Consumer Expenditure Survey Redesign

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Survey Redesign Panel II
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Survey Overview

- **Objective**
  - Collect information on the buying habits of America’s consumers, including their expenditures, income, and household characteristics
  - Used for periodic revision of the Consumer Price Index (CPI)

- **Sample Frame**
  - Conducted by Census Bureau with their address frame
  - Unit is “consumer unit” (CU)
  - Interview Survey (CEQ): 5 interview waves, 7,060 respondents = 35,300 annual responses
  - Diary Survey (CED): 2 one-week self administered diaries, 7,050 respondents * 2 = 14,100 annual responses
Survey Overview

- Interview Survey: 5 interview waves
  - Designed to be via personal visit, but about 1/3 are by telephone
  - Average response rate - 74% (CY 2010)

- Diary Survey: 2 one-week self administered diaries
  - Average response rate - 77% (CY 2010)
Redesign Motivations

- Evidence of measurement error
- Environmental changes in technology and spending behaviors
- Need for greater flexibility

Redesign objective

- Verifiable reduction in measurement error, with a particular focus on underreporting
- Taking two paths – large and small-scale
Summary of Small Scale Redesign topics

- Reducing the length of the CEQ (for 2011 on)
  - Eliminating questions
  - Streamlining sections
- Estimating income taxes
- Using CED data to impute for CEQ data
- Determine need for bounding interview and research ways to reduce Interview #2
- Web Diary
Data Users: Two data user surveys

- Users’ have a variety of (often competing) priorities, but tend to rate quantity (e.g., a complete data set for a CU) over quality (e.g., response rates).

- In general, users tend to ask for more; more details and more sample
Records: Two field studies

- It is very time consuming to get respondents to collect records
- The process of matching records to the flow of interview questions requires interviewer flexibility and respondent effort and cooperation
Global Questions: Lab and field studies

- Mixed results on correlation between global responses and detailed responses - varies by category

- Respondents don’t use a systematic, recall or expenditure-based strategy for arriving at answer

- Mixed opinion about accuracy of global questions
Survey Mode: Production data analysis, usability tests

- Telephone interviews resulted in comparable data quality when use of recall aids is controlled
- There are many operational issues with implementing a web survey for CE diary
Handling the Unexpected

- Typical project management issues, such as delays or underestimates of time needed to complete tasks
  - Had to lock Design Team into a report even though inputs for the report may not be finished
- Gemini Project Initiative was not funded
  - Will try to remain budget neutral
  - Implementing small-scale redesign options that will likely save money
Final Redesign Model

- Developing the final design
  - Interagency Design Team will kick-off this week
  - Incorporate inputs from multitude of sources

- Final Design approval
  - Presentations to levels of CE and BLS management
  - Stakeholder feedback
    - Design will have integrated feedback from previous user surveys and forums
    - Data User Impact Team to kick-off in 2013 – feedback will be integrated into final transition roadmap
Redesign Evaluation

- Evaluation of redesign success
  - Goal: a reduction in measurement error
  - Funding research contracts to produce a turn-key research plan to estimate measurement error pre and post redesign

- Final testing prior to implementation
  - Will have a large-scale pilot of the redesigned surveys
  - Five years to plan, implement, and analyze
Timeline

- 2009: Project planning, definition of data quality
- 2010: Identify and prioritize user needs, hold research methodology workshops
- 2011 - 2012: Develop inputs for redesign proposal and survey alternatives
- 2012 - 2013: Develop redesign proposal
  - Currently: Almost done developing inputs; Design Team to kick-off this week; Implementation of Small-scale redesign changes
- 2013 – 2018: Testing portions of redesign
- 2018 – 2023: Implementation of redesign
Costs

- Submitted budget initiative for Gemini (e.g., large scale redesign research); it was denied
- The CE research program has an annual budget, most of which has gone towards redesign work
- The redesign survey must remain “budget neutral”
Contact Information

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