

# ***THE STORYTELLER'S SECRET WEAPON***

**Using Survey Data to Drive Great PR**





# ***WHEN IT COMES TO STORYTELLING, ELITE TECHNOLOGY BRANDS HAVE A SECRET WEAPON: DATA***

That's right, the best storytellers in the business use unique data to help build and validate their marketing, sales and public relations (PR) campaigns. A great way to generate data is with surveys that shine a light on industry challenges, customer perceptions and/or adoption trends. Unfortunately, brands may find it difficult to overcome the cost and time barriers associated with commissioning surveys from analyst and research firms, especially if the purpose is primarily for PR. As a result, many organizations build storytelling frameworks that lack substance, which can leave journalists and prospects uninspired and unimpressed.

## **But it doesn't have to be this way!**

Good PR agencies understand the value of custom data. And, they know how to help you get it, without shelling out tons of cash or taking months to produce it. [This guide will highlight a simple process for unlocking the power of survey data.](#) Whether you're a big brand that's looking for a quick way to harvest data and use it in your PR program, or a smaller company looking to add impact to your storytelling campaigns, we're here with a quick guide to creating surveys for PR and marketing.

*(Disclaimer: There are many nuances to what is and is not a valid survey, report or study. Let's be clear, this guide is focused on running quick-hit surveys or product-related reports you can use to bolster marketing and PR storytelling campaigns. If you're looking to conduct a study for research purposes, we suggest you consult a professional research firm. That said, if you're looking to spice up your PR and marketing campaigns with some great customer or product insights, this guide's for you!)*

## **The reality is that great data drives relevance and trust throughout the storytelling process – but it has to be credible.**

In general, credibility often comes down to the size of the data set (which can be the number of respondents or the number of unique data sources – for example 145 IoT devices). The goal is to have a large enough data set that the results aren't likely to be easily skewed (if you only have 10 sources, one or two outliers can significantly alter results). It's generally accepted as a rule of thumb that 100 unique sources is a starting baseline, but the more data the better. Credibility also means sharing the source data and the methodology you used to gather and analyze it with journalists if asked. Transparency is the key when creating credible PR and marketing surveys.

And it's worth noting that you can also generate good data from actual users and product or service telemetry.



# CREATING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS



A survey is only as good as its questions, and having an idea of the story you want to tell can help guide the questions you ask. What's your desired goal or outcome? For example, are you trying to gather data that shows people aren't informed on a particular new technology? Or perhaps face barriers when deploying it? Whether you create the survey internally or with a firm, consider brainstorming the topic with your marketing or PR team to assess its viability – and craft questions accordingly. Start with these key considerations:



**Who is the audience for the survey or report?** This means identifying not only the target audience for the survey (prospects, partners, existing customers, verticals, etc.), but also who will consume the results (for example, internal sales teams, press, investors, etc.).



**What do we hope the data tells us?** Write out some sample results (for example, "75% of respondents claim siloed cloud data inhibits their ability to improve overall network performance.").



**Will the consumers of this data (i.e., the media or customers) be interested in the results, storylines or topic?**



**How are we going to use this data in content creation?** List out the specific assets or outcomes – such as an ebook, a social media campaign, sales collateral, a webinar, etc.

*"Successful surveys ask questions in a way that ensures the answers are informative. This means determining ahead of time what your survey is meant to uncover, and structuring the questions in a way that best helps tell that story."*

– Kerry Desberg,  
CMO at Impartner

**To qualify or not to qualify, that is the next question.**

**Segment Respondents**

**Focus on Market & Industry**

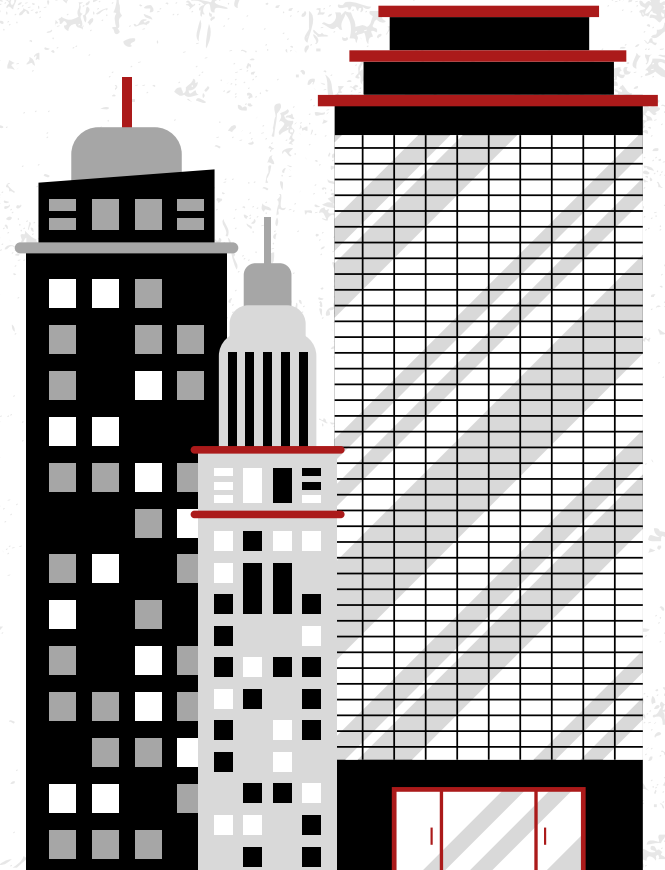
**Create Survey Tracks**

Qualifying allows you to screen and segment your respondents based on their answers, and it's extremely useful when it comes to leveraging the data – as long as you use a layered approach. The first set of qualifier questions allows you to segment results when doing the analysis, which helps in presenting the data. Questions around location, role, industry, company size, region, etc. are all common initial qualifying questions. For example, it's helpful to know if the data is associated with an engineer, manager or executive at a small, medium or large company.

A second layer for qualifying questions can focus on your actual market or industry. In the security market, for example, you might include questions that specifically ask if a respondent uses the X-Widget security product. And if so, are they using X-Widget for network, endpoint or cloud deployments? This information allows you to create survey tracks for respondents based on relevance. Continuing with the X-Widget security example, if someone doesn't have X-Widget, it would be useful to know why. Conversely, if they have it and use it for network security in particular, you may ask a completely different set of questions. Since getting someone to complete a survey often takes an investment (i.e., incentivizing the respondent with a gift card), it's vital to get the most useful data out of every interaction.

**Now that the qualifying questions are out of the way, it's time to dive into the meat of the survey.**

Make sure the remaining questions align with a cohesive narrative progression. This will make the data analysis process much easier, but it also makes it more intuitive for the respondent. It's also critical that you pull in your subject matter experts to vet the final questions. Their insight is vital to ensuring you position the questions properly and with vernacular that aligns with the target audience. Furthermore, be sure to consider length, both in regard to the individual questions and the total number of questions. Most surveys are limited to no more than 15 questions. If you need to increase that number (and thus the time commitment for respondents), you'll likely need to introduce incentives such as gift cards, swag, apparel, etc.





# USING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS



**Finally, it's more efficient to have survey questions tied to multiple-choice answers.**

Offering "fill-in-the-blank" questions means you have to manually evaluate those results, will have difficulty correlating responses across the entire data set, and in many cases, may have to make judgement calls around interpretations (which could potentially bring the credibility of the results into question). Save yourself the headache when possible.



***Consider having a little fun by throwing in a curveball question that stands out. For example, one client asked if users would rather clean office toilets or patch software. The majority of respondents chose cleaning toilets, which made for some great parody in content.***

**Once all your relevant internal teams have vetted the survey, it's time to pull the trigger and launch.**

But there are a couple key implementation decisions to make first, like picking the right survey platform. For example, you can start with a Google Forms approach if resources are tight and the requirements are basic. If you need to up-level the complexity and analysis, tools like SurveyMonkey might do the trick. When you need to do a significant amount of internal data gathering, consider a more sophisticated platform like Qualtrics that other internal teams might already be using (but, check out this [TechRadar](#) article for some other options).

Selecting and targeting the right audience is also a critical decision. Many organizations simply use internal marketing lists, which may already be segmented by audience (or can be with minimal effort). Depending on quality, these lists can be highly effective, especially if you use something like a gift card as an incentive. Moreover, surveys can create another valuable touchpoint with these prospective customers.



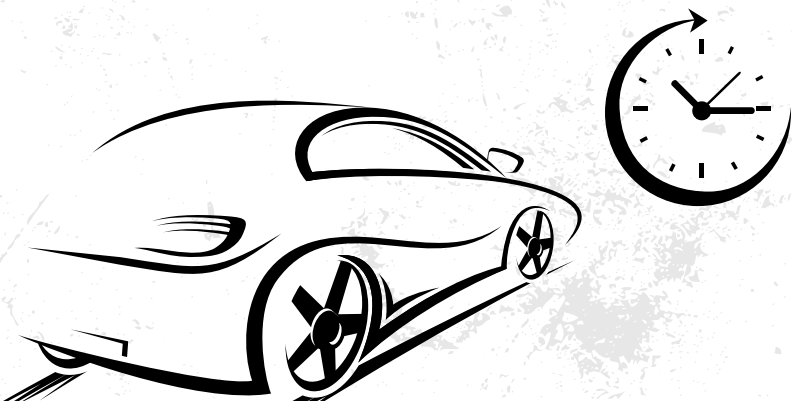


# DETERMINING SURVEY RUN TIME



Unfortunately, some organizations lack useful internal lists. In these instances, it typically makes sense to engage with a reputable publication or event to survey their readership or attendees. Or, consider targeting your social media followers, doing a promoted social campaign or even having a pop-up survey on your website.

And finally, once you launch the survey, how long do you let it run? Gathering responses for two weeks is typical, but depending on the pace and volume of responses, you might need to adjust this timeframe. For example, if response rates from targets on your internal marketing lists are low in the first week of the survey, you'll likely need to incentivize the audience, reload the email campaign and allow yourself more time.



*"Thanks to the time we put in up front to craft quality questions tailored to the storyline we wanted to explore, we got fantastic results from our survey. Not only did the data validate our product approach and secure strong media coverage, but we've also reused it in marketing collateral, website content and speaking engagements for our CEO."*

– Brett Goodwin,  
VP of Marketing at Shujinko

Data analysis can be a tiresome job, but one you can simplify by spending the time up-front to craft quality questions that follow a pre-designed narrative. Since every survey data set is different, we won't pretend that a one-size-fits-all set of instructions will work for evaluating every one.

**Instead, here are some quick tips:**

- Assign one person to evaluate the data initially. Too many cooks in the survey kitchen can slow the process.
- After the initial analysis, select a different person to validate the numbers. That person doesn't need to worry about the context of the answers, just that the numbers are correct.
- Review the initial analysis with a small PR or marketing team to ensure it follows the narrative you set out to achieve. If it doesn't, use this opportunity to dive into the data, find out why, and rework your story flow.
- Share a near-final version of the analysis with your subject matter expert(s) (SME) to get their thoughts and final context on specific points. This can round out your story.



## The next question is how to use the data?

You went into the survey journey with a good idea of where this data would end up, but there are many options. The most formal approach is to do a report in the form of a whitepaper or, more informally, an ebook. For shorter surveys, you can lay out the key findings communicated in a one-page summary or infographic. Use this primary asset as the anchor for the rest of the campaign. From there you can pull the data points into emails, social posts, press pitches, etc., sharing the complete asset for more detail. This is an extremely effective tactic when dealing with journalists.



## Here are some best practices for reporting your survey results:

- Pitch the report to press under embargo before you launch any other activities. This can result in exclusive and potentially more in-depth coverage.
- If there is enough information in the report, break the survey results up into a series of blog posts and link back to the complete report at the end of the final post.
- Refer and link back to the data for the next 12 months when creating content like contributed articles, ebooks, whitepapers, case studies and more.
- Host a webinar that runs through the results and talks about solutions to the key challenges or problems.
- If you have a podcast, dedicate an episode to reviewing the findings. If you don't have a podcast, pitch other industry podcasts and shows to do an episode with your SME all about the data.
- Filter the data into your lead-gen emails and create nurture streams around the results.
- Share the report with your channel partners and allow them to rebrand it for their communications with customers.
- Use the data when submitting for upcoming award opportunities or speaker sessions.
- Use the report to draft a contributed article (or series of articles) for mainstream tech publications or applicable vertical press outlets.



# **A SUCCESS STORY: VOXUS TAKES SHUJINKO SURVEY DATA TO THE PRESS**



*Shujinko, an early-stage startup, was preparing to announce their security compliance automation solution and needed a way to raise awareness of the challenges their product helped solve.*

*To do this, they commissioned a survey of North American CISOs with carefully crafted questions about compliance audit pain points and the improvements they would make to the process.*

*The results showed that automation was the number one improvement CISOs would make to the audit process and that they felt strong pressure to “do more with less” thanks to Covid-related restrictions and budget limitations.*

*Voxus helped craft a broader story around these data points and worked to secure coverage in 16 different IT and technology publications, including SC Magazine, TechRepublic, Security Boulevard, Help Net Security, CIO Review, Security Magazine and more. Read the full case study [here](#).*



## **SHUJINKO**

# VOXUSPR

When it comes to creating custom data that can help drive amazing brand stories, you don't need to break the bank or over-complicate the process. Great PR agencies know how to build compelling surveys and help you execute them in ways that support your core marketing efforts. Take this guide and use it as your secret weapon when building your next survey campaign. And if you need a little help along the way, Voxus is ready to jump in and lead the charge.

Contact us today by clicking [here](#).

