NRC+PICKER

Combining the advanced measurement and improvement technology
of National Research Corporation with the philosophies
and family of surveys of The Picker Institute[®]

The Survey Process

The NRC+Picker Qualisys Survey Management System is the most automated and scientifically-based data collection and reporting system in the industry. Qualisys anticipates each step in the research process, from design to reporting. Having mapped this process, Qualisys automates the entire spectrum of tasks with built-in audits for quality control and scientific integrity.

The data provided to NRC+Picker is first manually validated, which includes the following procedures:

- Virus checking

- Confirm complete transmission (verify record counts in file)

- Verify that file format and layout matches data specifications

All of the NRC+Picker surveys are printed in-house. Outside suppliers are not relied upon, permitting control of quality and expediting turn-around time. For each CDC survey, NRC+Picker will develop and print a personalized modular questionnaire with a cover letter. Cover letters will also contain a URL and a personal password for recipients who prefer to complete a Web version of the survey rather than the enclosed paper version. In addition to the Web option, each survey package contains:

- Survey cover letter printed on 8½ by 11 inch letterhead with black text

- Survey of up to four pages (single-sided)

- Outgoing envelope for mailing the surveys

- Business reply envelopes, containing the CDC name with NRC+Picker return information, including an 800-number

An additional benefit of the NRC+Picker in-house printing capability is the ability to generate a dynamic survey. Dynamic surveys for the CDC project will contain questions specific to the facility type. These questions are intended to gather information such as the amount and type of procedures performed at ambulatory surgery centers, bed sizes of inpatient facilities, etc.

Following preparation of survey materials, NRC+Picker mails all outgoing survey forms using First Class postage and pre-sort mail discounts. Similarly, all return mailers will contain First Class postage using a the NRC+Picker business reply permit.

For this project, NRC+Picker will use a three-wave survey mailing process to enhance response rates. This consists of an initial recruitment letter, followed in 1 – 2 weeks by a survey package containing the questionnaire, a cover letter and the postage-paid return envelope. A second survey package with a follow-up cover letter, questionnaire and postage-paid return envelope will be mailed approximately two weeks later to those who did not respond to the first survey package (either through the USPS or on the Internet).

A vital component to effective management and monitoring of the data collection process is the Qualysis Survey Control System (SCS). The SCS ensures the data is

accurate, integrated, and available during all phases of survey administration. NRC+Picker's unique identifier, known as a "lithocode," links all records in the SCS to the raw sample file. The lithocode is a unique identification number assigned by NRC+Picker at the time the survey forms are generated.

A new lithocode number will be created for each mailing and will be included on each survey page. These lithocodes are stored in a table in the SCS. This method of data storage allows NRC+Picker to connect a returned survey or Web response with the original data file record. The lithocode also allows the surveys to be individually monitored without using a sample respondent's social security number or name. Lithocodes are used to identify an individual at the time of scanning, at the time they are removed from further mailings, or at the time addresses are changed.

Qualisys is also the NRC+Picker "quality process" software, data collection system, and business discipline that standardizes and automates the entire survey process from data quality checks to scanning of returned surveys. NRC+Picker's data entry software is the same software used by the U.S. Census Bureau for Census 2000. This software earned a 99.89 accuracy rate processing the census.

Qualisys is composed of seven modules enabling NRC+Picker to implement the tasks required to control the quality of surveys. Following are the seven modules in Qualisys and a brief description of each.

1. *Configuration Manager* contains the layout for all mail items (e.g., questionnaire, cover letters, reminder postcards), mail methodology, cover letter personalization codes, data structure definition, sample unit definitions, and authorized personnel.

2. *Import Manager* allows the data to be stored in standardized tables and fields for automated processes such as sample generation, printing, scanning, and exporting.

3. *Sampling Tool* allows the form generation information to be compiled according to sample unit definitions. This is also where the team schedules the form generation.

4. *Form Generation* is a batch process that runs automatically based on scheduled samples from the Sampling Tool.

5. *Queue Manager* allows operations personnel to conduct zip code bundling and mail item printing.

6. *Scanner Interface* allows for the automation of scanning returned questionnaires and storing respondent results.

7. *Export Manager* allows for exporting of results using only the variables selected.