Chapter XXVIII
Comparison of Online Surveys Tools

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ABSTRACT

This chapter compares two major online survey tools made in Germany: Rogator and Formgen. Both are of a very high standard, and can be highly recommended for carrying out professional online surveys in any social or psychological science setting. This chapter compares the technical functions, the graphical representation, and the usability of both providers.

INTRODUCTION

Modern telecommunication technologies have had major impact on social research methods. Especially, the World Wide Web offers an inexpensive way to reach thousands of respondents for data gathering. But it is not only the distribution of questionnaires that is an advantage of the Internet. The medium offers a number of new possibilities to present information as well: Pictures, sound and movies can be implemented in questionnaires. Additionally, it is possible to define a logical structure in the questionnaires and let the respondent be guided through the form. Filter questions and ramifications allow a dynamic structure of the survey such as it could never be implemented in paper-and-pencil surveys.

In the meantime, numberless specialized software tools are available, offering the possibility to design and manage online surveys in a very easy way without the need for expert knowledge in Web page programming. The two German software packages, Rogator G3 (from Rogator AG, www.rogator.de) and Formgen (from pilotedata GmbH, www.formgen.de), are among the most elaborated online survey tools in the German-speaking countries. Main fields of appliance are inter- and intranet questionnaires for product tests, employee surveys, evaluation, quality management, and market analysis. The software also meets the
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Technical Remarks

Both Formgen and Rogator work with any modern system environment, such as Windows, with connection to the Internet and an installed Web browser.

In Formgen, questionnaires are regularly built online via a browser (Web interface), so there is no need to install additional software into a workstation. It is possible to design and run surveys on a host-server or, in case someone wants to run surveys on his/her own server, to install Formgen on a standard Web server running the J2SE environment (min. JDK 1.2), a JSP engine and an SQL database (Oracle 8.05, MS SQL server 7.0 or MySQL).

For designing questionnaires with Rogator, a basic software package has to be installed into a desktop computer. The questionnaire is built offline on the local workstation and then uploaded on a host-survey server.

In general, basic computer knowledge is sufficient to create and manage a survey. Both software packages offer the possibility for customization by HTML and Javascript. In Formgen, the whole HTML code is accessible for modifications, while in Rogator, HTML or Javascript code has to be saved as a .txt file that then can be embedded in the page.

Layout and Graphical Design

Both programs, Formgen and Rogator, allow adapting the online questionnaires graphically to nearly every layout. The realization of, for example, corporate identity style therefore becomes quite easy, even for nonprofessional layouters. The implementation of logos, and the use of specific colors and background pictures are standard features. The two online survey tools provide a library with predefined and practically proved layouts. Furthermore, both software packages offer the possibility of embedding multimedia objects like audio and video files, as well as flash animations.
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