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How We Got a 75.4% Response Rate on an Internet Survey

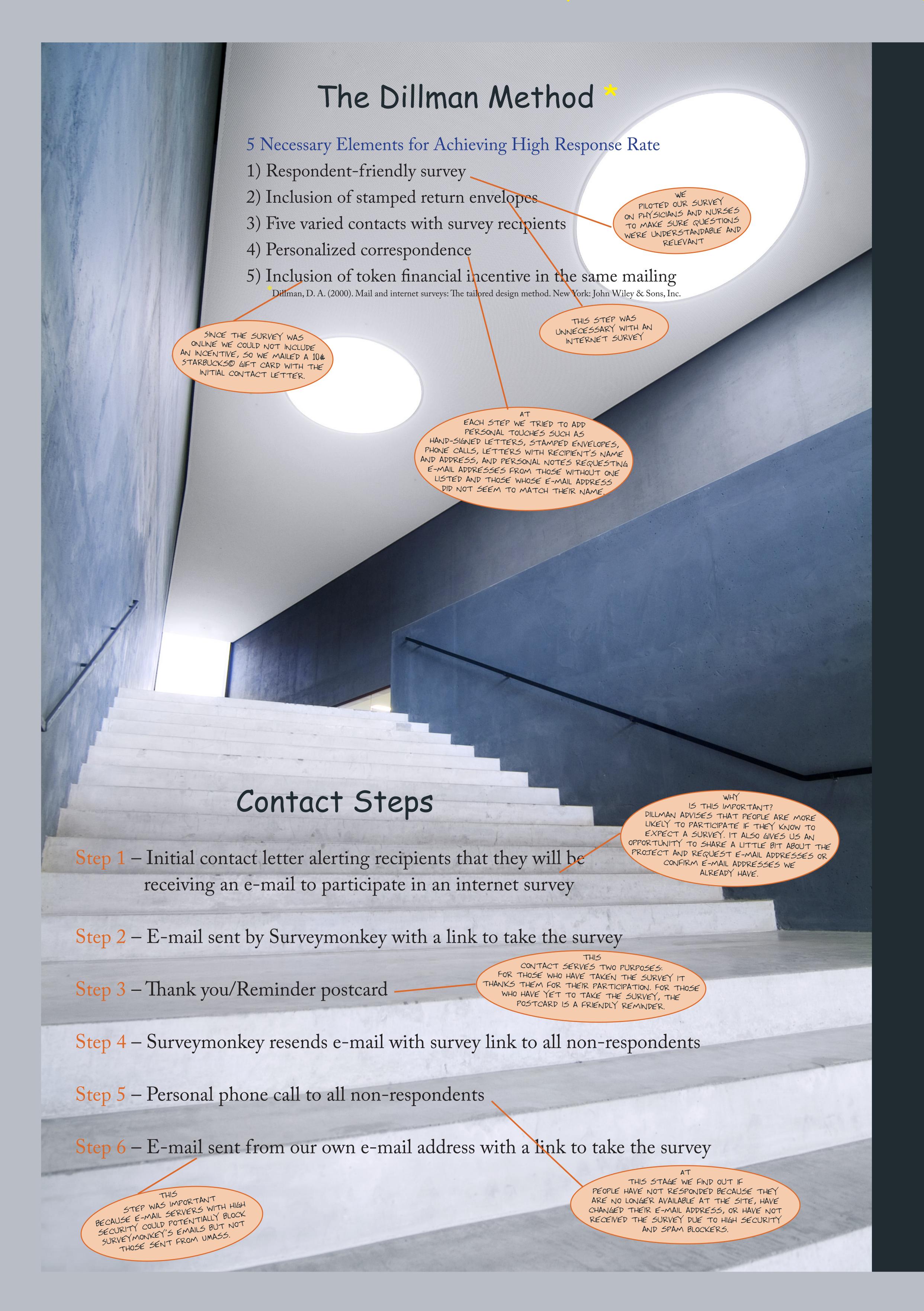Jill Rosenbaum
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How We Got a 75.4% Response Rate on an Internet Survey

Jill Rosenbaum, B.A. and Charles W. Lidz, Ph.D.

The Dillman Method *

5 Necessary Elements for Achieving High Response Rate

1) Respondent-friendly survey
2) Inclusion of stamped return envelopes
3) Five varied contacts with survey recipients
4) Personalized correspondence
5) Inclusion of token financial incentive in the same mailing

*Dillman, D. A. (2000). Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

WE PILOTED OUR SURVEY ON PHYSICIANS AND NURSES TO MAKE SURE QUESTIONS WERE UNDERSTANDABLE AND RELEVANT

THIS STEP WAS UNNECESSARY WITH AN INTERNET SURVEY

SINCE THE SURVEY WAS ONLINE WE COULD NOT INCLUDE AN INCENTIVE, SO WE MAILED A 10¢ STARBUCKS$0 GIFT CARD WITH THE INITIAL CONTACT LETTER

AT EACH STEP WE TRIED TO ADD PERSONAL TOUCHES SUCH AS HAND-SIGNED LETTERS, STAMPED ENVELOPES, PHONE CALLS, LETTERS WITH RECIPIENT'S NAME AND ADDRESS, AND PERSONAL NOTES REQUESTING E-MAIL ADDRESSES FROM THOSE WITHOUT ONE LISTED AND THOSE WHOSE E-MAIL ADDRESS DID NOT SEEM TO MATCH THEIR NAME.

Contact Steps

Step 1 – Initial contact letter alerting recipients that they will be receiving an e-mail to participate in an internet survey

Step 2 – E-mail sent by Surveymonkey with a link to take the survey

Step 3 – Thank you/Reminder postcard

Step 4 – Surveymonkey resends e-mail with survey link to all non-respondents

Step 5 – Personal phone call to all non-respondents

Step 6 – E-mail sent from our own e-mail address with a link to take the survey

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT? DILLMAN ADVISES THAT PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO PARTICIPATE IF THEY KNOW TO EXPECT A SURVEY. IT ALSO GIVES US AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE PROJECT AND REQUEST E-MAIL ADDRESSES OR CONFIRM E-MAIL ADDRESSES WE ALREADY HAVE.

THIS CONTACT SERVES TWO PURPOSES: FOR THOSE WHO HAVE TAKEN THE SURVEY IT THANKS THEM FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION. FOR THOSE WHO HAVE YET TO TAKE THE SURVEY, THE POSTCARD IS A FRIENDLY REMINDER.

THIS STEP WAS IMPORTANT BECAUSE E-MAIL SERVERS WITH HIGH SECURITY COULD POTENTIALLY BLOCK SURVEYMONKEY'S EMAILS BUT NOT THOSE SENT FROM UMASS.

AT THIS STAGE WE FIND OUT IF PEOPLE HAVE NOT RESPONDED BECAUSE THEY ARE NO LONGER AVAILABLE AT THE SITE, HAVE CHANGED THEIR E-MAIL ADDRESS, OR HAVE NOT RECEIVED THE SURVEY DUE TO HIGH SECURITY AND SPAM BLOCKERS.

What is Surveymonkey?

Surveymonkey is an online survey site that simplifies the survey process considerably. In the survey design phase, Surveymonkey offers 17 formats for asking questions (multiple choice, true false, open-ended, etc). Surveymonkey also has a diverse color palette for changing the appearance of the survey. As for implementation, Surveymonkey has the ability to track respondents so you can recontact non-respondents and avoid pestering those who have already participated. Surveymonkey can generate frequencies for each question and allows you to export data into programs like SAS or SPSS for more complex analysis. The Surveymonkey site will send out the survey and subsequent reminders for you if you furnish a list of e-mail addresses and will also provide you with a link to the survey which can then be posted on your website or included in an e-mail for you to send to participants.

Limitations of Surveymonkey

Surveymonkey does have its limitations. Even with many question formats, it can be restrictive with regard to how you can ask a question or set up your answer sets. Although most e-mail servers allow messages from Surveymonkey, institutions that maintain high security and intense spam blockers may block email from Surveymonkey. An additional limitation is that only email sent by Surveymonkey can track respondents. Participants who take the survey from any link other than the direct link to the Surveymonkey site can not be traced.

Our final contact is a link created by Surveymonkey but sent out through our own e-mail server. It is therefore untraceable, but being our final contact was not important to our study.

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