

Influencers and Trends in Mail Surveys

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About GfK Health Insurance Research

- GfK NOP is international research organization. In short:
 - GfK: Germany (and continental Europe)
 - NOP: England
 - Roper (and others): North America

- Long history of research for insurance industry
 - Insurance Research Group established in mid-1980's
 - Health insurance as well as other types
 - Large number / Wide variety of:
 - Clients
 - Research topics
 - Research methods

- This presentation comes from:
 - Research measuring satisfaction of health plan members
 - This research often conducted using mail method. Key reasons include:
 - Universal sampling: Have accurate mail addresses for all
 - Cost effective for large number of completes
 - Ability to get reasonably good response rates

Key Steps in the Successful Use of Mailed Surveys

3

- Getting the surveys to the right address
 - Good mailing addresses; address forwarding; Right survey to the right person
- Survive the junk mail sorting; Get the envelope opened
 - Demonstrate with mailing envelope that is from a relevant, trustworthy source (known logo, pre-notification)
- Survive the post-opening sort
 - Cover letter and survey format further establish legitimacy
 - Incentive establishes legitimacy, and reciprocity
- Saliency and low cost of response
 - Ask questions that are salient
 - Ask as few questions as you can
 - Make questions easy to answer
 - Assure confidentiality
- Keep from being forgotten
 - Reminders
 - Second mailing to non-responders
 - Even phone follow-up

Two Case Histories Provide Insight

4

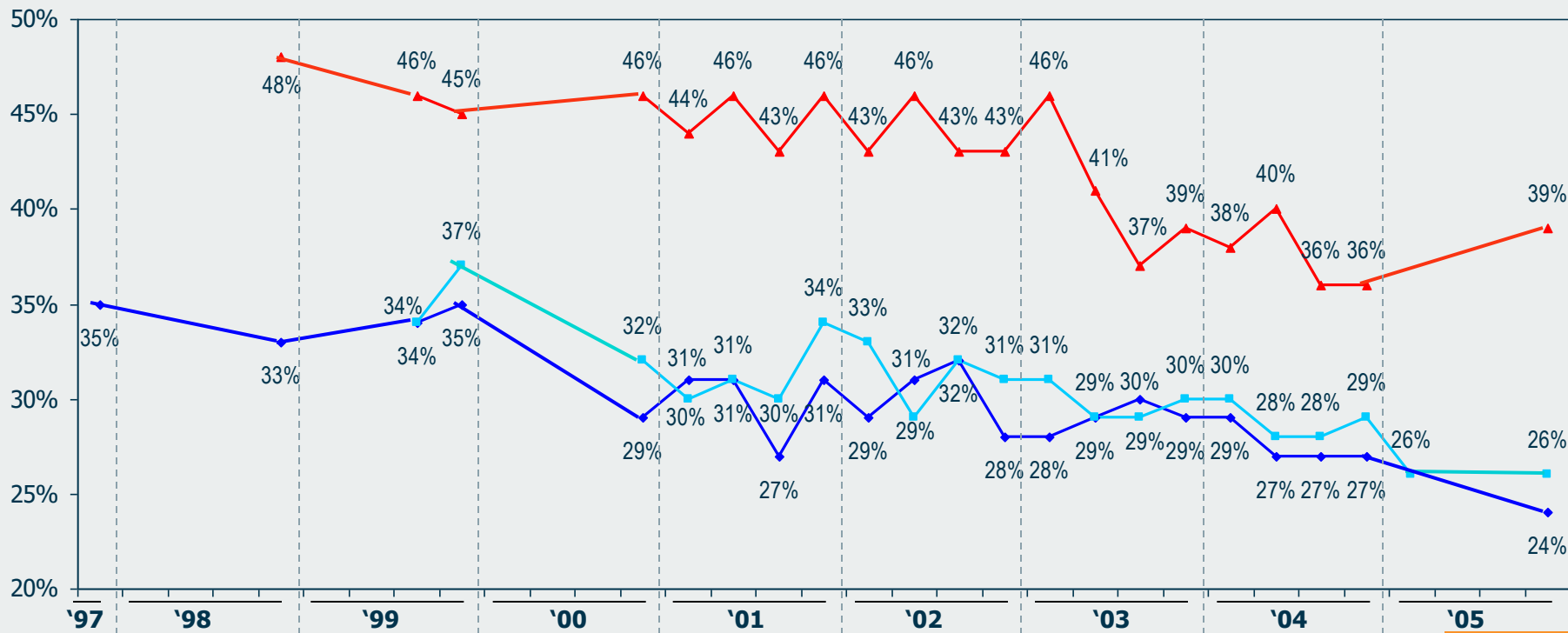
- Case Study #1:
 - Has had same methodology over several years
 - Provides opportunity to examine what has happened to response rates over the years

- Case Study #2:
 - Has had multiple adjustments to methodology (for a variety of reasons)
 - Provides opportunity to look at effects methodological changes on levels of response

Case Study #1: With Identical Method and Population, Decline in Response Rates Seen

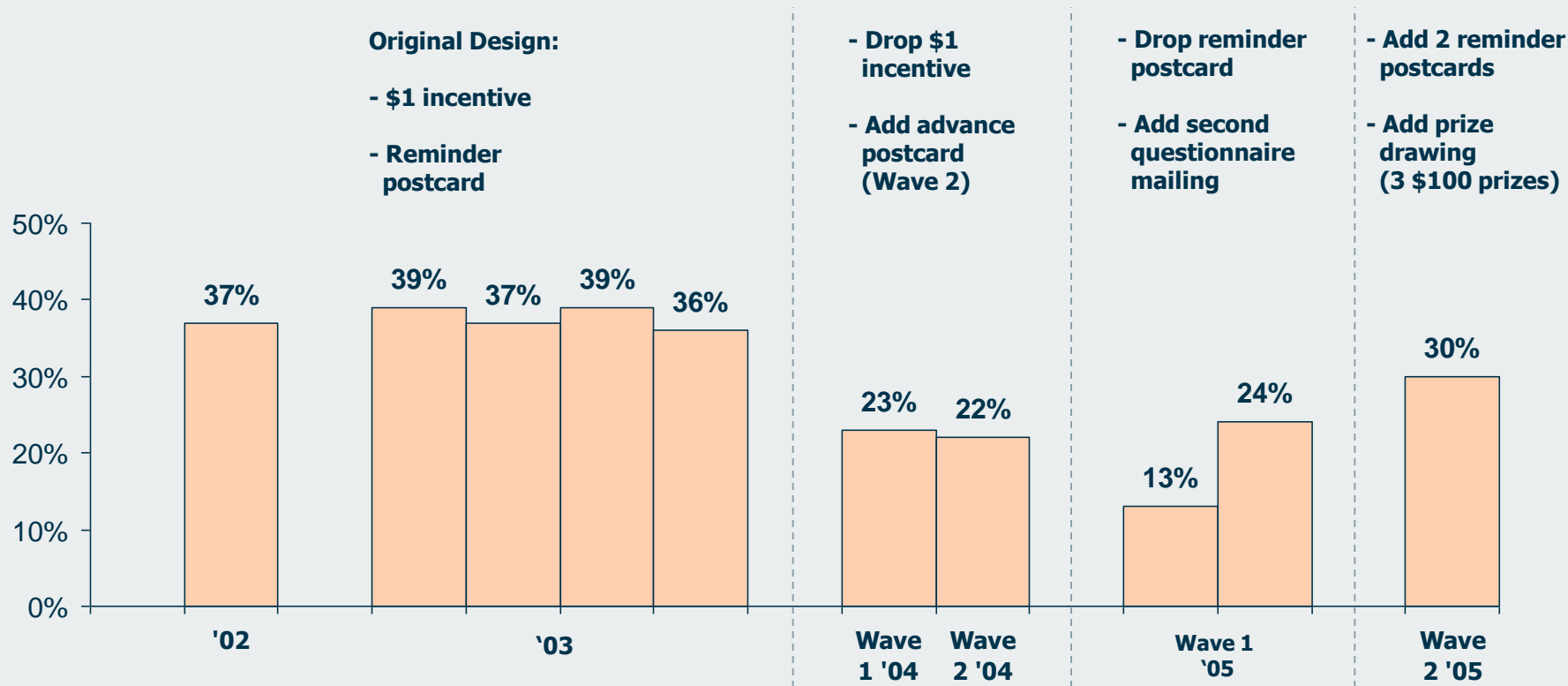
Mailout Characteristics:

- Questionnaire Mailing: 4-page survey, Client logo on outgoing envelope, logo and signature on cover letter
- Incentive: \$1 enclosed
- Reminder postcard mailed in following week



Case Study #2: With Variation in Method, Effects of Different Mailout Characteristics Seen

6



Comparing These Results with Other Response Rate Research

7

- Trends over time: Slow declines starting at the end of 1990's
 - Dillman and Carley-Baxter (2000) did not see decline in trend from 1988-1999

- Incentives and Reminders: Numerous studies showing effect
 - Dillman proposes 'social exchange theory' to explain effect of enclosed incentive vs. promised incentive
 - Fox, Crask, and Kim (1988) meta-analysis: Significant response rate increases seen with multiple notifications, university sponsorship, and type of postage. Also, decreasing effect of larger incentives
 - Including incentives increased response rate as well as decreased question-item non-response (Wheeler, et. Al., 1997)
 - Higher response with either preliminary or reminder notification (Chiu and Brennan, 1990)
 - New York State Dept. of Health/GfK test of \$0, \$1, and \$2 incentive (2002): Response increases by same amount with \$1 or \$2 incentive
 - Combination of enclosed incentive and reminder has more effect than either in isolation (James and Bolstein, 1990)
 - \$1 enclosed obtains higher response rate than no incentive. Promise of \$50 for completion does not obtain higher response rate (James and Bolstein, 1992)

Conclusions

8

- **Incentives Matter**
- Two Rules for Incentives:
 - Guilt Works Better than Greed
 - One Bird in the Hand is Worth Three Hundred in the Bush

- **Reminders Matter**
- Reminders Cut Through the Clutter as People are Receiving Lots More Mail
 - Note that, over time, this strategy only adds to the overall problem
 - Everyone (especially non-researchers) sending increasing amounts of mail for the same reason, causing more clutter to cut through

- Ultimately, Getting High Response Rates May Require High Incentives with Shorter Surveys