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Using response keypads to encourage audience participation

by Arnold F. Shapiro

Speakers at actuarial meetings often have difficulty assessing how knowledgeable their audience is on a topic, whether their audience lacks some key background information or skill, or has preconceived impressions on a topic. Even when a speaker asks for a show of hands in response to a question dealing with these issues, audiences often are reluctant to publicly acknowledge what they perceive as their shortcomings.

One way to evaluate an audience is to use interactive computer technology with participant response keypads. During the "Credit Risk Study" session at the AFIR/CAS/SOA meeting in Orlando in April, keypads were used with the audience. They provided immediate analysis and display of feedback on questions and issues.

A participant response keypad, which looks similar to a hand-held calculator, allows participants' responses to questions to be instantly recorded electronically.

Keypads allowed session participants to respond electronically to true or false and multiple choice questions projected by a notebook computer onto a screen. Once an answer was chosen, the anonymous response was sent to the computer by pressing the send button. The computer tabulated and displayed responses in a bar graph, instantaneously visible to participants and panel members.

Question formats used

True or false questions were used to elicit responses to such questions as "Have you read the final report on the 1986-89 Credit Risk Loss Experience?" and "Are you familiar with transition matrices and their uses in analyzing mortgages with credit events?" With keypads providing anonymity, the audience revealed that 75% of them had not read the final report, and 80% were not familiar with this use of transition

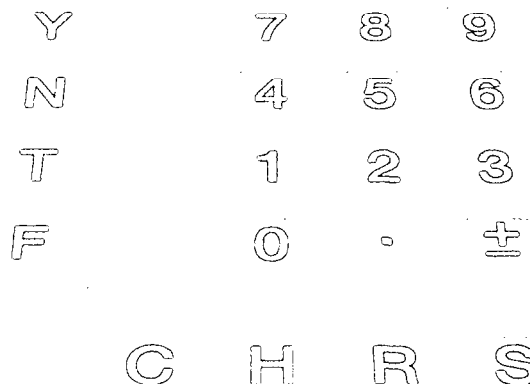
market, the ACLI baseline percentage of delinquent commercial mortgages is about 1%. In 1992, that percentage went up to: 2 x normal, 4 x normal, 6 x normal, 8 x normal, or 10 x normal?" Twenty percent of the audience thought it was 4x, 50% thought it was 8x, and 20% believed it was 10x, which gave all attending a sense of the depth of knowledge.

When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the keypads, more than 70% of the participants who used the keypads believed they improved the speaker/audience interaction, and more than 80% said that other sessions should use keypads when appropriate.

More than 80% of participants who used the keypads said they increased their participation, added to their enjoyment, and encouraged them to consider using keypads for their own presentations if appropriate.

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matrices. These responses helped to focus the presentations.

Using multiple choice questions, the "Credit Risk Study" panel was able to gauge the audience's preconceived impression about trends with the question, "In a good real estate