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Gauging Success
French-speaking organization uses surveys to ensure customer satisfaction

The nonprofit Alliance Française de Portland is part of a worldwide network that promotes French and Francophone language and culture. The Portland chapter was founded in 1983 and provides French classes to 900 adult students per year and organizes cultural events attended by up to 8,000 people from Oregon and southwest Washington.

Executive Director Linda Witt says the group makes regular use of the Constant Contact Online Survey tool to glean strategic data in four key areas: To assess the quality of its language classes and teachers; determine where to spend its advertising budget; learn more about its customers’ motivations; and, to get feedback on specific major events.

Prior to using Online Survey, post-term class feedback was collected via paper forms, which Linda says was “tedious and ineffective.” Now, all class feedback is collected electronically, enabling the administration to more easily gather and consolidate students’ thoughts on the language programs, information about student motivation, and insights about how they learned of the organization. “The teachers love getting student feedback; the board loves tracking trends such as overall approval ratings, and we, in the administration, benefit greatly from survey data that shows exactly what percentage of our leads are coming from our website, from print advertising, from word of mouth, or from our partners,” Linda says.

To encourage clients to respond to surveys, the group is selective in its use of the survey tool and also makes it a point to limit the number of questions in any one survey to a maximum of seven or eight—and sometimes as few as two or three—questions. Linda says the questions used in the survey are standard and remain the same from term to term so statistical trends can be easily monitored, but she adds a number of open fields for additional comments. Her strategy for keeping surveys concise and to the point is to focus on the key questions needed to guide the Alliance’s decisions, keeping in mind that the fewer questions asked typically results in a larger response rate.

“We must resist the temptation to drill into our readers’ heads for every bit of information that we’d like them to give up,” Linda says. “Consider it a victory if you get a good response rate on just a single key set of questions.”
To encourage participation, the Alliance offers prizes with many of its surveys. "We offer fun incentives such as a free French CD or $100 off a future course with winners drawn at random from among the survey respondents," Linda says. "It’s all part of our effort to be appreciative of our clients because we know that everyone is pressed for time."

Surveys are also used to gather customer feedback after major events, with the data collected used to optimize and tweak annual events for the next go-round. "We partner with other organizations on events and when it comes to lobbying for change or concessions. It’s very helpful to have survey data to back up one’s argument," Linda says.

Overall, the Alliance uses a combination of Email Marketing and Online Survey to better serve its audience. "The Constant Contact tools we employ have allowed us to expand our reach and engage more customers than ever before, in a very cost-effective manner," Linda says. "Most importantly, we now have a greatly improved understanding of our customer base, which helps us to manage our niche market and to deliver products and services that will keep us on a path of steady growth."