Final conclusions

regarding the

2013 Empowerment Survey

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Summary

Trendicy Corporation was asked to provide some guidance to a issue-oriented special interest group [SIG] as to the viability of applying Trendicy proprietary technology to a membership survey consisting of multiple-choice and free-form questions conducted using a provider of survey functionality.

In particular, there were a series of questions asking for comments which yielded answers in an unstructured format that were candidates for the technologies in question. These questions were designed to elicit answers regarding two areas of particular interest to the SIG. Further, within those areas were words and/or phrases carrying special meaning for Survey respondents and reviewers. Those areas are:

- the receptivity to having 'professional' practitioners participate in the closed community; and

- the receptivity to having representatives from equipment vendor companies participate in the community as well.

Relatively few respondents (less than 25%) included comments in their responses. Although there were fewer comments they reflect strongly-held feelings—which preliminary analysis found to be primarily negative. It would be seen that more detailed analysis bore this conclusion out, while providing hidden nuance that was useful in constructing an acceptable alternative.

This result was in stark contrast to the quantitative picture resulting from the multiple-choice questions that comprised the structured portion of the Survey [61% saying it would be okay, with ~ 68% requesting some additional level of restrictions].[1] *It should be noted that 23% stated they would not be in favor of these new groups joining the online community under any circumstances.*

This inconsistency in the responses could have resulted from the way the questions were structured. The responses offered may not have accurately elicited the feelings of the respondents, and the respondents' true feeling may have been more accurately reflected in their answers to the unstructured questions. *This would be another dimension of the results that would be tested during deeper analysis.*

One conclusion that was immediately apparent was that the sentiment of those responding with comments were expressing a stronger opinion as to the questions of allowing the participation of 'professional' practitioners and vendors that those who chose to limit their responses to the more structured multiple-choice questions.[2]

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1 Numbers add up to greater than 100% of respondents as they are aggregates across two questions.
2 Tables were also provided to the client as further elements of the product.

Methodology

The methodology followed was two-fold:

1. A preliminary exercise involving the extraction of unstructured data from the survey results document, importing the data into a relational database, then using the Structured Query Language to do high-level queries of the resulting tabular data for a preliminary report. The intent of this exercise was to demonstrate and validate the data-acquisition strengths of the *Trend*™ technology from Trendicy. In effect, it was a proof-of-concept effort.

2. Upon acceptance of this preliminary report, signifying agreement with the ability of Trendicy to deliver the structure and goals for the analysis, proprietary technologies were subsequently applied to the database created for the preliminary report to extract greater intelligence from the data.

With the lexical content and sentiment values adhering to domain-specific words established, processing of unstructured data was performed to derive quantified [using a scale from -10 to 10, inclusive] representations of the unstructured data, supporting algorithmic reduction of the data for combination with or comparison to the results of the responses in the structured portion of the Survey.

Results gathered supported conclusions drawn as to numbers, frequencies and sentiments of responses in the designated areas of interest. These conclusions were based on the Survey in question, and may or may not be borne out by longer-term analysis of data from follow-on Surveys or other, supporting sources.

This resulted in a set of conclusions reflecting the shared experiences and perspectives of Survey respondents while effectively minimizing non-contextual bias and interpretation [resulting from external observers].

Lexical logic

[Detailed analysis of the data was to be conducted using a Lexicon tailored to be specific to the SIG context, having added words and phrases of importance that are not typically present in or are different from the base lexicon [representing general, idiomatic phraseology external to the SIG communities] used by the Trendicy analytics and re-evaluating values representing sentiments adhering to those and other words in the SIG context.]

Outcome Sought

A stated goal of this study conducted by the SIG was to confirm whether the comments provided by their members aligned with the responses to the multiple-choice questions. In short, did the comments reflect the same sentiment and weight (i.e., high volume of responses centered about a small variety of themes) as those in the structured responses?

The SIG was also looking for insight on how to best respond to the question of whether to allow professional practitioners and representatives of vendor companies to participate in the closed, online community.

This survey was not intended to act as a referendum, giving the community members a "vote" on whether to allow these new groups to join. But rather, it was intended as a tool to guide the community administrators on how best to proceed in addressing this question. For this reason the SIG was particularly interested in identifying strong feelings as reflected in participant comments. The SIG was particularly interested in identifying any restrictions that might possibly be suggested as conditions governing the participation of these new participants, as well as the strength of any sentiment behind those suggestions.

Conclusions

While approximately seventy-five percent of respondents to the structured questions said participation by non-affiliated professionals would be okay (with thirty percent of these respondents feeling there should be some restriction imposed on their participation), comments in response to the related unstructured question(s) demonstrated a like attitude with a slightly less positive sentiment.

To the second question about allowing participation by non-affiliated agents of mainstream and other device suppliers, while approximately fifty-nine percent of respondents expressed the opinion that said participation would be okay (with thirty-nine percent of respondents feeling there should be some restriction imposed on their participation), comments in response to the related unstructured question(s) elicited the same attitude with a much less positive sentiment.

First question of interest

"What do you think about consulting professionals who work with people who have this issue, but who don't have the issue themselves, joining our social networks?"

This question was presented as an open-ended query, providing for the ability to respond with one or more free-form textual elements comprised of a word or words, phrase(s), or sentence(s). Text entry was accomplished in a virtually unlimited-length [4096 byte] field.

While the respondents may have felt permissive toward the participation of professionals (i.e., it would be "okay" or "okay with some restrictions") that sentiment came with some desire for restrictions being placed on the professionals.

Overall, participation by professionals was acceptable (while not necessarily approved) but carried a moderately negative sentiment [44% zero or below].

The responses to this question were quantified as the following:

- There were two hundred and seventy-three responses to the question (twenty-three percent of respondents).

- The maximum sentiment expressed was a positive ten (two respondents).

- The median sentiment expressed was a positive one (the sentiment at which total sentiment above or below is exactly equal), which was divergent from the results as determined by the structured question(s). Given that the results there would appear to be centered at the higher point of the spectrum [41% & 29% respectively to the two most positive responses], the extracted value (from the unstructured responses) of only slightly higher than neutral was interpreted as significant.

- The mode sentiment expressed was zero, or neutral (the sentiment occurring most frequently). This also called into question the reliability of the results derived in the structured section.

- The minimum sentiment expressed was a negative nine.

- The standard deviation was 2.98, such that the bulk of responses lay between approximately positive four and negative two.

- The data was skewed toward the negative end of the scale [skew = -0.301, of a

maximum of -1], indicative of a response set having an orientation toward more negative than positive responses.

◦ The variance was approximately nine, indicative of some diffusion of responses [a broad spectrum of attitude toward the proposition, rather than a more centrally-held attitude on the part of the respondents]. This is exemplified in the maximum value of ten, while the median and mode reside between zero and one.

◦ Two thirds [66.5%] of the responses were below a positive three. This was indicative of an at best moderately positive response, but more probably neutral to negative.

Common theme

Further investigation of the responses to the unstructured questions yielded a few notable themes running through all responses having a sentiment score of -3 or less (i.e.: -3 through a -9):

- that professionals do not attempt to offer judgment of any kind, including lecturing/preaching instead of discussing the topic [25%], and that;

- the licensed professionals must identify themselves [18%] at, or prior to, joining any discussion.

The final theme being expressed related directly to the level of intimate, practical knowledge that might be possessed by any professionals (i.e.: low or non-existent) if they were not themselves also members of the demographic served by the SIG.[3]

The lowest-scored comment is: "these people should disclose who they work for and that there be NO sales pitches nor practicing online."

Second question of interest

"What do you think about people who work as or for the associated device vendors, but who don't have life experience themselves, joining our social networks?"

While the respondents may have felt some permissiveness toward the participation of people from vendors, that qualified permissiveness came with a definite desire for restrictions being placed on their participation.

Overall, sentiment toward the participation by people from the device vendors in the communities was acceptable (while not necessarily approved), but carried a significant negative sentiment [52% zero or below].

The responses to this question were quantified as the following:

◦ There were two hundred and forty-seven responses to the question (twenty-one percent of respondents)

◦ The maximum sentiment expressed was a positive six. This is a relatively low value for a maximum sentiment.

◦ The median sentiment expressed was zero (the sentiment at which total sentiment above or below is exactly equal). Contrasting this with the results of the structured portion of the Survey, where approximately fifty-eight percent were indicating some

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3   Selected responses were provided in Appendices

acceptance for the proposal, a reasonable doubt is raised as to the efficacy of those results.

- The mode sentiment expressed was zero, or neutral (the sentiment occurring most frequently). This called into question the reliability of the results derived in the structured section.

- The minimum sentiment expressed was a negative nine.

- The standard deviation was 3.22, such that the bulk of responses lay between approximately positive three and negative three. At best, this was interpreted as neutral, but in combination with the low maximum and high minimum sentiment values, would seem to indicate an overall negative attitude toward the participation posed in the question.

- The data was skewed toward the negative end of the scale [skew = -0.481], indicative of a response set having an orientation toward more negative than positive responses, reinforcing the above.

- The variance exceeded ten, indicative of a considerable diffusion of responses [a broad spectrum of attitude toward the proposition, rather than a more centrally-held attitude on the part of the respondents].

- Two thirds [66.5%] of the responses lay below a positive three. This would indicate at best a moderately positive response, but more probably neutral to negative.

Common theme

Further investigation of the responses to the unstructured responses yielded a single, overwhelming theme running through all responses having a sentiment score of -3 or less (i.e.: -3 through -9): opening up participation to those representing the device vendors was too open to the danger that they [the external agents] indulge in advertising, marketing or sales [56%].

Behind this concern, the second most common theme was the requirement for full disclosure, so that community members be fully aware of the interest that may or may not bias the participation of these external agents.

The lowest-scored comment is: "No sales pitches--neither overt nor by comment proselytizing in forums or blogs!!!"