

Market Segmentation to Increase Transit Ridership

We carried out a segmentation study for Saskatoon Transit to create a baseline assessment of citizens' awareness and perceptions of Saskatoon Transit's services and to direct future communications activities to increase ridership.

Maintaining an efficient and cost-effective public transit system is the goal of many municipalities. However, the challenge in doing so is substantial. Few public institutions have as many moving parts: routes, transfers, payment methods, schedules, and fares, among others. There are several important pieces of this puzzle for municipalities such as understanding the travel patterns of residents, uncovering relevant issues with the system as perceived by current riders, as well as gauging the attitudes and perceptions of the transit system from those who do not currently use it.

This case study details how Inshtrix worked with Saskatoon Transit to help them in their goal of increasing ridership and improving satisfaction among current transit riders.

CHALLENGE

Maintaining an efficient and cost-effective public transit system is a goal of many municipalities. However, the challenge in doing so is substantial. Few public institutions have as many moving parts: routes, transfers, payment methods, schedules, and fares, among others. There are many important pieces of this puzzle such as understanding residents' travel patterns, uncovering relevant issues current riders experience with the system, as well as gauging the attitudes and perceptions of those who do not currently use the transit system.

Saskatoon Transit wants to continue to increase current riders' satisfaction and to improve the efficiency and use of its city-wide transit system. To assist with achieving these objectives, Saskatoon Transit contracted Inshtrix Research to help them better understand attitudes toward and perceptions of public transit services in Saskatoon.



APPROACH

An important component of the research was ensuring that the results were statistically valid so that accurate benchmarking could be carried out and market size estimates could be calculated. The challenge facing researchers seeking to assist Saskatoon Transit was significant because it is difficult to reach the heavy transit user groups using traditional survey methodology. User groups such as seniors and low-income residents may not be accessible online, and students may not be accessible by landline telephone surveying. To address these difficulties, Insightrix designed a multi-phased methodology to ensure that Saskatoon Transit's needs would be met by the research.

Phase 1: Research Design

Insightrix conducted a literature review of transit studies conducted in other jurisdictions and recommended that the population be segmented into four relevant groups. Each group has a different relationship with Saskatoon Transit.

Category	Group Description	Challenge
Captive Riders	Those who use the transit system and have no other means of transportation	Maintain satisfaction to encourage continuing use of Saskatoon Transit even if they should acquire another transportation method
Choice Riders	Those who have access to other means of transportation but use the transit system for at least some of their trips	Maintain satisfaction, increase ridership, and address barriers to increased use
Potential Riders	Those who have access to other means of transportation but would consider using the transit system	Directly address barriers to choosing Saskatoon transit for transportation
Non-Riders	Those who have access to other means of transportation and would not consider using the transit system	Encourage attitude change and address barriers with informational campaigns

Focus groups were conducted with Choice Riders and Potential Riders to better understand their motivations for using Saskatoon Transit and the barriers to using the service more often. These themes were incorporated into the questionnaire. Research that Saskatoon Transit had previously done regarding longitudinal ridership trends also informed the survey design.

Phase 2: Representative Sample

Following the qualitative research, Inshtrix designed a multi-mode survey methodology which included telephone, online, and intercept surveys. The sampling design needed to ensure that the results were statistically valid and representative of key user groups while providing the ability for benchmarking.

Using a mixed methodological approach to conduct the initial phase of data collection allowed a more accurate method for estimating the size of the user groups. Respondents were contacted through the following methods:

- online through SaskWatch, Inshtrix's proprietary research panel
- landline telephone
- cell phones

Quotas were set to ensure an appropriate mixture of respondents in key groups, including gender within age, Aboriginal, and foreign-born respondents.

The survey design addressed two key areas: perceptions and attitudes, and profiling questions. The perceptions that were gathered included top-of-mind associations with Saskatoon Transit, attitudes regarding transit use, satisfaction with various aspects of transit service, and likelihood to recommend. These questions allowed Saskatoon Transit to identify key perceptual barriers. Second, profiling questions were used to assess the awareness of current service offerings and potential usage of various extended service offerings and enhanced services, familiarity with the transit system, current usage frequency and type of trip, appeal of using it for different types of trips, and demographics.

Phase 3: Oversampling of Key User Groups

Although Captive Riders make up less than one tenth of the population, they make up more than one quarter of Saskatoon Transit users and a majority of them use the transit system nearly every day. Captive Riders, thus, are a key user group of the transit system whose opinions, especially with regards to satisfaction, were important to capture.

Inshtrix interviewers conducted intercept surveys with transit users over a period of four weeks. Routes were strategically chosen so that there would be an appropriate mix of transit users: regular commuters, students, seniors, and other patrons. The questionnaire was split-sampled to reduce the length of each interview and to allow a greater number of interviews to be conducted. This allowed more statistically accurate results to be collected for key survey questions and to minimize the inconvenience of participating for transit riders.

Phase 4: Results and Recommendations

The major advantages of the methodology were that it allowed Inshtrix to achieve the following:

- create an accurate profile of ridership groups because of the mixed methodology approach and increased number of surveys with key rider groups
- estimate the number of transit system users as a percentage of Saskatoon's population

Areas of satisfaction and barriers to increased use of the transit system were identified for the different ridership groups. Because the first phase of the research was conducted in a representative manner, the sizes of the groups could be estimated accurately. Before the research was carried out, Saskatoon Transit was not able to gauge the number of discrete users of the system, since many riders choose to pay their fare with cash or individual tickets.



The research revealed key barriers to using Saskatoon Transit and areas with high importance but relatively low satisfaction. These results allowed Saskatoon Transit to target these key areas to improve the user experience and generate more positive word-of-mouth about the transit system.

Benchmarks for satisfaction with various areas and willingness to recommend were also measured. This will allow Saskatoon Transit to assess the effectiveness of their new initiatives in the future and to continue to improve the service.

Interest in potential service offerings was also gauged and these measures will assist Saskatoon Transit in the launch of these new services. Saskatoon Transit will use these results to inform and direct communications activities in support of future projects and marketing programs aimed at encouraging increased ridership. Overall, the results will assist Saskatoon Transit with its goal of increasing ridership and improving satisfaction among current riders.

Questions? Interested in learning more?

Give us a call at our toll-free number **1-866-888-5640** (North America) or email us at info@insightrix.com.