

# WHITE PAPER:

## *Be Careful What You Ask For*

I often have the opportunity to see surveys written by people with little research experience. Sometimes, students will show me questionnaires they are writing for a project. Or I'll get a draft from a nonprofit or a church. Regardless, there are some simple mistakes often made by those new to survey preparation. While these are mistakes most often made by rookies, it's still good for those of us with more experience to do a bit a review.

### **Reminder #1: People have fuzzy memories.**

Our brains are constantly collating and regrouping our memories. This has real implications when it comes to customer satisfaction. If someone asks, what do you think of a company or a person or an event, our answer often involves a combination of the many times you have had such experiences. You'll give an answer that may not reflect any one encounter.

That's why, in a customer satisfaction survey, you need to be careful how you ask your questions. If you are trying to monitor satisfaction and look for any shifts, don't ask the more generic version of the question. Instead, I recommend you ask those responding to think back to their last visit or purchase. That way, if something bad or good happened, you are more likely to hear about it. Otherwise, someone who likes a company might ignore the recent bad experiences when they answer until the bad experiences become overwhelming.

Put another way, with the generic question, there will be more of a delay in tracking changes. By asking about the last visit or last experience, you'll know something is up if 5% of respondents had a bad experience one month and, in the next month, it rises to 30%.

It is difficult for individuals to give a good answer if the question is too vague.