

Want to Know What Your Members Are Thinking?

BY HEIDI VOSS

Wouldn't it be nice if you could read your members' minds?

If you could, hopefully you would gain very insightful knowledge that would help you make the club a better place for them.

Your members are brilliant, affluent consumers pursued by everyone to capture their time, dollars and loyalty. But as clubs you do not have the budgets of the fast-food restaurants or soft-drink companies to produce Super Bowl-like advertisements to capture their interests.

You need to find out what they want, zero in on it full force and give it to them.

In the past, clubs sent out lengthy surveys to members asking them about their overall club experiences and how the clubs could be better. Many times companies were hired to compile the questions, send out the surveys, bug the members to return them and compile

the tedious data. This process could take months. And frequently the issues on the survey were non issues by the time the results came back.

It was learned that the unhappy members or the cheerleader members were most likely to return their surveys. The nonplussed

members filed the surveys in the circular bin and went on with their lives — sometimes including the club and sometimes not.

Today you have the luxury of surveying your members through e-mail. The survey programs tabulate instantly, showing you up-to-the-minute data and even individual responses. There has been great success with these Internet-based surveys.

Here are a few keys for you if you should choose to survey your members:

Use survey software and try to keep the survey topic-based. For instance, do a survey on 2006 golf events for men and women or menu items for the grille room. The survey should have a theme and should

not stray too far from it.

Keep the survey short. Limit it to no more than 20 questions. The shorter the survey the better. Also, make sure that your questions are properly linked so that they skip to the next appropriate questions after certain responses.

Send out an update on the survey results to your members. They want to know what other members have to say. It's reassuring for them to realize that others have the same opinions and that the club is listening.

Yes, this is the key, folks. Just like the fictional radio personality Frazier Crane does, you need to listen to what they have to say and then try to respond in a quick and efficient manner.

Get on a survey cycle every two months. Plan out your topics in advance and let members know what the next survey will deal with so they can begin to think about that subject.

Do not overload your members with weekly surveys and random surveys. Send them on a schedule, with the updates following two weeks later.

Here are some topics that other clubs have found to be very insightful:

- golf events;
- food;
- golf shop purchases;
- social events;
- kids' survey regarding activities;
- the magazines, newspapers and journals members read;
- renovation dollars; and
- pool and fitness programs.

The surveys can help you dedicate your limited funds when it comes to advertising dollars, golf shop purchases for next season, and increasing attendance by planning events that members would like to see at the club.

Remember that using a survey is only a tool to make the club more member friendly.

You will glean valuable points from your members when they believe that you desire to continually improve the club and shape it to meet their changing needs.

Heidi Voss is the president of Bauer Voss Consulting, a club marketing consulting company. She specializes in new development, conversions from public to private and member buyouts. For more information, visit www.bauervossconsulting.com.

