Chapter 14

Surveying the Crowd

*T*he power of Facebook is in the size of its community. As you know by now, there are hundreds of millions of users in the Facebook network. If you and your company want to tap into the wisdom of this crowd, you're going to need to understand how to do it.

As the membership to Facebook grows, you have an opportunity to gather information from some of the most connected people on the Web. You can get hundreds or even thousands of completed surveys with lots of data, if you play it right. In this chapter, we discuss how to use Facebook for research, and then we get into the finer points of creating your own survey tools using Facebook applications (apps).

Gathering Data through Surveys

A survey is the most widely used method for collecting data in market research today. You can conduct a survey by mail, e-mail, telephone, personal interview, Web site, focus groups, or other methods. The questionnaire is one of the more common methods for collecting data from a survey and is helpful in learning about the attitudes and behaviors of your target audience. The response rate on your survey can depend on the content that you include in it and where you choose to conduct your survey.

Many companies that create surveys for market research pay people who fill them out, or even give them another kind of incentive to complete the

survey. Some people like using surveys as fun, online viral activities. Surveys are a great way to share information with your friends, whether by e-mail or embedded in social networking sites like Facebook. There is probably no quicker and easier way to gain quantifiable data than through an online survey!

You have a few ways to tap into the collective wisdom of the Facebook crowd. But before you dive in, you may want to think about how to engage the Facebook audience with your survey.

Facebook members generally like to stay within the Facebook environment, so it's up to you to play by their rules as much as possible. Plenty of low-to-no-cost survey tools reside outside of Facebook on the Web, but we suggest using an application within Facebook that you can add as a new tab to your Page (see Chapter 4), which also has its own URL if you want to invite your external customers to sign in to Facebook and take the survey.

REMEMBER

If you send your survey to folks outside Facebook, they'll need to sign up for Facebook to view it, if they aren't already a member (see Chapter 1).

TIP

Here are a few basic tips when dealing with surveys:

- ✔ To make it easier for Facebook members to spread the word virally, keep your survey exclusive to the Facebook community. Plus, having data exclusive to Facebook can be attractive to the media.

- ✔ To include people outside of Facebook, you might consider running parallel surveys — one inside Facebook and one outside Facebook — to draw conclusions between the two.

- ✔ To run your survey from your own business Web site, you might consider using OpenID or Facebook Connect (see Chapter 15) to make it easy for members to connect.

Defining Your Goals

Whatever your business is, start by identifying your goals, and then write a hypothesis of what you want to achieve with your data. Make sure that you decide how many completed surveys would make your research a success. Following are some possible goals:

- ✔ Data that you can use to validate a new product or service launch, such as: If we produced a new type of widget. Would you buy it?

- ✔ Data that you can use to produce white papers or for the press, such as: Would you recommend your bank to your best friend?

✔ Data that you can use for business development, such as: What is your next big IT project?

✔ Data that you can use for benchmarking, such as: What is the average time it takes your call center to respond to an e-mail?

✔ Just for the fun of it! Surveys can certainly help engage your users.

TIP

Your goal in conducting a survey is to get as many completed surveys as possible. The number of completed surveys that many studies aim for is 100 or more. Any fewer than that is sometimes considered statistically invalid if you are trying to use the data with the press or in a magazine.

Checking Out Facebook Survey Apps

No matter what kind of survey you choose, a number of apps have sprung up to satisfy the needs of marketers to research the Facebook community into the next century.

To find these apps, choose Applications⇨Browse More Applications from the lower navigation bar. Type "polls" into the Search box, and then press Enter. (See Figure 14-1.) Poll applications appear and you can now select a polling app by clicking its link.

Figure 14-1: Searching for polls in the Applications Directory.

Here are a few of our favorite poll apps that you can find in Facebook, along with a short description of what they do.

- ✔ **Polls:** Polls is a popular application that lets marketers tap into the power of their Pages and profiles by creating their own custom polls. Created by Context Optional, polls are easy to create and Facebook displays the results using rich and colorful graphics. (See Figure 14-2.)

- ✔ **Daily Experience Survey:** Posts a new survey of 10 questions daily. The surveys range from serious to seriously funny (see Figure 14-3). Facebook users can post the app to their profile as a means of making their profile more sticky and engaging. The results are also posted to the profile and you can link to others who answered the same way as you. Sometimes there's an incentive associated with the survey, but not every time. To find this app, search for "Daily Survey" in the Applications Directory.

- ✔ **YouGov:** Delivers surveys ranging from government policies to retail, fashion, and beyond (see Figure 14-4). YouGov members are typically paid for their opinion so you need to have a modest budget to work with them. YouGov is based in the UK, which can help if you want a global audience response. To find this app, search for "YouGov" in the Application Directory.
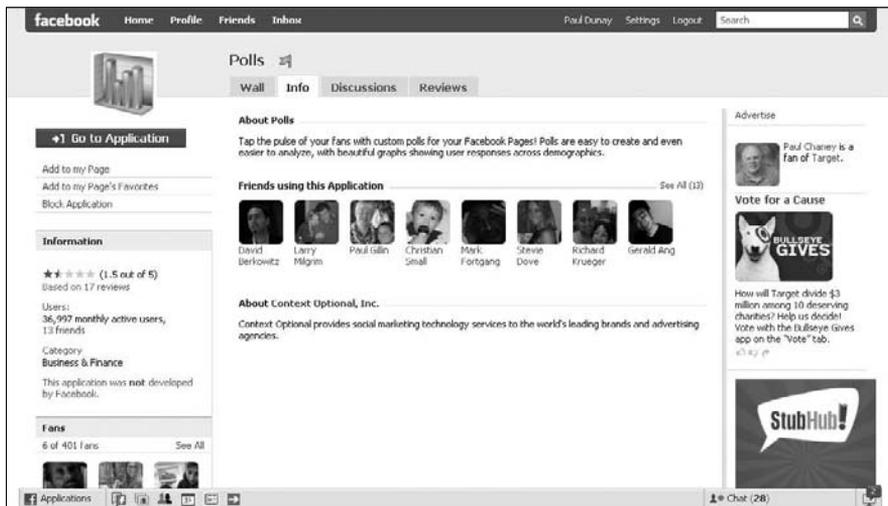
Figure 14-2:
Viewing Polls to tap into your fans.

✔ **SocialToo:** When you want fast response survey data that you can publish quickly in a report or on your Web site, this Web-based tool can provide short bursts of survey data (see Figure 14-5). SocialToo has a very elegant user interface and works well with Facebook. To find this application, search for "Social Too" in the Application Directory.

Figure 14-3: Checking out the Daily Experience Survey.

Figure 14-4: Having more of a government focus with YouGov.

✓ **Quibblo:** Provides a variety of free survey and quiz templates that you can quickly customize and post directly to your Facebook account. Quibblo is a Web-based tool (see Figure 14-6) that integrates well with social networks, such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, and Hi5, as well as a variety of blogging platforms including Blogger, WordPress, and TypePad. To access Quibblo, go to the Quibblo Web site.

Figure 14-5:
Using a short survey tool like SocialToo.

Figure 14-6:
Checking out Quibblo to survey any social network.

Creating a Facebook Survey

Creating and designing a survey is a fine art honed by marketers for years. So, you do not need to reinvent the wheel since you can find so many resources to help you. Following are some basics to help you create a winning survey.

✔ **Keep it short.** When drafting your survey, you should brainstorm as many questions as you can to be sure that you cover all the bases. Then go back over the questions and mark the questions in three categories: essential, useful, and nice to have. Keep the survey to essential questions only, and as few of the useful questions as possible.

There is an inverse relationship between the number of questions in your survey and the number of complete surveys you will receive, so the shorter the survey the better!

✔ **Write down the expected outcome.** This trick is critical for helping you decide whether a question is essential. Try to write the expected press release headline, such as "Nine out of ten dentists prefer Crest to any other toothpaste." It not only helps you qualify the question for inclusion in the survey, but also gives you a frame of reference to understand how well you know the audience. If there is a huge gap, you might want to host a discussion on your Wall about it!

✔ **Start with your best question.** We say this for two reasons.

1. If you're going to get some incomplete survey data, then be sure you get your best question answered up front; don't save it until the end of the survey.

2. Start with your most interesting question to draw in the survey taker. This way you capture their interest and you can move them toward the harder questions you saved for the end.

✔ **Don't sound like a survey.** Try not to sound overly complicated or use big fluffy words; use simple words that are easy to understand. An example of overly complicated wording would be, "What is the approximate frequency of your shopping behavior when it comes to the purchase of toothpaste?" A better question would be, "How many times did you buy toothpaste in the last month?"

✔ **Keep the choices to a minimum.** We recommend no more than five choices per question. Whether you are ranking an attribute from not important to highly important or presenting five multiple-choice options, try to keep the number of choices down so your completed survey rate goes up!

Setting a privacy policy

Just a note on privacy, some people feel very comfortable revealing personal details online that they would never divulge in real life. The anonymous interfaces of the Web lull people into a false sense of security. As the administrator of the survey, it is up to you to act responsibly with this data and never cross the line in connecting it to a profile or quoting someone when they haven't given you permission.

REMEMBER

Facebook is a very powerful tool, even more powerful than Google in some ways because the profile data on Facebook members is so accessible. Because of this, we strongly recommend that you craft a strong privacy policy and publish this with your survey.

Promoting your survey

After you create a survey on Facebook, you need to promote it. In this section, we discuss how to promote your survey and keep the energy up around it so that you maximize the number of completed forms.

After you launch the survey, the hard work of communicating that it is live and open for business kicks in and becomes a never ending process until you feel you've reached the desired number of completed forms.

Announcing your survey to fans

Facebook makes it easy to tell all your fans about the new survey, so why not take advantage of it? You can post a quick update about the survey in the News Feed for your Page and send messages directly to all your fans to get their attention (see Chapter 6). You can also keep the updates coming while you get more and more completed surveys. Don't be afraid to ask for help from your friends and fans by posting, "71 Completes! We just need 29 more!"

Announcing your survey to external clients

You can always invite your existing customers via e-mail to take your survey. If this sounds like the path you want to take, you have two ways to accomplish this:

REMEMBER

- ✔ **Use your personal or business e-mail account.** Because Pages have their own URL, you can copy the URL into your message, inviting customers to log in to Facebook and take your survey.

  Not everyone in your database is a member of Facebook, which means non-Facebook members need to join Facebook to take your survey (see Chapter 2).

- ✔ **Use the Facebook e-mail system.** You have less control over how it looks from a branding perspective, but it is very consistent with all the other Facebook experiences that your fans are already having.