

Alternatives to ‘Death by Happy Sheet’ – using technology to engage participants in evaluation.

Kirsty Fenton

Department of Primary Industries, Victoria

PO Box 303, Wodonga, Vic, 3689

Email: kirsty.fenton@dpi.vic.gov.au

Bernadette Swanson

Department of Primary Industries, Victoria

Private Bag 15

Ferntree Gully Delivery Centre Ferntree Gully Victoria 3156

Email: Bernadette.swanson@dpi.vic.gov.au

Abstract:

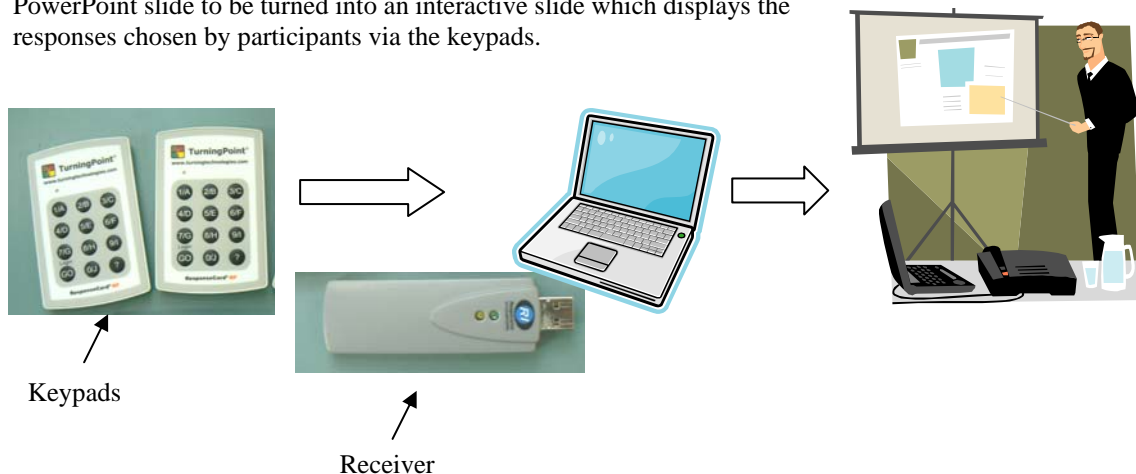
The Department of Primary Industries, Victoria, has adopted the Keepad interactive technology to enhance client participation in evaluation of events.

Up until now, the typical ‘end of workshop evaluation’ process using hand-written evaluation forms (or ‘happy sheets’) has caused some participants to run and hide. This interactive evaluation approach has proven a hit in many evaluation activities to gain instant feedback from an event, check prior learning, provide participants with an ‘equal’ voice, or to promote discussion through the instant responses. It has also been an effective ‘hook’ to introduce staff to the ‘fun’ side of evaluation during evaluation capacity building sessions, and as a quick and effective way of collecting, analysing and presenting data in a timely manner.

This paper gives an overview of the Keepad technology and discusses DPI staff experiences in using the technology in a variety of settings.

What is Keepad technology?

Keepad is an interactive data collecting and analysing technology which gathers instant feedback from your audience to defined questions and presents this collective response via a PowerPoint presentation. Each participant (or team) responds via individual keypads (a credit card sized handheld device) which ‘talks’ to a receiver connected via a USB port to a computer. Turning Point® Software enables a PowerPoint slide to be turned into an interactive slide which displays the responses chosen by participants via the keypads.



What is Keepad capable of?

There are a number of ways Keepad is used in educational and corporate settings. Responses can either be anonymous or can be linked to individuals or teams by registering each keypad to a particular person. Results are presented in a graphical form and reports are available instantly. Some suggested ideas for use include:

- Track participant learning
- Increase participant alertness
- Obtain instant feedback
- Give every participant an equal voice
- Negate vocal minority
- Establish levels of understanding
- Checking pace and understanding
- Promote discussion
- Monitor changes in opinion level
- Collect and analyse data
- Assess prior knowledge
- Use answers as a trigger for discussion
- ‘On the fly’ questions
- Quizzes
- Collaborative learning – teams
- Comparisons
- Professional development

(www.keepad.com)

The DPI experience

The Keepads have been used by a variety of teams for a number of purposes throughout the Department, including evaluation of events, training (reinforce content through questioning), identifying increases in knowledge (pre and post activity), planning workshops (gauging peoples reactions and identifying areas for focus), checking staff understanding of strategic plans, using the answers from focussed questions to encourage robust discussion, and team-building activities (they are great for trivia nights!).

Teams have experienced varying levels of effectiveness in using the technology. Most have commented on the benefits of engaging participants through the interactive nature of the technology and identifying areas that could be discussed further in a real-time setting. Furthermore, the technology offers a different communication style that can be used as an alternative to common presentation styles. The key areas of difficulty have been in running the technology, such as having keypads that did not communicate with the receiver (flat batteries!) or lag-times in displaying results (when displaying team scoreboard – usually the general slides are instantly displayed).

There is also an element of excitement at the ‘new’ technology in teams where it hasn’t been used before. In order for use to continue teams will need to reassess the value and purpose of using the Keepad technology as a methodology for capturing responses in their work.

The DPI Evaluation Unit has found that Keepad is a good ‘hook’ to initially engage participants in Evaluation Capacity Building activities or courses. The initial use of Keepads in these instances has resulted in a four-fold benefit in that participants are engaged, they participate in an evaluation by answering questions about their current levels of knowledge around evaluation, the presenter can assess the level of knowledge and therefore vary the presentation accordingly, while the participants are exposed to another evaluation technique. We have found that a number of participants are more likely to undertake an evaluation in their work area after being exposed to the technology as they want to ‘play’ with the technology and demonstrate it to other team members and networks.

CASE STUDY:

Each year, the Phylloxera (a grapevine pest) team conducts Phylloxera Management Workshops with extension staff and producers. In 2007, the team trialled the Keepad technology to conduct their pre and post training questionnaires to evaluate the change in participant knowledge, which was historically conducted using paper-based questionnaires.

The project team asked multiple-choice questions on a PowerPoint slide (figure 1), which participants answered using their individual response keypads. A graph showed the percentage of answers given to each of the choices. The questions were repeated at the end of the training to gauge changes in participant knowledge (figures 2 & 3). By assigning keypads to individual participants the project team were also able to track each individuals learning, and obtain instant feedback and reports – complete with graphs!

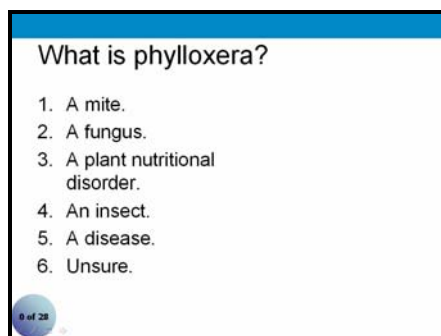


Figure 1: A typical Keepad slide.

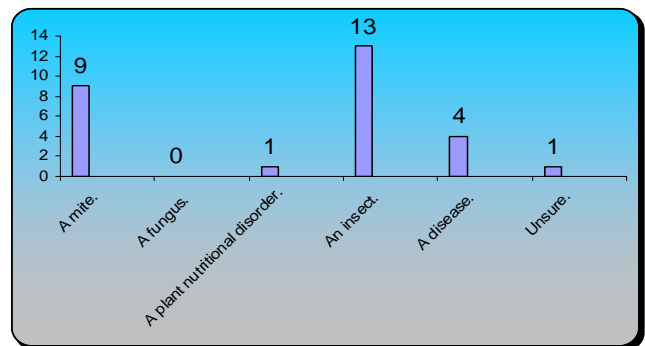


Figure 2: Pre-workshop response graph

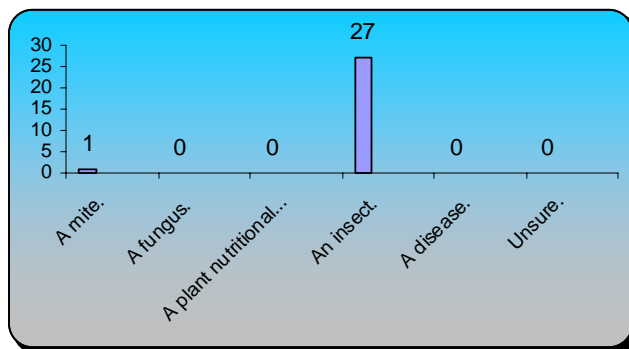


Figure 3: Post-workshop response graph

The project team found that at the end of their two-day event, participants were eager to take part in evaluation activities, with some participants reporting they felt like more like “contestants on a quiz show”. The project team also found that the instant reporting allowed them to structure the workshop towards the needs of the audience and removed a lot of the cumbersome analysis and reporting requirements that are generated through paper-based questionnaires.

Tips and Traps – what we've learnt

As with any technology, there is a chance of things going wrong. The technology is designed for a room setting with a secure power supply and presentation equipment, such as a data show. While the technology may be able to be used in the field using a battery-powered lap-top computer it will not allow the results to be easily sighted by the participants, reducing the interactive benefits of the technology.

In order to use the technology, software needs to be loaded on the computer being used in the presentation. It is advisable to allocate time before a presentation to ensure that the technology is connected and working properly, and that the keypads 'communicate' with the receiver.

A basic knowledge of Keepad and its functions is needed to overcome 'technical glitches' and to run the presentation successfully. Forethought as to handing out and collecting the equipment is also beneficial to ensure that all keypads are returned at the end of the event.

Potential users of the Keepad technology need to be mindful that technology should be used sparingly and strategically, link to discussion, have simple slides (clear in both wording and presentation), and promote audience involvement by responding positively to responses and discussions. Presenters should be confident in their facilitation skills in order to ensure participants have a 'positive experience' when using the technology.

As with any activity, if responses can be linked to participants the presenter should outline the confidentiality and ethical considerations, such as who will use the data, and how it will be used and stored.

Conclusion:

The interactive approach to evaluation using Keepad has proven to positively engage participants in evaluation activities, and has increased the level of quality and input of evaluation data received from participants. It also provides an opportunity for the evaluator to gather real-time data that can be 'checked' with participants, or use participant responses to promote further discussion. The utilisation of results may also be enhanced as quick, real-time feedback can be presented to participants and/or stakeholders, rather than the usual gap needed to collate, analyse and report from the paper-based questionnaires that are so often used to evaluate events.

The DPI Evaluation Unit use a number of innovative resources to enhance the collection, quality, reporting and utilisation of evaluation data, however the Keepads have proven a particularly valuable tool to spread the 'evaluation epidemic' while increasing the evaluation knowledge of participants. Furthermore, we have found that participants desire to use the Keepads in their teams has inadvertently led to an increased effort to evaluate their activities. In this way, Keepads have been the 'hook' to get DPI staff involved in evaluation.