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Why Choose a Custom Service Over an Off-the-Shelf Online Survey Tool (April 2009)

These days, with many free and low cost do-it-yourself online survey tools available, why should you choose a custom service such as DataStar for your online survey needs? A simple answer might be "you get what you pay for," but in this article we'll step through the top-ten reasons for using a professional custom service for programming and hosting your next online survey.

1. Custom Design

With a custom service, you have complete creative control over the look and feel of your online survey. We can take your "vision" and publish it to the World Wide Web. We do not try to mold your survey into a preset template and can even design your survey to mimic your corporate web site, thereby increasing your response rate through the use of familiar colors, logos and page layout.

2. Expertise

Why make your study a do-it-yourself project if you do not have to? A custom service will do it for you so you can spend your time doing what you do best. At DataStar, we have been programming online surveys since 1994. When we handle your project, you save time and money because we approach survey design with data analysis in mind. There are no hidden fees for converting any data we collect into a compatible format to be used for tabulation/reporting. Because we are experts in the field, you can reduce your turn around time from data collection to final delivery of results by putting our skills to use. By using a custom service to handle virtually every aspect of the data collection, your valuable time is freed up to focus on your analysis or maybe to start planning your next study!

3. No Limits

A custom service does not limit the number of submitted surveys by day, month, etc. so you will never miss out on collecting valuable data. Nor do we limit the number of questions or question type(s) allowed. We can intertwine numerous question types within a single matrix. Want a checkbox, radio button, and a select box rolled into a single question? Need your survey to be available in multiple languages from Albanian to Zambal? Need to allow your respondents to complete a survey in multiple sessions? Not a problem! A custom service does not have any of the limitations that are associated with the free and low cost survey tools.

4. Advanced Survey Logic

Does your survey have complicated skip patterns and/or survey branching? A custom service can incorporate advanced programming to navigate a respondent down the path that is right for them, whether based on their responses to previously answered questions or calculated criteria. Need to make sure a response is valid? We can incorporate custom error checking to ensure that valuable data is clean and usable in your analysis. Have questions and/or response choices that require rotation or randomization? Have complex quota groups to be managed? When using a custom service, anything is possible.

5. Database Integration

Have variables in your client database that you'd like used in the survey logic? We can drop in customized text or questions based on information you provide to us. We can personalize a survey and/or send personalized email invitations as well. Integrating your database into the survey programming allows you to ask fewer questions, thus saving respondent's time and reducing your budget.

6. Customer Service

You will receive fast, courteous customer service from your personalized project team - you will not have to wait hours or days for technical support to respond to your email. Our team approach yields better quality control and coverage. At DataStar, we pride ourselves on going above and beyond for our clients - we are the programmers responsible for every aspect of your project and realize how important your survey/data is. When you use DataStar for your online survey needs, you will have easy access to experienced project directors from the start of your project until you are completely satisfied with the final deliverable(s). We are easy to reach by phone or email to meet your needs.

7. Compatibility

Our surveys conform to HTML 4.0 and XHTML standards for improved compatibility with wireless and mobile devices, as well as accessibility guidelines. We are Section 508 compliant, which means those with disabilities will not have a problem participating in your study. To maximize compatibility, DataStar surveys primarily depend on server-side functions and do not heavily utilize Java, JavaScript, cookies, multimedia applications or other client-side elements which may restrict functionality to a narrower user-base.

8. Server Reliability

Our high performance servers are hosted with NTT/Verio, the largest communications company in the world. Verio's high performance National Network is fast, reliable and scalable. It combines key components that are critical to the operation of a state-of-the-art internet service: a high capacity national backbone, a 24 hour Network Operations Center (NOC) and superior engineering support services. Rest assured that we take reliability and performance seriously and have taken steps to provide you with the highest level of service and support possible.

9. Security

Worried about the integrity of data collected? No need to be. At DataStar, we have taken a number of steps to enhance the security and confidentiality of all data kept on our servers. We recognize the importance of security issues both to our clients and survey respondents alike. In addition, when appropriate, SSL technology may be employed to encode data as it is being sent between a respondent's computer and our own systems so that information cannot be viewed by anyone else on the network. Our web site has security measures in place to protect the loss, misuse, and alteration of the information under our control. Only authorized employees have access to the information you provide us, on a custom project basis.

10. Competitive Advantages

DataStar is HIPAA compliant. We've undergone a comprehensive review of the administrative, physical and technical safeguards necessary to reasonably and appropriately protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of the physical and electronic information that we create, receive, maintain and/or transmit on behalf of our clients. Our staff has undergone background checks for the Department of Education and we are a GSA contract holder as a prequalified vendor to streamline the procurement process for government agencies. Because of these competitive advantages, we are able to service your research needs in many confidential areas that other companies and on-line tools cannot provide.

Choose a custom service for your online survey needs and you'll sleep better at night! At DataStar, simply put, we are the Survey Specialists! Small or large, simple or complex, our experienced programming team has every angle covered.