

## **Working With Local Survey Researchers To Understand Extension Marketing Efforts**

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The survey mode was a facile research tool for the Center for Research at the Suffolk Community College, and the Cooperative Extension Service of Suffolk County, Long Island. The telephone survey used in social marketing resulted in a higher participation rate by respondents in densely- and moderately-populated areas of the leading county in wholesale agricultural receipts. Survey results describe Extension presence and services, and have been used in the development of a marketing plan for the CCE-Suffolk Association.

### **Survey Instrument**

In social marketing, the telephone survey is valued for its higher participation rate. Unlike surveys sent through the mail, which traditionally have lower return rates, phone surveys reach more respondents and, generally, those respondents most needed for statistical accuracy. Because the phone survey seemed a better instrument for deriving baseline data that could be used for strategic planning, grant applications and budgetary discussions with funders, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Suffolk County, Long Island, used it to gauge awareness of its presence and services among sample populations of county residents.

The statistical reliability of the telephone survey was not the only reason, however, for its use in the marketing study considered by CCE-Suffolk in the fall of 1994 and completed in the spring of 1995. This survey mode was also a facile

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research tool for the Center for Research at the Suffolk Community College, which undertook the marketing study of its client, CCE-Suffolk. The college researchers had used the phone survey as an instrument for other local clients, such as a town government working on a cable television issue.

More importantly, the academic survey center had the necessary human resources needed to effect a reliable phone survey. Both the faculty and the student body could be utilized — and were — to design and execute a phone marketing study. A team of three professors: a study coordinator, a statistician and a specialist in question formation, created a survey and used two classes of students pursuing a course in statistics to make the phone interviews over a period of five weeks. The usable surveys were then coded, analyzed with SPSS statistical software and rendered in a written report that illustrated significant findings and showed the descriptive statistics in a code book.

The completion of the survey process was an exciting moment, but one that took months of discussions by the government and marketing committee of CCE-Suffolk and frequent conversations by the marketing/communications agent who served as liaison between the college research center and the cooperative extension office.

## Survey Dimensions

To understand why this surveying process was undertaken in such a careful way, it is necessary to learn something about the dimensions of Suffolk County, Long Island.

By Northeastern standards, it is large in land size and in population. Eighty miles long and about fifteen mile wide, Suffolk County occupies two-thirds of the 120-mile land mass that is called Long Island. Approximately 2.6 million people live on all of Long Island, and 1.3 million of those people live in the part called Suffolk County, which is part of the metro New York media market and one of the most affluent counties in the country.

Two-thirds of Suffolk County is densely populated and urban in character; one-third is rural and has about 100,000 residents. For nearly 80 years, the Extension office has been situated in what has always been a rural part of the county because the county seat is there. Today, that same part of the

county is the center of a thriving agricultural industry, making Suffolk County the leading county in New York State in wholesale agricultural receipts. Once all of Suffolk County was agricultural; but about 45 years ago, the developmental pressures from people spilling out of the New York City suburbs caused farmers near the City to sell their land, move their farming endeavors, or leave farming altogether.

This exodus brought urban dwellers into former agricultural areas. These new residents did not have a connection with the land or Extension's traditional agricultural base, which was by then concentrated in the rural parts of the county, thus reinforcing false perceptions that Extension was only serving the residents near its rural headquarters. In fact, many CCE-Suffolk programs in gardening, nutrition, parent-teacher training, water quality and 4-H youth development were carried on in the urban parts of the county.

Awareness of this activity was not universally apparent in certain community circles and correcting misperceptions demanded data that CCE-Suffolk did not possess at that time. Evidence was needed to gauge the awareness of Extension presence and services in the densely- and moderately-populated areas of the county.

## **Survey Areas**

CCE-Suffolk officials believed that this awareness was strongest in the rural part of the county and weakest in the most densely-populated areas, but there were no data, derived in a controlled statistical study, to support this anecdotally-held view. A formal view was suggested by the government and marketing committee.

## **Survey Arrangements**

The marketing/communications agent contacted the coordinator of the academic research center to see if the college could conduct a survey for CCE-Suffolk. The coordinator made a formal presentation of his services, similar to the way an advertising agency might compete for a new account. When the client relationship was formally arranged, the cost of a phone survey was priced at about \$7,000. CCE-Suffolk granted \$4,600 dollars in two increments of \$2,300 for the process and tasked the government and marketing committee

to find underwriting for the remaining monies. This fundraising endeavor of letterwriting and phone calls to individual community donors was laborious but ultimately successful, occupying as much of the marketing-communications agent's time as the ongoing liaison with the research team.

A timetable for the survey depended closely on the availabilities and use of monies. After some discussions with the college coordinator and the government and marketing committee, the marketing/communications agent was able to go ahead and release the first increment of \$2,300 for the development of the survey instrument [the written questions the student surveyors would use when calling] and the second increment of \$2,300 for the executing of the survey by the student classes. The logic of the disbursal was that the data needed to be gathered when the student classes were still in session and while the colder weather kept target audiences indoors and amenable to answer telephones.

### **Survey Targets**

Limited funds for the survey also meant that the areas to be surveyed had to be chosen in a way that would be affordable and still ensure random selection. For this reason, the academic researchers and the marketing/communications agent, in consultation with the government and marketing committee, determined that 250 completed surveys would be needed for the southwestern, northwestern and central portions of Suffolk County. Additionally, 250 more completed surveys would be needed in the rural or eastern part of the county as a statistical control, for a required total of at least 1,000 completed interviews. In the end, 1,200 completed surveys were gleaned from 12,000 phone calls made during a four-week stint by the student interviewers.

Each interview included 17 questions or what the researchers characterized as "over 50 items" [that] "took approximately 10 minutes to complete" (Cornell Cooperative Extension Public Opinion Survey, May 1995, page one.)

### **Survey Analysis**

The SPSS statistical package was used to analyze the survey results and 17 labels with value, frequency percent, valid percent and cum percent were listed in the data book.

Each value label also listed the statistical mean and the number of valid cases of the total 1,164 completed interviews.

### **Survey Results and Dissemination**

Approximately 50 percent of those surveyed showed an awareness of CCE-Suffolk with, as expected anecdotally, more rural residents knowing about and using CCE services. There was a correlation between familiarity of CCE and use of its services. Middle-aged respondents seemed to be aware of CCE. Of all the media used by CCE to promote its programs, newspapers were the place cited most as a source of CCE programs by respondents.

The college researchers shared the survey results formally with the government and marketing committee. Committee members then explained them to CCE-Suffolk board members and staff members. Summaries of the survey results were written for the CCE Annual Report and in letters written to elected officials.

Subsequently, the survey results have been used in the development of a marketing plan for the CCE-Suffolk Association. As an adjunct to this effort, the government and marketing committee, will begin a special marketing effort to local governmental and civic leaders in the southern part of the county, one of the areas that research data showed as underserved. This pilot project is scheduled to roll out in the fall of 1996, two years from the start of the research project. As certain research questions are raised and new strategies are piloted, other research questions may be revealed for future study, showing the iterative process inherent in marketing any organization.

**Center for Community Research  
Suffolk Community College  
CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PUBLIC OPINION  
SURVEY**

Date:

Interviewer:

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am calling from the Center for Community Research at Suffolk Community College. We are conducting a survey of Suffolk County residents about the Cornell Cooperative Extension. Your opinion is being requested to assist the Cornell Cooperative Extension in the development of programs and information to best serve this region. Would you help by answering a few questions for us? This will take about 8 minutes. (If yes, proceed. If no, check here \_\_, say "thank you," and hang up.)

- Which is your town of residence?  
 (1) Babylon     (5) Islip     (9) Southampton  
 (2) Brookhaven     (6) Riverhead     (10) Southold  
 (3) East Hampton     (7) Shelter Island  
 (4) Huntington     (8) Smithtown 1(a) zip code \_\_\_\_\_
- Please indicate, from the following choices, how familiar you are **generally** with the services of the Cornell Cooperative Extension:  (1) Not at all  (2) A little  (3) Somewhat familiar  (4) Very familiar  (5) Extremely knowledgeable.
- For each of the following Cornell Cooperative Services, please indicate first whether or not you have ever heard about the service? I will then ask you whether you or any member of your household, to your knowledge, has ever used the service:

(Mark an x on those where response is yes. If yes, go to B.)	(A) are you familiar with?	(B) ever used by self or household?
(1) classes and seminars	__ (a)	__ (b)
(2) horticulture diagnostic lab	__ (a)	__ (b)
(3) consumer help line	__ (a)	__ (b)
(4) Ag News	__ (a)	__ (b)
(5) CE News on local cablevision	__ (a)	__ (b)
(6) consultation on such things as pesticides, waste management, water quality improvement, or home gardening, and parenting and child development	__ (a)	__ (b)



(8) In-school educational programs  (9) HIV educational program  (10) Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program  (11) Consumer helpline  (12) Coordinating and providing volunteer services  (13) Tele-C.U.E. automated question-and-answer service  (14) Home horticulture diagnostic lab  (15) GROWNET computer information service

7. What is your overall impression of the quality of Cornell Cooperative Extension programs or services in the following broad areas where:

1= Poor, 2= Fair, 3=Good 4=Very Good, 5=Excellent (6=don't know, no answer)

(1) Child development programs, such as 4-H  
 (2) Children's educational programs at the Suffolk County Farm  (3) Home gardening consulting and information  (4) Consumer support programs  
 (5) Publications, phone or on-line services  
 (6) Recycling education  (7) Food and nutrition programs  (8) Farming or fishing support programs  
 (9) Waste management consulting programs

8. Are you aware of the location of any Cornell Cooperative Extension center?  (1) yes  (2) no (If yes, proceed. If no, go to question 10)

9. Please name the locations that you know of (Do not read. Check location named.):  (1) Riverhead  
 (2) Southold  (3) Yaphank  (4) Hauppauge  
 (5) another location named

10. Have you ever used Cornell Cooperative services to provide information or help solve a problem for your business or job?

(1) yes  
 (2) no  
 (3) not sure/no answer

11. Do you regularly use some other research-based organization for help in your business or home:  
 (1) yes (please specify:  (2) no  (3) not sure/no answer

12. Have you ever attended an event, tour, or class at a Nassau County Cornell Cooperative extension location?

(1) yes  
 (2) no

13. Would you please indicate, by saying yes or no, whether your household includes any children in the following age groups? \_\_ (1) newborn to 5 years old \_\_ (2) over 5 years old to 10 years old \_\_ (3) over 10 years old to 15 years old \_\_ (4) over 15 to 18 years old \_\_ (5) no children (don't read)
14. What is your correct age group? Just stop me when I get to the correct group: \_\_ (1) under 25  
\_\_ (2) 25 to 29  
\_\_ (3) 30 to 39  
\_\_ (4) 40 to 49  
\_\_ (5) 50 to 61  
\_\_ (6) 62 or over
15. Are you employed in any of the following occupations?  
\_\_ (1) tourism related industry  
\_\_ (2) retail sales  
\_\_ (3) education  
\_\_ (4) government  
\_\_ (5) waste management/sanitation  
\_\_ (6) veterinary or animal management  
\_\_ (7) marine industries, including fishing  
\_\_ (8) agriculture and/or horticulture
16. Would you like more information about programs and services available from Cornell Cooperative Extension?  
(If yes, read "for Extension information, call (516) 727-7850  
\_\_ (1) Yes  
\_\_ (2) No  
\_\_ (3) Don't know/ no answer
17. Gender (record without asking)  
\_\_ (1) male  
\_\_ (2) female

Thank you very much for your help.

