Surveys and Focus Groups

Surveys and focus groups are good tools to evaluate users’ interests and feelings about a product (or potential product). They can be a starting point for determining areas you want to focus more in depth research like observations and contextual inquiry.

Surveys

Strengths

- Getting general feelings about an existing product
- Acquiring demographic data on target market
- Understanding what users “think” is important (marketing data)

Weaknesses

- Survey design is very difficult to get right
- Constrained responses
- Typically limited time & focus for response
- Limited or not ability to follow-up for clarification

- Relies on user to self-report accurately

Survey Design Resources

- 19 Lessons from United Airlines on How To Build A Crappy Survey
- Qualities of a Good Survey Question
- Survival Statistics' chapter on survey design
- Penn State Survey Resource Center's Educational Resources

Focus Groups

Strengths

- Can talk to many people at once
- Allows users to feed on each others’ ideas
- Can help understand users’ attitudes, beliefs and desires
- Useful for getting users’ reactions to ideas or to prototypes

Weaknesses

- Not great for understanding what people REALLY do with a product
- Not good for understanding what features people will really use in a new product (only what interests them)
- “Group think” drives people toward consensus with the loudest opinion
- Relies on user to self-report accurately

Focus Group Resources

- The Use and Misuse of Focus Groups by Jakob Nielsen