Chapter 19
Online Survey Software

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ABSTRACT
The commonality among online instruments—regardless of discipline—is the use of online tools to administer the electronic measurements, collect participant responses, and aggregate the results for data analysis. Under the heading of software as a service (SaaS) or cloud computing, online survey software makes it possible for individuals and organizations to easily develop and administer online instruments. This chapter provides a background into SaaS and cloud computing, profiles three leading online survey software tools—SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics, and LimeSurvey—along with the PollEverywhere online and mobile polling tool. The chapter concludes with the corresponding cost and links to these online survey tools along with relevant terms and resources.

INTRODUCTION
As the Internet has grown, online surveys have emerged as commonplace, with individuals and organizations alike developing and administering surveys. A Google search for “online surveys” reveals approximately 110 million results, including hundreds of free and fee-based tools for use in market research, customer satisfaction, academic studies, and even personal surveys just for fun (Google, 2012). Facebook, the largest social networking site with over 845 million users, boasts numerous surveys ranging from serious medical studies to silly movie quotes.

With so many electronic surveys available, completing online surveys has become a frequent activity of online users. A 2009 study from Dennis, Osborn, and Semans found that “one in four opt-in [online] panelists had participated in 20 or more surveys in the past four weeks” (p. 5). Additionally, individuals can earn money by completing...
online surveys through such services as Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mason & Suri, 2011).

Behind all of these online surveys are websites running various online survey software programs that make it possible to administer online instruments, electronic measurements, surveys, and polls with publishing and distribution costs essentially zero. This is a dramatic change from previous administration methods such as telephone or postal mail which had significantly higher costs associated with surveys.

These online survey platforms are a subset of a movement called software as a service (SaaS) or, more recently, cloud computing. After providing some background into SaaS and cloud computing, a number of online survey software programs will be profiled. In particular, two leading commercial software programs—SurveyMonkey and Qualtrics—are introduced, followed by a profile of the open source LimeSurvey product. Additionally, the online and mobile polling tool PollEverywhere is profiled. The chapter then concludes with the associated cost and links to these tools and relevant terms and readings.

BACKGROUND

Online survey software is an example of software as a service (SaaS) or cloud computing. The Gartner research group defines software as a service as “software that’s owned, delivered and managed remotely by one or more providers” (Gartner, 2012b, para. 1). SaaS then is software that’s run on remote computers but able to be accessed on local ones. As Gartner further stipulates, if a vendor has to install software locally, then it’s not SaaS (para. 1).

SaaS is considered a subset of the larger concept of cloud computing. Gartner (2012a) defines cloud computing as “a style of computing in which massively scalable IT-enabled capabilities are delivered ‘as a service’ to external customers using Internet technologies” (para. 1). The cloud is basically the Internet but it represents a particular use of the Internet. The idea is that you can store content in the cloud (e.g., documents, music, video, files, etc.) or you can run programs in the cloud (e.g., word processing with Google Docs rather than installing Microsoft Word on your local computer) or you can even run entire virtual computers online (e.g., leased instances through Amazon Web Services).

The concept of storing materials online isn’t a particularly new one; in addition to the “thin client” concept that came and went in the late 1990s where the idea was that everything important would be online and you’d not need as powerful of a computer on your desktop, the “client-server” model of mainframes (i.e., big powerful centralized computer access from dumb terminals) is a forerunner. However, the movement toward online computing and storage has been accelerating of late, due not only to good marketing and terminology (i.e., “the cloud”) but also because of new tools being made available to developers and consumers alike.

The advantage of hosting surveys online (in the cloud) rather than running surveys locally are numerous. The most obvious is that the surveys themselves are accessible to anyone with Internet access. However, this could be done with a locally-installed survey program as well, just as long as the resulting survey was posted to an available web server. As with other web-based publications, the per-unit cost of an online survey is essentially zero, in contrast to print surveys which have a finite cost to print or copy each additional survey. Additionally, the distribution costs of online surveys are essentially zero, in contrast to the postal mailing or telephone call costs associated with traditional methods of survey distribution.

Beyond the low publication and distribution costs associated with online surveys, the benefit of employing online survey software (particularly SaaS or cloud-based) is that the researcher is not responsible for maintaining the software itself. Online survey software companies typically
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