

Exploratory Cognitive Testing

Shipping Cost Questions

1/16/23

Introduction

- Thank you for your time today. My name is XX and I work for the United States Census Bureau. My research team evaluates how easy or difficult Census surveys are to complete. What works well, we keep. When potential users, such as you, have difficulty with something, we have an opportunity to fix it.
- Before we start, take a moment to look over and sign the consent form. It explains the purpose of today's session and your rights as a participant. Only those of us connected with the project will have access to these notes and they will be used solely for research purposes. Your name will not be associated with any of the data collected during the session. Any information you provide will be kept confidential.

[Confirm they signed the Consent Form]

Thank you.

- I am going to give you a little background about what we will be working on today.
- We are exploring the topic of shipping costs and would like to learn more from Commodity Flow Survey respondents like yourself. The topics I'll go over with you are about your contract carriers or in-house fleets, as well as the cost of shipping your commodities, and how easily you can get data related to these things.
- We plan to use your feedback to improve any potential new survey questions and make sure they make sense to respondents like you. We are not testing you- we only want to evaluate the questions.
- When we refer to cost of shipping, this refers to how much you spend getting a shipment from point A to point B, and not the value of the shipment.
- Do you have any questions before we get started?
- OK great.

Background Questions

- What is your position or role within the company?
- Can you give us a brief description of what your company does and how it is organized?
 - Is it an independent business, or part of larger establishment?

[If MultiUnit Company] I realize you have more than one location you could be answering for, so for the purpose of this interview, let's assume the questions pertain to [**address fill**].

The first set of questions I'll ask about pertain to Fleets and Carriers.

Fleets & Carriers

Carriers Used:

- Thinking about how your shipments leave this location, what type of carrier(s) do you use?
You can exclude customer pickups.
 - o In-house/our own trucks > [Jump to In-house section](#)*
 - o For-hire carriers> [go to For Hire section](#)*
 - o Mix of in-house and for-hire carriers> [Go to For hire section and In house](#)*

For-Hire Carrier Questions:

- What type of for-hire carriers do you use?
 - o Contract carrier(s); Common carrier(s); Mix of contract & common carrier(s)*
- Are certain types of shipments handled by different carriers because of some particular characteristic of the shipment? (e.g. if includes bulk items then...)
- Does a broker or 3PL arrange transportation?

Contract Carriers:

- How many contract carriers do you use?
 - o Is this (Are these) contract(s) exclusive?*
- About how long is a typical contract with your contract carrier(s)?

I'd now like to ask about how the cost of a typical contract is determined. If possible, I'd like you to think of a recent or existing contract. I'll read some examples of contract terms, and I'd like you to tell me how accessible you think that data is.

- Which of the following are included in a typical contract? Select all that apply.
**[Note to researcher, answer used as fill in question below]*
 - o Number of trucks on the contract*
 - o Number of assigned drivers on contract*
 - o Geographic coverage (long-haul, regional, etc.)*
 - o Permitted commodities to be hauled*
 - o Allowable wait time for pickup*
 - o Other*
 - Please describe: _____*
 - o Don't know*

- How easy or difficult would this contract data be to provide?
 - ☐ Very easy
 - ☐ Somewhat easy
 - ☐ Somewhat difficult
 - ☐ Very difficult
- Does this seem like a comprehensive list of key factors, or are there other aspects of a contract we may have missed?
- How would you get this data? Would you have to check the actual contract, or would you estimate off the top of your head?
 - ☐ [If estimating] How confident would you feel about the accuracy of your estimate?

Can you describe the cost structure of the contract?

- For example: *Unlimited hauls and miles; Fixed fee/flat rate + variable amount- based on what?
- [if variable amount] What determines the amount? (For example, tons, miles, etc.)

In-House

- How large is the fleet at this location?
- How easy or difficult would it be to provide the number of vehicles in your fleet by vehicle type?
 - ☐ Very easy
 - ☐ Somewhat easy
 - ☐ Somewhat difficult
 - ☐ Very difficult
- Can you estimate typical fleet maintenance expenses per year?
 - ☐ What types of maintenance expenses are you considering?
 - ☐ In terms of your records, how easy or difficult would it be to provide this information?
 - Please explain.
 - ☐ Were you including fuel cost in your estimate?
 - ☐ How easy or difficult would it be to report the cost of fuel?
 - What time frame would be easiest to provide, or would it not make a difference? (e.g., A 2- week period versus an annual timeframe)
- Which set of information would be easier to provide- Questions about the number of vehicles in your fleet by vehicle type, OR questions about maintenance expenses?
- Can you provide an estimate of fleet driver staffing expenses per year?
 - ☐ How easy or difficult would it be to provide this information?
 - Please explain.

Note from Monique: If R can provide a detailed breakdown of the number of vehicles by vehicle type), then we can use assumptions to estimate these – e.g., the BEAN Total Cost of Ownership tool (here) is free and shows a range of assumptions for a comprehensive set of cost inputs (maintenance, labor, insurance, fuel, resale value, ...) (for final survey).

Cost of Shipping

Thank you for that information. These next questions will pertain to *Cost of Shipping*. As a reminder this refers to how much you spend getting a shipment from point A to point B, and **not the value** of the shipment.

- How easy or difficult would it be for you to provide shipping cost data for a given 2-week period for all shipments from this location? *Include costs of for-hire & in-house carriers.*
 - Please explain.
 - Would you need to contact another department to get shipping cost data?
 - **[IF YES]**: What is the job title/role of the individual you would need to reach out to?
 - **[IF YES]**: What department are they in?
- What timeframe would be easiest for you to provide shipping cost data, for all shipments from this facility?
- What factors impact the shipping cost for one shipment?
 - For Example:
 - *truckload vs. less-than-truckload service*
 - *destination*
 - *distance*
 - *shipment weight*
 - *fuel cost / fuel surcharge*
 - *special handling – fragile, perishable, hazardous, oversize/overweight, etc.*

Note to researcher: Likely most fees are distance-based with a fuel surcharge. But destination may play a role, as high-demand corridors or destinations may command higher prices.

- How easy or difficult is it to provide this data?
- Would you know in advance, or be notified if the shipment is moved from a truck to another mode of transportation, such as rail, air or water?
 - Would this affect the cost?
- **[For Multiunits only]** How is shipping cost information maintained across your company?

- o E.g., Maintained at each location separately;*
- o Company level only (the data from each location is combined);*
- o Location and company levels;*
- o Not consistently maintained at either level*

How is shipping cost information maintained within your company? (select all that apply)

- *In database(s)*
 - o [IF a database:] Is this shipping cost information stored in one database or multiple databases?*
- *Stored as physical files*
- *Shipping information is not consistently maintained*

Wrap Up

That wraps up all the questions we wanted to cover. Our goal is to learn whether shipping cost data is tracked, and how easy it is to report.

- Is there anything else you wanted to share about shipping costs, or other steps you would need to take to get this data?
 - o Do you have any other comments or suggestions for us? Any questions?*

[Provide observer time to ask questions, if applicable.]

This concludes our session. Thank you for your time and valuable feedback!