

How a F.R.O.G. Keeps Washington State Ferries Afloat



A Ridership Survey Case Study



FERRYRIDERS' OPINION GROUP

Jump On Board

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Survey Analytics
Enterprise Research Platform

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Washington State collects passenger feedback through an innovative smartphone feedback system. At left is an example of the use of QR Codes to allow riders to easily share their opinions of their ridership experience with transit officials.

This case study illustrates how a major public transportation agency is successfully leveraging the latest marketing research technology in panel management and digital surveys to better serve its riders and communities.

Washington State Ferries is the largest ferry system in the United States, serving eight counties within Washington State and the Province of British Columbia in Canada. With annual ridership of almost 23 million passengers, the system has nine routes and 20 terminals that are served by 22 vessels. Although passengers are transported by water instead of wheels or rails, the ferry system must understand its passengers just as any major public transit agency in order to be successful.

Although various rider studies had been conducted through the years, the system had never had a systematic customer insights program. Washington State Ferries decided to build and maintain a feedback panel of riders in order to listen and to communicate with

them regarding fare and route structure changes.

In 2010, Washington State Ferries launched the Ferry Riders Opinion Group (F.R.O.G.). This was a revolutionary method for a transit agency to continuously monitor rider experience.

The F.R.O.G. panel is made possible through a partnership among Washington State Ferries, Survey Analytics, and a research consultant. While the research consultant provides the questionnaire design, reporting and presentations, Survey Analytics provides the software backbone of the project, including panel management, survey invitations, survey execution, and full analytics.

Riders were recruited to the panel using a variety of methods, including ride-aboard intercepts, interviewers, mailers, and a link on the Ferry System's website.

Using the latest in mobile technology, riders are now recruited to the panel via QR codes on posters in ferryboats and terminals. Passengers simply scan the QR Code with their smartphone to join.

Note: See an example of the Washington State Ferries QR Code poster on the next page.

Building The Panel

Riders who wish to join the F.R.O.G. panel are directed to an online portal (FerryRidersOpinionGroup.com) where they can sign up using their email address. As part of the signup process, users are also asked to fill out a profile. The profile was designed and customized by the Commission to reflect segments such as casual, vacation and daily commuters. The voluntary profiling allows Washington State Ferries to be in full control of sampling and analysis.

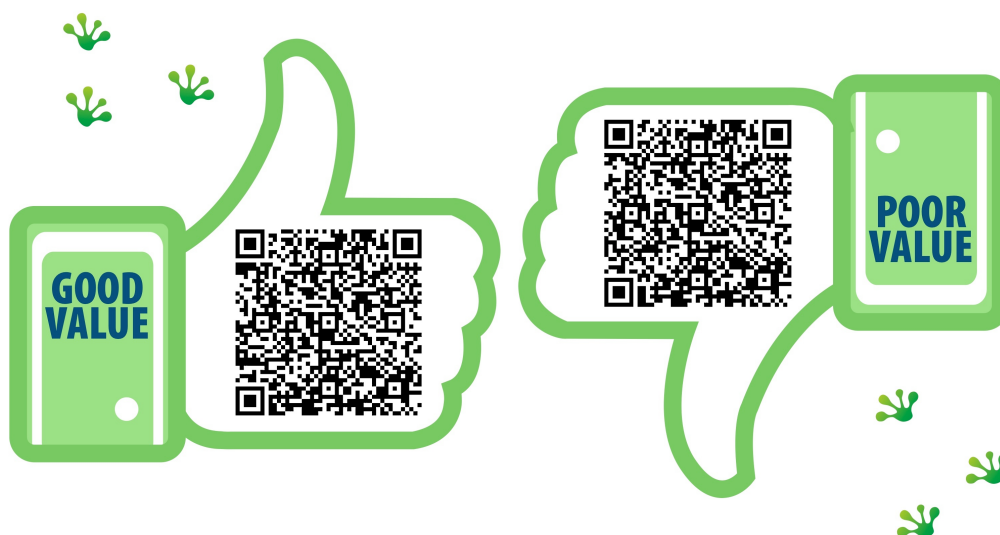


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Join F.R.O.G. tell us how we're doing

Use your mobile device to scan one of the square codes below to tell us if you think WSF is a good value for the fare you paid or not and to join the F.R.O.G.



Or skip the vote and sign-up at:
www.FerryRidersOpinionGroup.com



This poster is used throughout Washington State Ferries' system.

Some other profile questions are:

- Age
- Gender
- Frequency of usage (ridership)
- Route Information
- Residency (Island or Mainland)

Once registered with the panel, riders are invited to participate in research studies, including online surveys. Some of the data collected is also shared with riders as “quick polls” to keep them engaged and develop a shared sense of responsibility. The system has consistently received over 50% participation rates on surveys, in large part, because of this capacity to share the data with its constituents.

The Survey Analytics Enterprise Research Platform that drives the F.R.O.G. panel is a one-stop solution for managing customer and rider feedback via digital connections.

Research Projects and Surveys

Surveys are developed and programmed using the Survey Analytics point-and-click interface to create questionnaires. They are deployed to the panel members via email invitations and smartphone-based push notifications (depending upon how riders have elected to receive communication). Opt-in push

notifications can even be sent based on the riders’ physical location - such as a particular terminal, route or destination - using smartphones’ geolocation function. Survey responses can include photographs - capturing maintenance issues, rider experience and more. Automatic email alerts can also be sent based on survey responses.

The Survey Analytics survey wizard allows multiple administrators to create and deploy frequent *ad-hoc* and tracking studies without any help from IT staff or the delay and cost of an outside marketing research consultant.

On-Board Rider Surveys

Any agency which has employed intercept interviewers for data collection can attest to the complications that can arise. Paper questionnaires often need to be entered by hand - sometimes days later - lengthening the reporting cycle. With paper surveys, questionnaire flow cannot be enforced and open-ended responses can be illegible. Further, individual questionnaires can be lost.

Tablet Surveys

Washington Ferries can now conduct ride-aboard intercept surveys using questionnaires programmed on tablets such as iPads, Kindles and Android Tablets, with no active internet

connection required. Data is available as soon as the tablets are synced, open ended questions are legible, and questionnaire logic is followed.

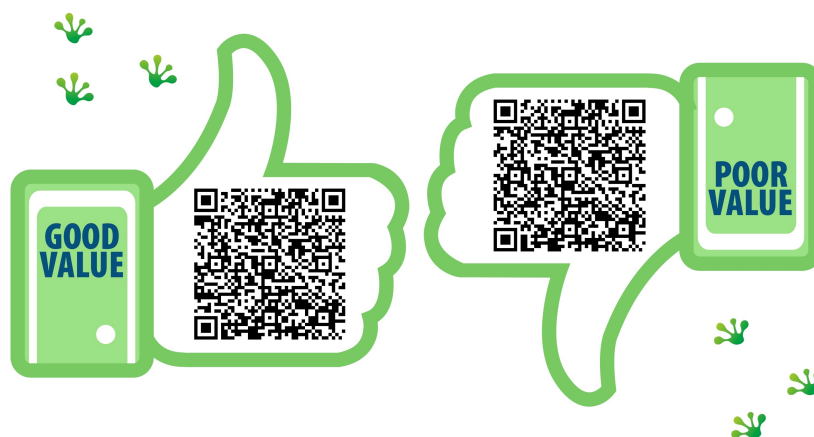
The Results

The F.R.O.G. panel has been a tremendous success. The system has used rider feedback to introduce new fare structures, improve rider satisfaction and better serve the communities that depend on the ferry service. The Washington State Legislature was so impressed by the usefulness of the program that a new statewide transportation survey panel has been funded. Other Washington-based regional transportation agencies are laying the groundwork to establish their own user panels as well.

According to Bill Young, WSTC project manager, “The use of Survey Analytics’ Enterprise suite of advanced features has aided WSTC in its efforts to maintain a close connection with riders and make the Washington State Ferry a better system.

Engaging riders regularly through a survey panel is proving to be an invaluable method for transit agencies to stretch their research dollar, gather new customer insights and build customer engagement like never before.

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To learn how Survey Analytics create a ridership panel for you, please call Jack Geiger at 360.471.5514 or email him at jack.geiger@surveyanalytics.com.