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## Web-based Quizzes and Surveys Using Free Software

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### Introduction

Many colleges have seen rapid adoption of the web as a tool not only for presenting information, but also as a tool gathering information. However, the mechanism of allowing anonymous submission of information into a useable format has not been as trivial as publishing web pages. Fortunately, in addition to commercial solutions (such as Question Mark's *Perception*) there are many robust free software solutions to this problem.

In addition to presenting the several options I have found useful, this presentation is designed to serve as a launching point into a discussion to share experiences with this class of software, with the goal of developing a "best of breed" among the free software available in this category.

### Options

A quick table comparison of the free options we'll be looking at follows. We will focus primarily on Virginia Tech's *Survey* in this presentation, but will provide adequate information on other solutions so that attendees will be able to make an informed decision.

Name	Hosting	Setup	Ease of Use
VT's Survey	Locally hosted	Requires setup on web server	Entry level, one page of training or 15 minutes
PHP-MySQL or PHP-MSAccess	Locally hosted	Usually enabled, but requires access to writeable directory for database or server account	Requires some comfort with high-level programming
Zoomerang (Basic)	Hosted offsite at zoomerang.com, ad-supported	No setup	Entry level – free version is limited
Hot Potatoes	Locally hosted	No web server setup usually needed, but requires access to web server	Entry level to advanced, requires comfort with web

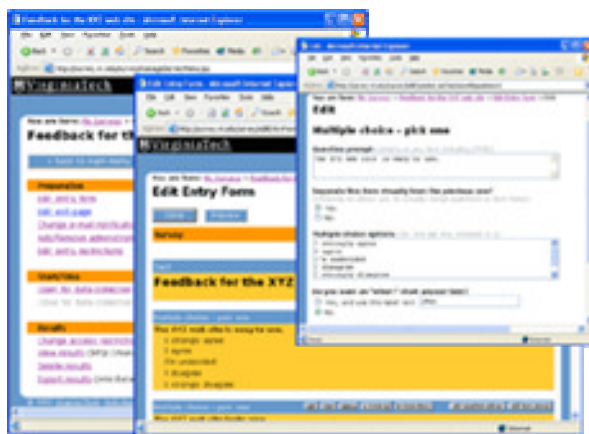
## Virginia\_Tech's\_Survey

**Survey** from Virginia Tech is an open source application that runs under Java Tomcat Server, which is also a free product that is part of the Apache Project. Initial setup is easy, but requires system administrator privileges. I had our Windows NT administrator install the application, and he informed me that it was a “cookbook installation” in that it was an easy, step-by-step process. Once installed, it runs on a non-standard port on your web server (i.e. <http://www.myschool.edu:8080>). To make it easy for our users to get to the survey page without having to remember the port, I used a simple auto-redirect page with the following tag:

```
<meta http-equiv="Refresh" content="0;
URL=http://freya.augustana.edu:8080/survey/login.jsp?r=1">
```

This allows the user to simply go to [www.myschool.edu/survey](http://www.myschool.edu/survey) and they are redirected to the login page. A virtual server could also be used (ie, <http://survey.myschool.edu>).

A demo can be found <http://survey.vt.edu>; the software can be freely downloaded at <http://vtsurvey.sourceforge.net>.



The feature list for **Survey**, as provided on the Sourceforge website, includes:

- Forms-based visual editor for survey creation
- User authentication via internal user database (XML-based) and/or external via LDAP
- Customizable layout (header, footer, colors, styles)
- Enables use of HTML for special-purpose customization (optionally)
- Restrict allowed respondents by user-IDs or shared password (optionally)
- Restrict to only one response per user (optionally)
- E-mail notification for incoming results
- View results online

- Password-protect viewing of results (optionally)
- Export of results to Microsoft Excel, SAS, SPSS or similar (via CSV formats)
- Support for collaborative development (multiple survey admins)

*Survey* uses a very easy, simplified user interface, which allows users to autonomously create, administer, and run online surveys. All functions are explained well and are augmented with examples to make setup for a survey as simple as possible. Users may password-protect their surveys, allow multiple administrators, or request e-mail notification. Once the survey is complete, they may view results through a web browser or export to comma separated values (CSV) format for viewing in Excel, SAS, or SPSS.

## **Conclusion**

The open source software movement has provided some amazing, high-quality software options to fill the web-based survey need. Virginia Tech's *Survey* is an excellent example of this and has worked very well at Augustana and many other colleges.

## **References**

Apache Tomcat, <http://jakarta.apache.org/tomcat>

Hot Potatoes, <http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked>

PHP homepage, <http://www.php.net>

VT Survey homepage, <http://vtsurvey.sourceforge.net>

Zoomerang, <http://www.zoomerang.com>