

Panel. Sourcing with Difficult Audiences

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Introduction

One of the most significant challenges in market research is ensuring that both quality and uniqueness in sample matches the specific needs of any given study. These challenges are only compounded due to the overlap of participants across multiple panels, and a lack of uniqueness for certain demographics.

The same types of people tend to sign-up during the recruitment process, leaving several audiences without accurate panel representation. At the same time, there's the issue of uniqueness. With a smaller pool to draw from, many respondents belong to multiple panels and suffer from the common effects of being veterans to the survey process. Their responses to questions around brand awareness, interest in specific brands or product types, and other frequently asked questions, can skew the results of a study simply due to limited population sample.



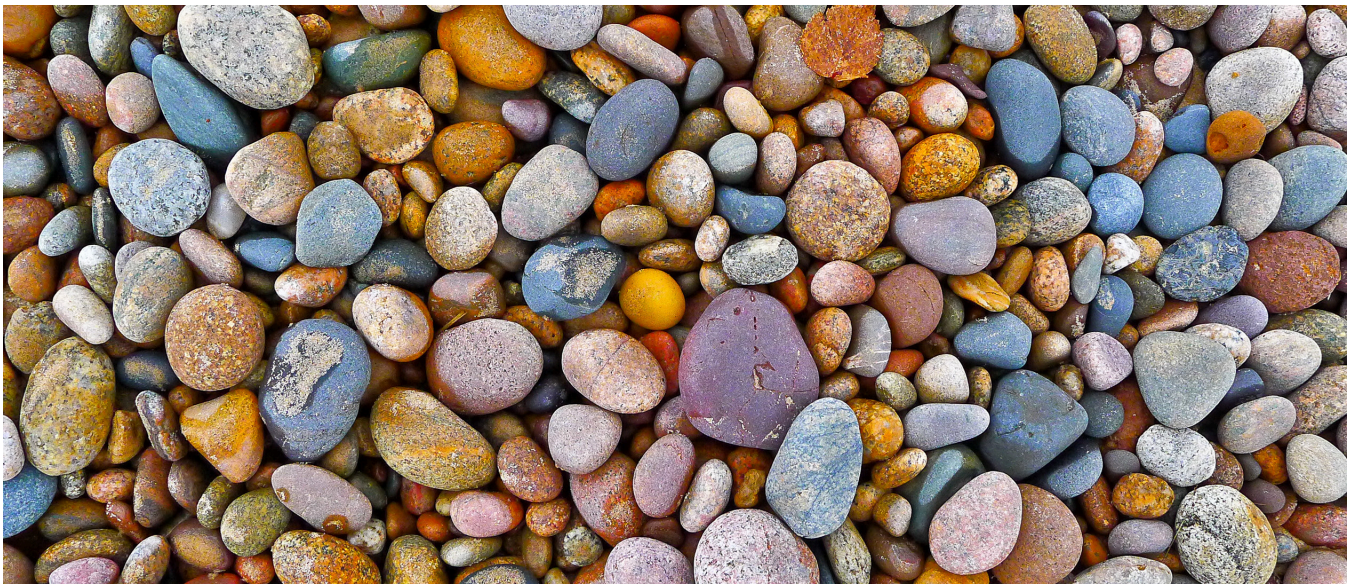
From the accessibility of different populations into online recruiting methods, to the inherent lack of uniqueness that happens with so many “veterans” on board, panel sourcing must take many factors (beyond pure demographics) into careful consideration.

Innovate’s approach to this issue is based on years of experience in the field. This guide is designed to illustrate some of the specific best practices we ascribe to and recommend for building and utilizing panels for market research. From recruitment methods to management of sample over time, these are important steps that help to ensure accuracy and sample availability — no matter how specific the needs of a survey.

Recruitment

Sourcing a difficult to reach audience starts at the very beginning — with recruitment. Most people recruit from the same online publishers, including loyalty sites with large populations of people that fit target demographics.

Innovate uses these same tools to some degree as they help to form a solid foundation for a given panel. At the same time, however, it's important to diversify the sourcing process. This is done through exclusive relationships with specialty websites that don't directly focus on delivering traffic. By shifting the focus from pure traffic generation to the quality of the people entering the recruitment process, the risk of frequently overactive respondents in multiple panels making up the bulk of any sample is reduced significantly.



At the same time, the medium matters just as much.

The internet simplified the sampling process so much that quality took a hit early and has been a concern in the industry for the better part of 20 years.

Large brands have implemented consistent best practices to avoid over-sampling from the same pools, but it can still be a challenge policing digital recruiting processes (whether to avoid fraud or other risks). It's one of the reasons Innovate has such a robust quality assurance process — going out of our way to ensure every possible step is taken to protect the integrity of our panel.

Television Recruitment Widens the Potential Pool of Respondents

To address this uniqueness challenge, diverse recruiting is a must. Online recruitment sources tend to be over-saturated with thirty-something mothers and are underrepresented in key groups including young males, African Americans and Hispanics. Offline recruitment via television helps provide an access channel to these high demand, low supply segments.

By combining a mix of old and new media during the recruitment process, it's possible to tap into demographics that are not as well represented online, while building a stronger pool of people who aren't as likely to be active in other panels.

That's not to say it's easy to do this. This type of sourcing strategy is expensive. The cost of producing a high-quality TV commercial, then buying media on cable networks that target key demographics, requires significant investment. And with so many different difficult-to-reach audiences being targeted, a range of different networks may be necessary.

But the result is important.



While the average respondent in an online recruited panel belongs to multiple panels, TV recruits are far less likely to belong to other panels. This helps offset underrepresentation and diversify.

The quality issue is hugely important, but so too is the feasibility of the panel. Online-only panels frequently have difficulty meeting specific demands for hard to reach audiences. With less overlap and a greater pool of people to draw from, it's easier to ensure feasibility for any given market research project.

Sample Management

One of the major challenges with more difficult to source audiences is that the number of them in any one panel is often not large enough to overcome issues like tenure balance.

Why is this so important?

Because without the ability to randomly stratify sample and balance across activity level and tenure, it's difficult to account for known noise in the sample.

Certain demographics are highly in demand. Studies that call on young males, African Americans and Hispanic respondents can quickly lead to a sample source with far too many tenured, experienced survey experts and not enough fresh insights to balance them out.



New Registrations Act Different

New registrations, such as those generated from TV recruitment and other offline sources act differently from those who have been taking surveys for some time. They are not yet conditioned to taking surveys and their responses reflect that. This includes things like:

- Hyper awareness of key brands
- Overzealous awareness and usage of brands
- Familiarity with the structure of surveys and process for completion

While it's natural for anyone who has taken more than one or two surveys to become familiar with the process and some of the recurring questions they see, a small representation for a high-demand audience in a panel can exacerbate issues of tenure.

These highly active groups make it much harder to get good representative sample, especially when measuring things like awareness. It can go as far as to affect the results of a survey and make measuring awareness in certain populations much more difficult.

Balancing Across Tenure

The best way to ensure this doesn't happen is to balance sample across tenure. This helps to eliminate some of the noise that results when pulling from one group too often. At the same time, with a larger pool of such respondents, the risk of oversaturation and rapid tenure are reduced in that panel.

Without processes in place to continuously grow panel through unique and offline sources, this is an issue that can multiply over time. The demand for difficult to reach audiences causes increased saturation, which in turn makes these audiences even more difficult to reach.

By planning in advance, building a strong recruitment process and stratifying sample to balance tenure and activity level, these issues can be addressed up front.



Panel Management Best Practices

One of the areas that can really help to improve sample quality and maintain a strong representation of that sample in a panel is good panel management best practices.

There are several ways to do this, most directly through incentive programs that truly reward people for their time and encourage them to engage and remain loyal to the panel.

Low response rates to survey invites, low completion rates in surveys, or lack of interest in incentives can create issues immediately. That's why it's so important to build a strong relationship with panel participants through:



Regular communication — sending new survey opportunities 1-2 times per week.



Ensuring quality checks and verification methods aren't too burdensome, protecting data quality without inconveniencing users.



Working with survey programmers to build mobile and desktop optimized surveys that are easy to use.



Providing a clear, enticing incentive program that rewards participants for their time.



Keeping a close eye on conversion rates and targeting practices to avoid excessive panel burn.



Following up and providing immediate response if there is a question or problem to keep panel members engaged.

Respect and appreciation for panel participants is just as important as the data they provide. By treating them well and ensuring they are well rewarded within industry expectations, they will reward us in turn with timely feedback on future surveys.

Incentive Programs that Work

Good incentives are a must, but how do you create a program that really works to draw people in and keep them actively engaged? Some things to consider:

- **Universal Incentives** — When 80-90% of respondents don't qualify for a study because of low incidence rate requirements, it's easy to inadvertently condition respondents that react poorly. Whether driving them to alter their responses to qualify for incentives, or just outright discouraging them from future surveys, this is a major risk. Innovate handles this by budgeting for people who don't qualify and offering incentives for all respondents, regardless of qualification.
- **Daily Streaks** — Loyalty is a huge factor. By rewarding panel members who check in every day and qualify for Innovate's daily streak bonuses, we're able to not only better reward our top performers without affecting the quality of our sample and responses; we're able to build a strong panel of loyal respondents, all while balancing tenure between old school respondents and newbies.

The goal is never to bribe people into taking surveys, but to reward them for their time and willingness to return over time. The goal of incentivizing is to groom affinity and trust in the survey process, and never to condition or influence survey responses.

Finding the Right Balance of Email Follow-up

Email is the easiest way to reach and invite respondents to a survey, or encourage them to return and keep up their daily streak.

But it can also backfire when overused. Overly frequent, intrusive email can push people away, lead to spam issues, and reduce the response rates of your most valuable panel members.

A carefully structured system that accounts for the maximum frequency at which you want to send emails, the types of emails you want to send, and the relevancy of the surveys to which you are inviting panel members is very important.



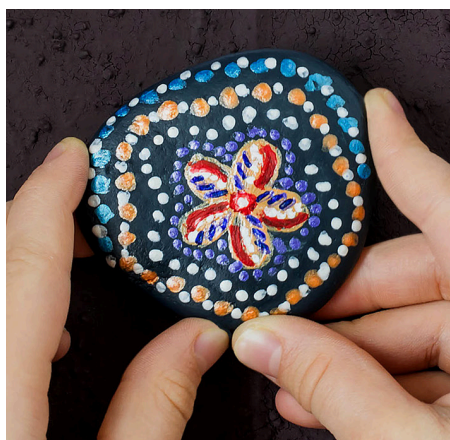
Maintaining Privacy in Sample

panelist privacy has always been a sensitive topic, but in today's climate of database breaches and governmental debates regarding web privacy, users are particularly gun shy. That is why it's more important than ever to organize accordingly when collecting and handling personally identifiable information (PII) — not only to ensure panelists feel secure sharing their nuanced, personal information, but to avoid liability issues, PR nightmares, and even potential industry blacklisting.

When a client seeks to collect PII, we must first understand how the data will be used. That the goals are entirely research-based, and not for marketing purposes, is key. Beyond that, it is vital to discuss how user data will be stored and — ultimately — destroyed by the client. The “shredding” of data is a detail often overlooked amidst the hustle to get a deal signed and a project live, and can lead to devastating consequences down the road if not explicitly laid out and adhered to.

On the panel side, Innovate recommends the following guidelines to ensure maximum user confidence:

- **Privacy Policy and Terms & Conditions documents** should be highlighted and easily accessible to all prospective, onboarding, and tenured members.
- **Users should be made privy of any changes** or updates to either document. Whenever possible, confirm acceptance of updated terms via a click capture.
- **All emails and invites to members** should include reference links to both documents in the footer text.
- **When dealing with international audiences**, make sure Privacy Policy and Terms & Conditions documents are in place for each region, as conditions such as age and contact rules can vary dramatically.



Finally, it is recommended that all client surveys be rigorously tested to look for any questions with potentially “sensitive” information which users could perceive as taboo or “off limits.” Such cases are seen as an invasion of privacy, beyond what was covered in site documentation, and should be buffered or declined outright, depending on case specifics.

Surveys containing adult topics such as sexual habits or drug usage, for example, should always be front-loaded with user warnings and an opt-out, and carefully targeted to ensure age appropriateness.

Conclusion

Whether sourcing a difficult to reach audience for a very specific study, or ensuring the quality of responses from carefully targeted studies are as accurate as possible, it's vital that best practices are followed in recruitment and panel management.

At Innovate, we carefully invest in the recruitment process, drawing from offline and online sources to ensure representation and uniqueness. We maintain an optimal tenure balance via our communications strategy, while employing loyalty features and privacy safeguards that ensure panelists feel valued, protected, and eager to engage.

You can learn more about what Innovate does to ensure sample quality, engage with respondents, and build a strong panel that represents the needs of the industry in our resource library. You'll find additional eBooks, webinars covering topics related to quality, recruiting and engagement, and much more:



Contact our team today to discuss how our Panel Sourcing can help you.
Call us at 888-229-6664 or contact us at Sales@InnovateMR.com.