Incentives in Physician Surveys: An Experiment Using Gift Cards and Checks

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Introduction

- Introduction
- Background on Incentives in Surveys of HCPs
- Purpose of research
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusions
Introduction

- Key research questions:
  - Does the method of payment affect survey response rates?
Background:

- Effect of pre-paid incentives on response rates (Kellerman & Herold 2001; Delnevo et al. 2004).
- Misdirected funds are a small risk to available funds (Hogan 2007).
- Gift cards are a widely used method in reputable surveys (Kay 2001).
Why do we care?

- Survey research has noted the utility of cards in other populations, but not among physicians acting in their professional capacity.
- Survey research is an important tool in assessing many aspects of health care delivery and costs in the United States.
- Better MD survey cooperation is better understanding of healthcare.
- Survey researchers need to find advantages in getting MD cooperation.
- Serve client interests with cost-efficiencies and improved response rates.
Purpose of the research

- Project: Purchasing Program Evaluation
- Physician Survey
  - Program-participating and Non-participating respondents surveyed
  - Multi-modal data collection effort

Embedded experiment:
- To test whether there is a significant difference in response rates between Rs receiving cards or check incentives in MD survey.
Methods

Sample:

- 1200 physicians participating in the Program
- 1200 physicians known not to be participating.
- All 50 of the United States
- Sample source: UPIN registry
Methods:

- Data Collection initiated in January 2008
- 5 wave mail (advance, survey, postcard, survey, survey)
- Multiple Response Options
  - Mail, web, phone, fax
- Teleprompting for non-respondents
**Methods**

**Instrumentation:**

- **Survey:** 6-pages PAPI survey for non-participants, 10-page for participants.
  - Topics
    - Program satisfaction, how program is used, why physicians/practice elected to use (or not use) program, some demographics.
  - Multiple-choice, Likert scales.
- **Cover letters:** on official stationery signed by client program officer, letter explaining how and why to complete from project director at RTI
- FAQ included
- **Inserts:** **Incentive:** Pre-paid $25 personal check, or gift card.
Results

- Response rate data captured after 3\textsuperscript{rd} round of mailing (reminder postcard)
- Subsample of 103 respondents
  - 55% gift card, 45% check
Results

- Overall response rate at time of analysis was 38%.
- A simple logistic regression model was used to analyze the effects of incentive type and program participation on response rate.
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Response</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gift Card</td>
<td>41 (71%)</td>
<td>16 (16%)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check</td>
<td>23 (50%)</td>
<td>23 (50%)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N=103</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Results

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<th>Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>28 (61%)</td>
<td>18 (39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participating</td>
<td>36 (63%)</td>
<td>21 (37%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=103
Results

- Logistic Regression Model
  - Forward Selection
  - Binary DV (Response vs. Non-Response)
  - Predictor variables: Incentive, Participation Group

- The forward selection method retained only the *incentive* variable as significant, with a Wald’s $\chi^2=5.0915$, $p=.0224$.

- The Odds Ratio Point Estimate=2.562. Thus, a respondent receiving a check was 2.562 times more likely to respond.
Results

- **Specialization**
  - Data available, though diverse. No coherent groups of any reasonable size could be computed.

- **Gender**
  - Frequencies show that males were somewhat more likely to respond than females, however this difference is not significant.
Bottom line:

- Gift cards do not seem to be a good choice of incentive type for physician samples.

- A starting point.
  - More research needed on other professional populations
  - Additional variables may shed more light on complexities of response
Conclusions

- The cost of using a gift card incentive is actually higher than the cost of using a check of the same value.
  - Value of checks only lost if cashed, gift card value lost in all situations except returns.
  - Service charge for gift cards (up to $3 on a $25 card)
  - To date, 45% of checks have been cashed.
    - Unlikely that additional checks will clear at this point; checks are void after 90 days
A copy of this presentation is available at www.rti.org/aapor