



NAVIGATING SAMPLE SOURCES: MATCHING YOUR RESEARCH GOALS TO THE RIGHT AUDIENCE

At Research Results, we are often asked: “How do we know we’re talking to the right people?” Over the years, we’ve seen how dramatically research outcomes can shift based on the participants. Your sample source is actually one of the most influential—and often overlooked — drivers of data quality.

Not all sample sources are created equal. Whether you’re validating a product concept, assessing market opportunity, or gathering feedback from current customers, the sampling source you choose shapes the reliability, depth, and nuance of your findings.

BELOW ARE FIVE PARTICIPANT TYPES, WITH GUIDANCE ON WHEN EACH IS THE BEST FIT.

#1:

Verified Panels and Expert Networks

Definition:

Verified panels consist of respondents rigorously screened and authenticated through LinkedIn, professional credentials, licenses, or government-issued IDs.

Why it matters:

In B2B, healthcare, and other specialized segments, the margin for error is tiny. Verified panels ensure respondents are who they say they are and meet your criteria.



Best Use Cases

- B2B decision-makers
- Healthcare professionals



Advantages

- High respondent credibility
- Reduced risk of misrepresented credentials
- Stronger foundation for strategic insights



Limitations

- Higher cost
- Longer recruitment times
- Smaller sample pools

#2:

Self-Reported Online Panels

Definition:

Respondents self-identify roles, qualifications, or demographics with minimal verification.

Why it matters:

This is ideal for speed, scale, and cost-efficiency. Trade-offs include less certainty about respondent accuracy.



RESEARCH RESULTS



Best Use Cases

- General consumer studies
- Early-stage concept testing
- Quick pulse studies



Advantages

- Lower cost
- Fast turnaround
- Large-scale reach



Limitations

- Risk of misclassification
- "Survey-savvy" respondents may bias results
- Less suitable when authenticity is critical

#3: Phone-to-Web Recruitment

Definition:

Respondents are contacted by phone to confirm fit, then directed to complete an online survey.

Why it matters:

Some audiences are underrepresented online, require precise geographic targeting, are harder to reach, or may be less responsive to custom recruits. This hybrid approach validates respondents while using the efficiency of web surveys.



Best Use Cases

- Geographic-specific studies
- Populations with limited digital access
- Niche B2B and healthcare professionals



Advantages

- Access to harder-to-reach respondents
- Validates real participants
- Flexible geographic targeting



Limitations

- Higher cost than online panels
- Longer recruitment timelines
- Less scalable for large national samples

#4: Specialty / Custom Recruitment

Definition:

Recruiting through professional networks and associations, advocacy groups, niche communities, patient registries, or social networks to reach specific profiles.

Why it matters:

When research relies on rare expertise or lived experience, custom recruitment ensures accurate representation.



RESEARCH RESULTS



Best Use Cases

- Rare disease or condition-specific patient studies
- Highly specialized B2B segments
- Specific user groups (power users, influencers, brand loyalists)



Advantages

- Highly relevant and authentic respondents
- Engaged participants with direct experience



Limitations

- Higher time and cost
- Smaller sample sizes
- Must manage representativeness expectations

#5:

Client-Provided / Customer Lists

Definition:

Participants come from a client's CRM, loyalty program, or user community.

Why it matters:

For feedback from actual customers, this provides valuable context and actionable insights.



Best Use Cases

- Customer satisfaction and experience studies
- Product feedback and usage research
- Retention and loyalty studies



Advantages

- High relevance and brand familiarity
- Motivated respondents if incentivized properly
- Strong for longitudinal tracking
- Know that you are speaking with real people



Limitations

- Response rates are typically very low
- Only reflects current or past customers
- Potential bias toward engaged or vocal segments
- Requires privacy and consent compliance
 - a. Participants must have opted in to marketing materials
- Response rates vary based on list quality

Choosing the right participant source isn't just a logistical step, it's a research design decision that impacts data integrity and confidence in your results. If you're unsure which path is right, we can help.

To discuss your specific needs, contact Ellen Pieper, Chief Client Officer, Ellen.Pieper@researchresults.com, or 919-368-5819 today.