

FUN WITH RESEARCH! **RESPONDENT SOURCES FOR SURVEY RESEARCH**

There are many ways to reach the right people to participate in your survey research.

Every research project is different, but whether you're looking for consumers or business respondents, you've got some options. Some take more work, others cost more money, and ultimately it's up to you and your research partner to determine the approach that will get you the right group of respondents.

Current Customer Email Lists

If you're doing research for marketing purposes, your own customers are certainly a group that should be included. These are the folks who have already chosen you, so understanding their attitudes, needs and preferences gives you a great baseline to compare against responses from other groups. They are also the most likely to respond to your survey invitation.

Your customers are more likely to participate in your survey if the email invitation comes from you (instead of a research company they've never heard of), if you explain why participating will benefit them (better products or service, etc.) and if you include an incentive (such as a sweepstakes drawing or a small gift for each participant).

If your customer list is small (less than 5,000 names), if you have never emailed your list, or if most of recipients don't open your emails, using your customer list alone might not be sufficient.

Lapsed Customer Email Lists

Respondents who used to buy from you but no longer do are a great resource for survey research. They can tell you why they chose you initially, but also why you lost them, who they buy from now, and what you could have done to keep them.

Lapsed customers will likely respond at a lower rate than current customers.

Prospect Email Lists

If you have an email list of prospective customers who have reached out for information or quotes, or who have downloaded resources from your website, you can invite them to participate in your survey. For these respondents especially, it's important that your survey is anonymous (since they'll worry about you using it for sales purposes).

Online or Social Media Communities

LapsedIf your organization hosts or participates in online discussions, has a Facebook or other social media page or community, you can invite participants on those platforms to take the survey. Use a different survey link so that you can tell who's come from where — this will allow you to see the difference between groups on various platforms so you can tailor your online activity appropriately.

Partner Organizations

Particularly for B2B companies who may have very limited contacts or operate in a particular niche, partners can be an incredibly valuable source of survey respondents. Trade organizations, event sponsors, even other organizations serving the same audience you do may be willing to share a link to an anonymous survey with their communities on your behalf. Sweetening the pot by agreeing to share some of the research results, or even allowing them to provide some questions they'd like to include, can often be a win/win for both of you.

Panel Providers

Panel providers have developed large groups of people willing to anonymously participate in survey research. Quality panel companies carefully vet their panel participants so you can be confident they are who they claim to be, monitor the feedback from clients on the quality of the responses they get, and ensure that respondents can only participate in a limited number of surveys within a given month.

Some panels specialize in a particular niche — healthcare, technology, etc. — and many provide access to a wide range of audiences.

Panels will provide a projection of feasibility (how many respondents they can get you) and cost per respondent based on your target — respondent characteristics, geography, etc.

You will pay the per-respondent fee (CPI) for the responses that meet your qualifications, and in some cases a project minimum fee. Panel providers are able to program and field your survey if you'd like, or you can incorporate URL redirects into your own survey and send them a link to send to respondents.

Research Recruiting Providers

Sometimes even panel providers can't find the respondents you need, especially if you're a B2B company working in a narrow or highly specialized niche. In that case you can rely on the help of companies who specialize in respondent recruiting, who will do the legwork to identify and contact potential respondents who fit your target profile.

Sources To Avoid

Purchased Lists

Email lists are generated in many different ways, and unfortunately many list providers don't care how they get their names. If you're using a list based on contest entries or giveaways, or generated for another purpose (being notified about an upcoming event, attending a concert, etc.) then you're not going to get a good responses from it, and the responses you do get won't be high quality.

Friends and Family

Often our best supporters want to help us by taking our survey. But if they're not our target audience, their participation can compromise the other data you're gathering. Better to give them a link specifically for friends and family, if necessary, and then exclude their responses from your analysis.