The Ins and Outs of Survey Completion Rates

Find out which factors impact your survey completion rate

SURVICATE

Introduction

Collecting data gives you huge power – the power to make more informed business decisions. While collecting behavioral data like: most popular content, most frequently used product features or best-converting landing pages is a good start, it doesn't let you in on the "why", i.e. the reasons behind it.

You need more insights –which means, more feedback.

Using online surveys is one of the fastest and most effective methods to collect feedback, both from your current and future customers. That's the beauty of it!

But there are also a few issues you have to keep in mind while conducting surveys to make sure you're not setting yourself up for failure. One of them is ensuring you get a satisfactory survey completion rate. The lower your completion rate, the smaller your survey sample, which – in turn – will impact your data's validity.

In the following report, you'll find out **the factors that impact survey completion rates.**

We're going to show you not only the statistics for completed surveys (that is, where respondents completed the entire survey and hit "submit" at the last step) but also those from abandoned surveys.

It will give you **a truly comprehensive perspective of which question the survey completion rate starts to drop**.

What data did we consider?

The following report is based on data collected between **September 21, 2018, and January 21, 2019.**

We've analyzed **267,564 responses** from surveys conducted by our customers using Survicate. It contains findings from multiple survey types including email surveys, mobile surveys, targeted web surveys, link surveys, NPS and CSAT.

Data is not limited to any specific sector.

Survey Terminology Explained

- **Completion rate** - the number of questions answered divided by the total number of questions included in a survey

- **CSAT(Customer Satisfaction Survey)** - measures how satisfied customers are with products or services delivered by a company

- **NPS (Net Promoter Score)** - measures the overall customer experience and acts as an indicator or predictor of long term brand loyalty

- **TWS (Targeted Website Survey)** - survey run on a website to collect feedback from web visitors

- **Mobile survey** - a survey displayed on a mobile device

- **Email survey** - a survey sent via email with the first question embedded in the email

- **Link survey** - a survey shared via a link

Key findings analyzed

1. A notable drop in average completion rate with each additional question

It probably doesn't come as a surprise that the number of questions asked has a direct impact on the survey completion rate. In fact, the more questions your survey includes, the lower the average completion rate.

Surveys which included between 1-3 questions had an average completion rate of **83.34%**. The average completion rate drops to **65.15%** in surveys containing 4-8 questions. Questionnaires with 9-14 questions have a completion rate of **56.28%**, while those with 15 questions and more have a completion rate of **41.94%**.
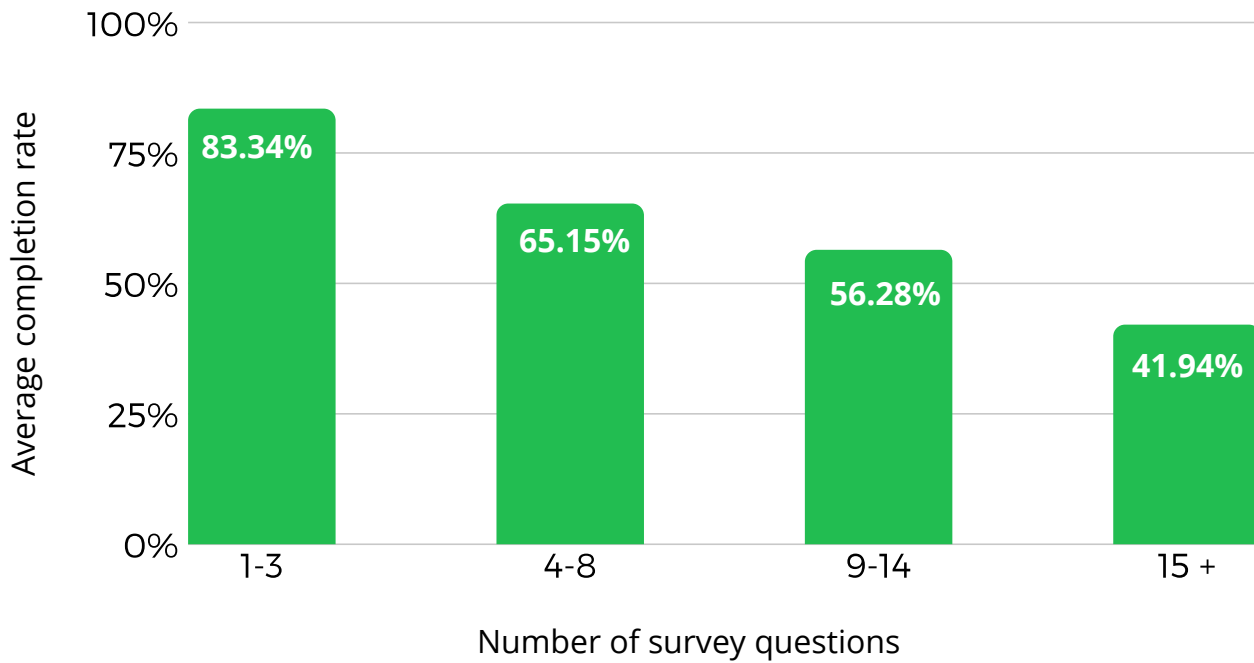
Figure One | The impact of the number of survey questions on the average completion rate
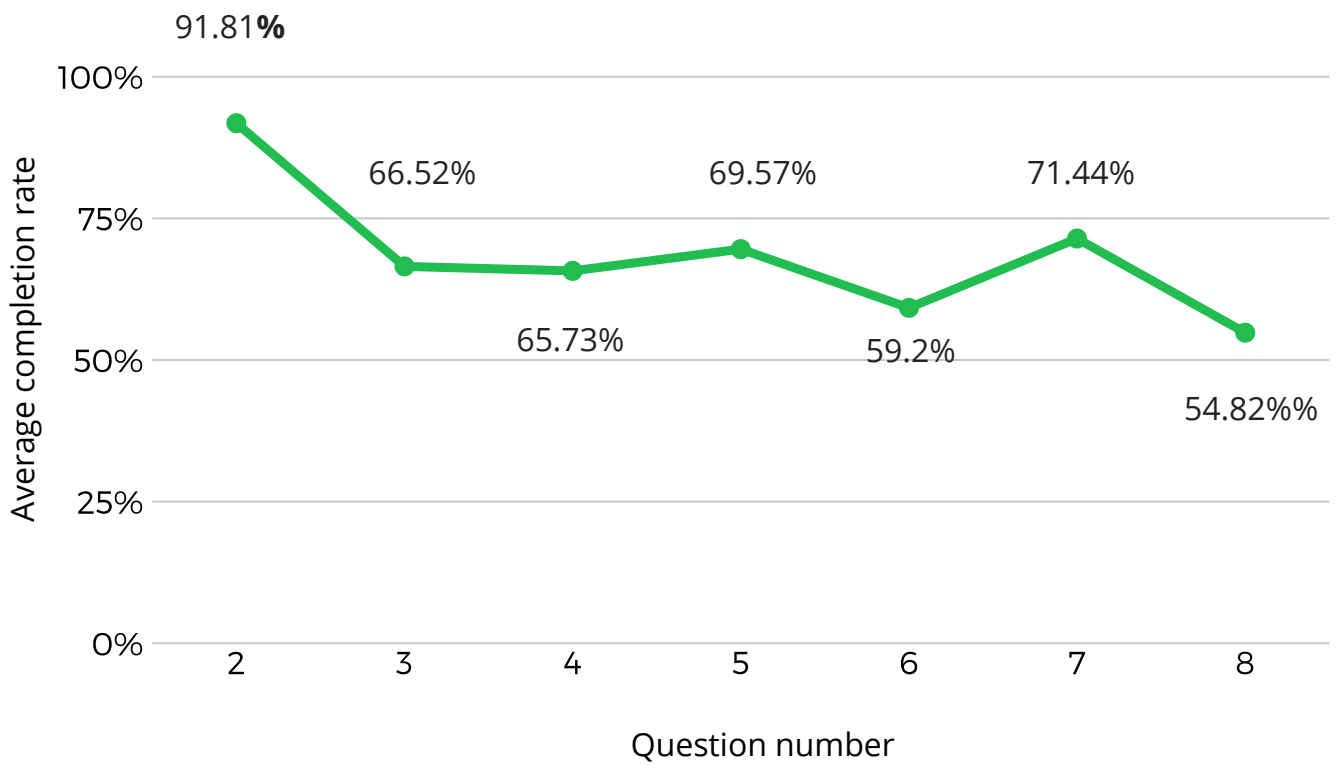

Figure Two | How the average completion rate changes per survey question

Why is this the case?

One of the reasons longer surveys have a lower completion rate might be due to survey fatigue (1). It occurs when a survey taker becomes tired or bored of answering questions. Just like eating too much chocolate can make you sick, answering too many questions can make your customers sick!

Another reason is timing. That's right – timing is everything. A survey which includes one or two questions can probably be completed in a minute or two. And it's highly probable that your respondent will be able to find a couple of minutes to fill it in.

Longer surveys are a different story. Not only does your respondent have to be free to answer your questions – which means they actually have to plan when to complete your survey – but also be in the right mindset, as longer surveys require more effort.

(1) Nielsen Norman Group

2. Question type impacts the completion rate

There are two types of questions you can include in a survey:

- a closed-ended question – a question with limited, pre-defined answer options

- an open-ended question – a question where respondents can answer in their own words

We've compared two survey types: those which included open-ended questions and those which included closed-ended questions only.

The former had an average completion rate of **60%** while the latter had an average completion rate of **61%**.
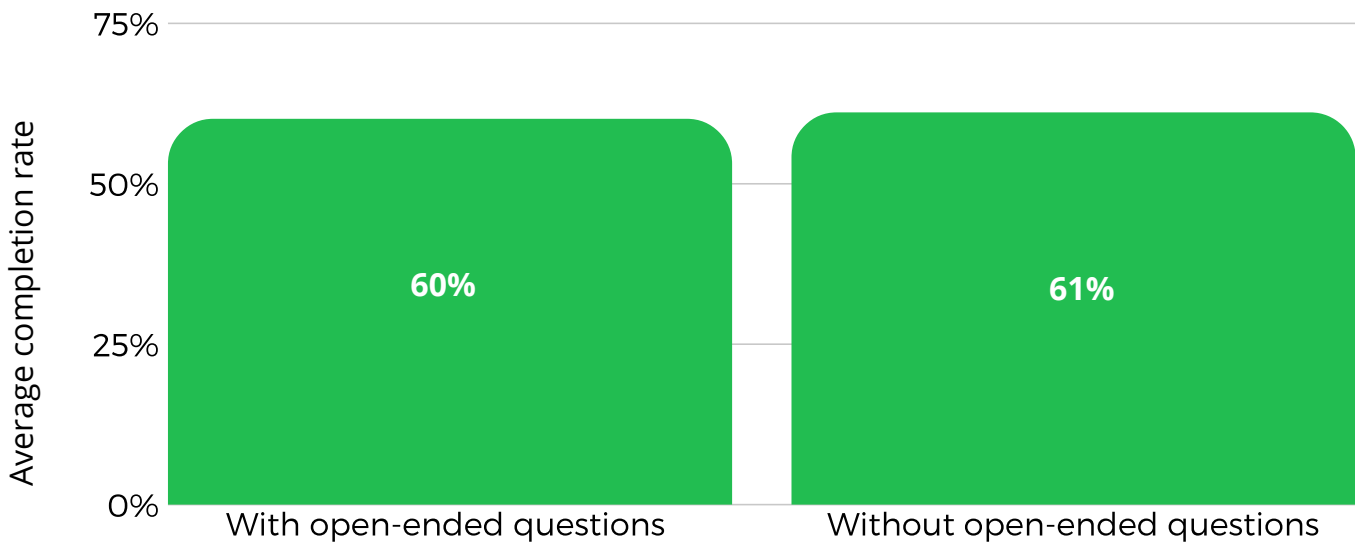

Figure Three | How the type of survey question impacts the average completion rate

Not much of a difference, right?

This is what we thought, which is why we've decided to investigate this issue further. We've checked how the average completion rate varies with each additional open-ended question asked.
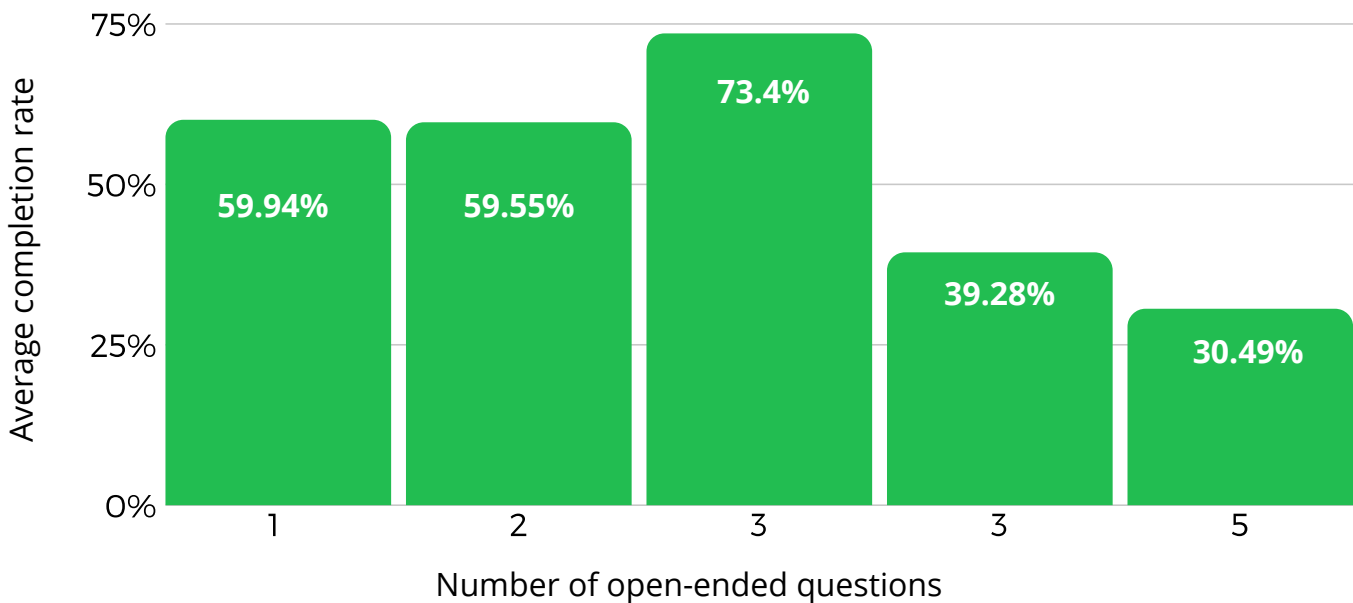Here are the results.

Figure Four | How the number of open-ended questions impacts the average completion rate

Surveys which have one open-ended question only have an average completion rate of **59.94%**, those with two – **59.55%**, three open-ended questions resulted in an average completion rate of **73.4%**, four questions – **39.28%**, while the lowest completion rate **(30.49%)** can be observed in surveys including five open-ended questions.

As clearly demonstrated by the graph above, the completion rate drops significantly after the third question asked. There is no difference in the average completion rate in surveys containing one and two open-ended questions.

In general, people are more reluctant to answer open-ended questions. How so? They might view them as too difficult to respond to – they simply don't know what to say.

How closely they can relate to the researched subject, will determine their willingness to answer open-ended questions (or not). Someone who is indifferent to the discussed issue (2) most probably won't be motivated enough to share their opinion on the topic.

And this is not necessarily a bad thing – you should aim at getting answers from people who care about the subject, only then will it have a positive impact on your research quality.

Not to mention that open-ended answers aren't quantitative, which means you won't be able to cross-analyze them easily.

(2) Nielsen Norman Group

3. Survey distribution channel impacts the completion rate

The way you distribute your survey will also impact your completion rate.

The data displayed on the graph below considers both email embedded surveys and surveys which were sent via a link.
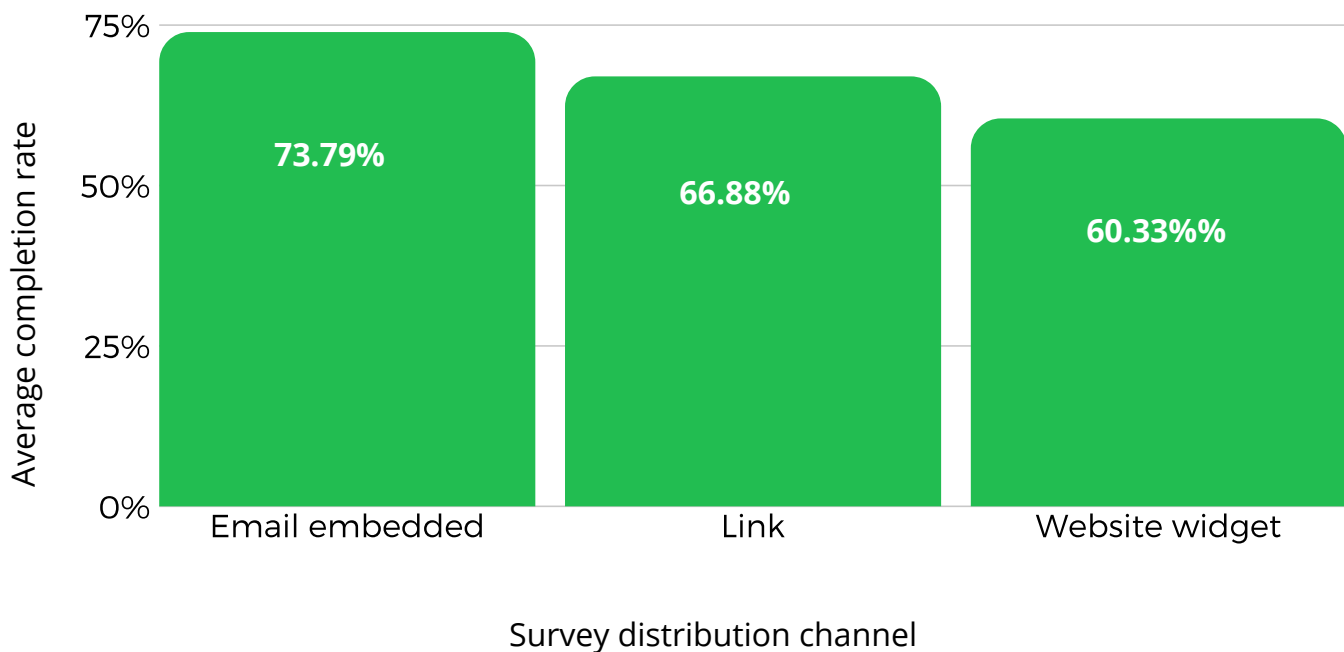

Figure Five | How survey distribution channel impacts the average completion rate

So what does it reveal?

In case you're wondering whether email has been surpassed by any other customer communication channel, it hasn't – though other channels are certainly gaining traction.

Email is still king, with surveys sent via email noting the highest average completion rate – **73.79%**. Surveys distributed via a link have an average completion rate of **66.88%**, while website surveys have an average completion rate of **60.33%**.

Furthermore, embedding the first survey question in the email has a positive effect on the average completion rate.

No wonder that questionnaires distributed via email tend to work best. Email is still considered the most effective communication channel. On average we check our inboxes 15 times a day (3). We're basically email addicts – and this increases the probability of answering a survey. The more time we spend scanning our inbox, the higher the chance of noticing an email survey.

Another benefit of sending a survey via email is that respondents can return to it in their own time – there's less pressure on them to fill it in here and now.

When it comes to web surveys, there're a few factors you need to consider:
- who do you target them at
- when do you display them (immediately after a visitor enters the website, on exit intent, or after they scroll to the bottom of the page)

(3) Forbes

All of the choices above will impact your survey completion rates. When you send it via email, there're fewer decisions you have to make.

4. The type of device used to fill in a survey impacts the completion rate

Another factor impacting average survey completion rate is the device the survey was attempted on. There is practically no difference in the average completion rate between tablets and mobile devices – having **69.68%** and **69.29%** average completion rates respectively. Questionnaires filled in on the desktop have an average completion rate of **57.43%**.
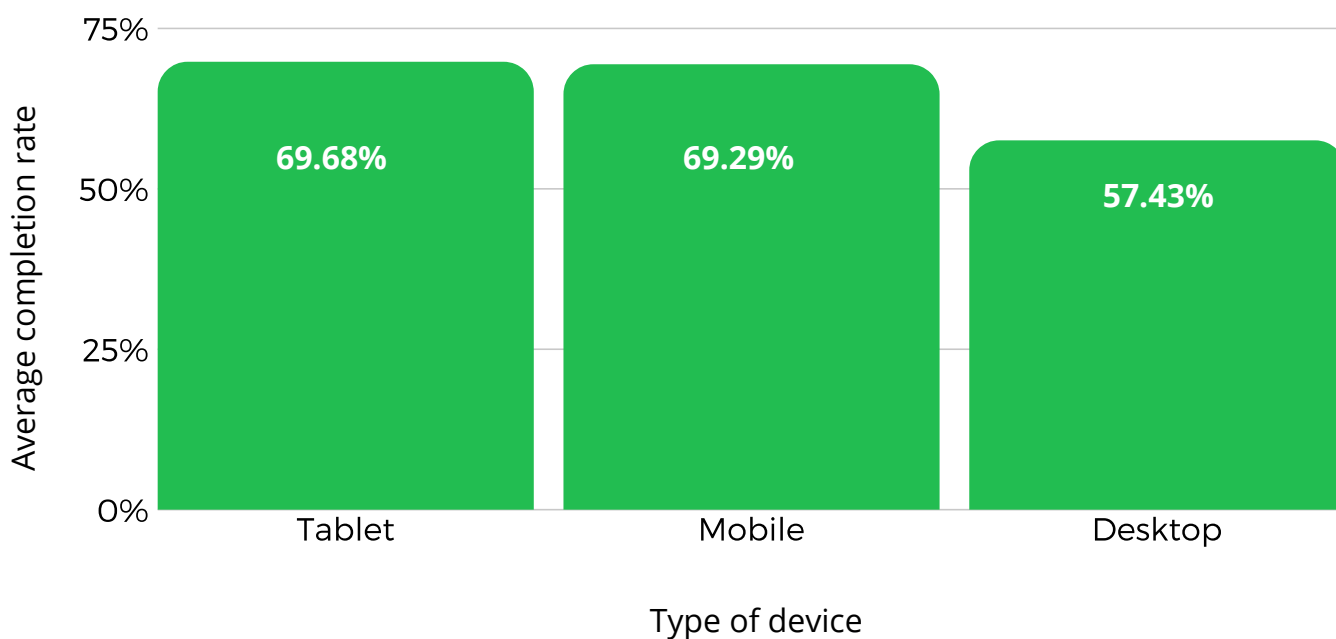

Figure Six | How the type of device impacts the average completion rate

Answering surveys on mobile phones and tablets might be more convenient for respondents (as in user-friendly), provided that the survey doesn't include too many open-ended questions.

What's more, they can access it literally from anywhere, for example, sitting on a bus/train on their way to work, or during their lunch break.

Recommendations for conducting surveys in 2019

People are busy, your customers/leads included. Keep your surveys short and sweet. Surveys with 1-3 questions have the highest average completion rate (**83.34%**).

Think hard about what you want to achieve with your survey, or what information you want to get. The more questions your questionnaire includes, the longer it takes to fill it in, the lesser the chance your respondent will complete it.

Just accept the fact that you won't be able to get all the insights you want with one survey. It's better to do a couple of shorter surveys than one very long one. It's good practice to include the most important questions at the start, in case your respondent decides to abandon the survey before fully completing it.

Don't overdo it with open-ended questions. Yes, they enable your respondents to get creative, they might present you with the feedback you've never expected to receive and shed completely new light on the subject you're investigating.

However, they're also time-consuming and not everyone will be willing to invest time and energy in answering them.

You now know that surveys with up to three questions perform best. There is no difference in completion rates between surveys including one and two open-ended questions, so you might want to consider including two open-ended and one close-ended question.

Especially if you're interested in collecting more qualitative data.

Still, bear in mind that open-ended questions are harder to analyze than closed-ended questions, so remember this next time you design a survey.

When it comes to survey distribution, email wins, but it doesn't mean you should put all your eggs in one basket. Email is effective as it's got a wider reach. Everyone (well, almost everyone) uses it but it's not everyone's preferred communication channel.

Respect people's preferences and don't limit yourself to email only, see what works for your customers and leads. You can mix up various distribution channels.

Surveys completed on tablets and mobiles have a higher average completion rate than those filled in on the desktop. Make sure all your surveys are mobile optimized to enable easier survey completion.

Send surveys with Survicate – you'll never miss any feedback

Survicate is an all-in-one customer feedback software used by companies like Atlassian, Sendgrid, and TaskRabbit.

Survicate saves answers to ALL survey questions, including the partially completed ones, so you don't miss out on any feedback!

We know that timing's everything, so to boost your completion rates we let survey participants return to their unfinished surveys even after closing their web browser. They can start exactly where they left off without losing any data. A perfect solution, for your user researchers and respondents alike!

Start for free, upgrade as you grow

SIGN UP FREE

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