Designing Envelopes to Encourage Response
Considerations and Effects of Experimentation

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IFD & TC
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Participation Decision Points

Receiving the Envelope
Do I want or need to open this?
- Size, shape, and weight
- Sponsor
- Recipient
- Visual components

Opening the Envelope
Do I want to participate in this?
- Incentive
- Cover Letter elements and appeal

Participating in study
Do I want to continue this?
- Questionnaire Design
- Questionnaire Length
Intervention to increase salience sooner

- Little research conducted on visual clues (messaging and graphics)
- Trying to make incentive and appeal "work" earlier in decision process
Wisconsin Longitudinal Study

Refusal Conversion Mailing

Experiment Design
- Refusal conversion mailing (N=2,361+)
- Simple random sample of 1st refusals
- Treatment group received sticker on envelope
- Control group received no message on envelope

Messaging:
- "Small"
  - Doesn't raise expectation too high
- "Thanks"
  - Doesn't raise expectation too high
  - Show gratitude in a short message
- Considered using "gift" in place of "thanks"
  - "Thanks" retain some sense of mystery
  - Without specifying, "gift" could sound like commercial marketing
- "Previous participation"
  - Draw on participants sense of membership
  - Distinguishes mailing from commercial marketing (Dillman et. al, 2009)

Visual elements:
- Sticker
  - Easy to implement, change, or add mid-project
  - Less expensive
A small thanks for your previous participation is enclosed.
Experiment Results

- Study is ongoing
- We analyzed effect on first contact after mailing
- We found no difference in the outcome of the first contact
Survey of the Health of Wisconsin
La Crosse & Wood County Mail Survey
Experiment 1

Experiment Design
• Mail Survey (N=2,608)
• Random address based sample
• First mailing:
  • received $2 vs. $5
  • received no message vs. message
• Second mailing:
  • received $0 vs. $2
  • received no message vs. message
• 8 balanced treatment groups per county

Messaging:
• One appeal
  • Monetary appeal
• Brings incentive "work" in earlier
•Explicitly mention "cash" to reduce number of throw-aways
Do Not Forward

Thank You!

A cash gift is enclosed.

22222
Jack Frost
6789 Cold Road
Freezing, WI 55555-5555
Experiment Results

- Envelope message had no effect

- The additional $2 incentive had no effect

- The $5 pre-incentive performed significantly better than the $2 pre-incentive.
Survey of the Health of Wisconsin
La Crosse & Wood County Mail Survey

Experiment Design
- Mail Survey (N=2,616)
- Random address based sample
- First mailing:
  - received $2
  - received no message vs. money message vs. health message
- Second mailing:
  - received $0 vs. $5
  - received no message vs. money message vs. health message
- 6 treatment groups per county

Messaging:
- Two appeals:
  - Monetary appeal
  - Health-related appeal

Visual elements:
- More noticeable graphic components
- Striking, attention-getting, attractive
- Considered using color county logo
  - Felt that color would draw attention away from graphic and message

Monetary Appeal
We’ve included a small cash gift to thank you for your participation!

Health-Related Appeal
Your participation is needed to build a healthier Wood County!

We've included a small cash gift to thank you for your participation!
We’ve included a small cash gift to thank you for your participation!
• Considered using color county logo
• Felt that color would draw attention away from graphic and message

Alternative Designs

- Self-selection (into or out of study)
- Bias in responses to survey questions
- How will images of active people affect responses?
  (Toorop & Cooper, 2013)
- Legibility
- Too difficult to see that the graphic is cash
- Experimental Design
- Does this design differ enough from Experiment 17?
- Might not have had enough graphic “scope”

- Self-selection (into or out of study)
- All white, youthful hands
- Experimental Design
- Does this design differ too much from Experiment 17?
- Might have too much graphic “scope”

- Positioning of graphics so not to interfere with post-office procedures

- Self-selection (into or out of study)
- Bright colors and hands geared more toward children and youth
- Ambiguous and/or conflicting visual cues
- Clarity or youth “feel”

- Self-selection (into or out of study)
- You can help build a healthier Wisconsin
- “Thank you!” Your cash gift is matched!
You can help build a healthier Wisconsin!

- Self-selection (into or out of study)
  - What other images could serve better to signify "health?"
- Bias in responses to survey questions
  - How will images of active people effect responses? (Toeppoel & Couper, 2011)
- Logistics of design
  - Positioning of graphics so not to interfere with post office procedures
• Self-selection (into or out of study)
  • Bright colors and hands geared more toward children and youth
• Ambiguous and/or conflicting visual clues
  • Charity or youth “feel”
Thank you!
Your cash gift is enclosed!

- Legibility
  - Too difficult to see that the graphic is cash
- Experimental Design
  - Does this design differ enough from Experiment 1?
  - Might not have had enough graphic "oomph"
• Self-selection (into or out of study)
  • All white, youthful hands
• Experimental Design:
  • Does this design differ too much from Experiment 1?
  • Might have too much graphic "oomph"
*Envelopes drafts were designed with either cash or health in mind introducing additional variance. We wanted to vary the message, not the graphics.
We’ve included a small cash gift to thank you for your participation!
Experiment Results

- The message made little difference on response rate
- Envelopes with no message had slightly higher response rates than envelopes with messages
- Overall, the additional incentive increased response rates from 64% to 69%
Summary

Using envelope messaging in the field:
- Carefully consider if messaging is appropriate for your study
- In general we found no effect but have reason to believe that the effect could be negative

Finn et. al (2004)
- Found no significant effect but response rates with the message were 39.2% compared to 45.6% without the message.

Why we think we found no effect:
- Interaction with other elements on the envelope
  - SHOW: Seal from local government
  - WLS: Familiarity with study
- Sample
  - SHOW: Highly compliant
  - WLS: Longitudinal refusals

Things we want to try in the future:
- More diverse sample/more studies
  - Non-governmental
  - Look at non-response bias
  - Could we be bringing in different people?
- Varying the graphic
  - Bolder graphic
  - Graphic with no text
  - Phrasing of appeals
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