usage.
- **Campaign assets** – We can develop campaign assets including an executive summary, the white paper, and exhibits.
- **Webinars** – Researchscape analysts will co-present on webinars discussing the results.
- **News release support** – As a courtesy, we will review a news release for accuracy prior to distribution, and – after distribution – we will answer the methodological questions that journalists ask your team about a particular news release.

Researchscape International has documented hundreds of newsmaker surveys and Researchscape staff have been conducting telephone surveys since 1988 and online surveys since 1996. For more on our services, visit <http://www.researchscape.com/>.

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## METHODOLOGY

We downloaded 3,073 news releases from Business Wire, PR Newswire, and PR Web that mentioned “survey” and discussed a survey sponsored or executed by the organization: 250 from March 18 to May 3, 2013; 103 from October 26 to November 18, 2016; 1,169 from January 16 to November 30, 2017; 941 in November, 2018; and 610 in October, 2019. We excluded those that referred to third-party surveys. The database of releases is 58% B2C surveys vs. 42% B2B.

The results are remarkably stable from time period to time period, indicating the results are representative of newsmaker releases in general.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeffrey Henning, PRC, is the president of Researchscape International, a research agency specializing in PR surveys. Researchscape has conducted newsmaker surveys for [4A's](#), [Actian](#), [BlueVine](#), [Confluent](#), [Cumulus Networks](#), [Data Artisans](#), [Data Intensity](#), [DaySmart](#), [Dell](#), [Evergage](#), [Healbe](#), [Hopscotch](#), [iBoss](#), [Intermedia](#), [Klarna](#), [Merck](#), [Mission Control Marketing](#), [Nextiva](#), [OEX](#), [One Door](#), [PDI](#), [Seed](#), [Smart Assistant](#), [Symphony Communication Services](#), [Talend](#), [TriCore](#), and many others.



Jeffrey is currently volunteering as the president of the Market Research Institute International, a non-profit providing continuing education to the research industry. In that role, he is overseeing a complete redesign of *The Principles of Market Research* course, which provides an academic foundation to researchers across hundreds of agencies and panel suppliers.

Jeffrey is a member of the Insights Association and the American Association of Public Opinion Researchers. In 2012, he was the inaugural winner of the Market Research Association's Impact award, which "recognizes an industry professional, team or organization that has demonstrated tremendous vision, leadership, and innovation, within the past year, that has led to advances in the marketing research profession."

Before founding Researchscape in 2012, Jeffrey co-founded Perseus Development Corporation in 1993, which introduced the first web-survey software, and Vovici in 2006, which pioneered the enterprise-feedback management category. A 31-year veteran of the research industry, he began his career as an industry analyst for Giga Information Group (now part of Forrester).

Follow him on Twitter: [@jhenning](#).