

The background of the entire page features a group of stylized, semi-transparent silhouettes of people in business attire. The silhouettes are in various colors including teal, purple, blue, and green, and are arranged in a way that suggests a diverse group of professionals. A large teal triangle is in the top left corner, and an orange triangle is in the bottom right corner.

THE RIGHT BLEND: A QUICK GUIDE TO ENSURING HIGH-QUALITY B2B MARKET RESEARCH SAMPLE

Knowing how to select your partners
can make or break your study results

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KEY FINDINGS:

- 1.** Selecting respondents for a quantitative B2B survey requires a different approach than selecting sample for B2C research.
- 2.** The quality of B2B sample varies greatly among different B2B survey panels and expert networks.
- 3.** Blended sample sources for B2B survey research can provide more stable, representative, and granular results than single-source research.
- 4.** Researchers can ensure high-quality B2B market research sample by following a checklist of best practices for B2B survey sample selection.



B2B growth requires deep insight on your target customer

The most successful organizations with the highest rates of growth are client-centric in everything they do, from product design to marketing strategy to sales approaches. These market winners build their corporate culture and playbooks with customer understanding at the center. For B2B leaders, surveys of customers, prospects, suppliers, distributors, and even competitors' customers are a powerful way to acquire deep customer understanding.

B2C and B2B surveys necessitate different approaches

B2C companies can easily survey, say, shampoo users, aged 18-49, to get insights on their target customer – but finding the right audience for B2B surveys is a greater challenge because the targets are much rarer and far more discerning. To reach procurement managers at manufacturing plants, automotive fleet decision makers, cloud developers, or CFOs – and to entice these professionals to engage in a survey – you'll need a precision approach. And these folks expect to be appropriately (that is, highly) compensated for their valuable time, as detailed in the Ipsos POV Decision Makers or [Decision Breakers: Why B2B Research Fraud Can Cost You Millions and How to Prevent It.](#)



if something seems too good to be true, it probably is,”

A CEO will not spend 20 minutes taking a survey for \$5 in rewards if their hourly pay rate is \$400/hour. The old adage, if something seems too good to be true, it probably is, applies well to B2B market research. If your B2B sample costs are too low, the quality of respondents will also be too low. The people you are surveying are not likely to be who they say they are, as qualified as they claim to be, or even real humans! This means that understanding the sources and quality measures used by different sample providers is critical to deliver a true understanding of your target audience.

Michael Gunnels, President of Ipsos Total Operations, North America, has witnessed the differences among B2B and B2C quantitative suppliers firsthand:



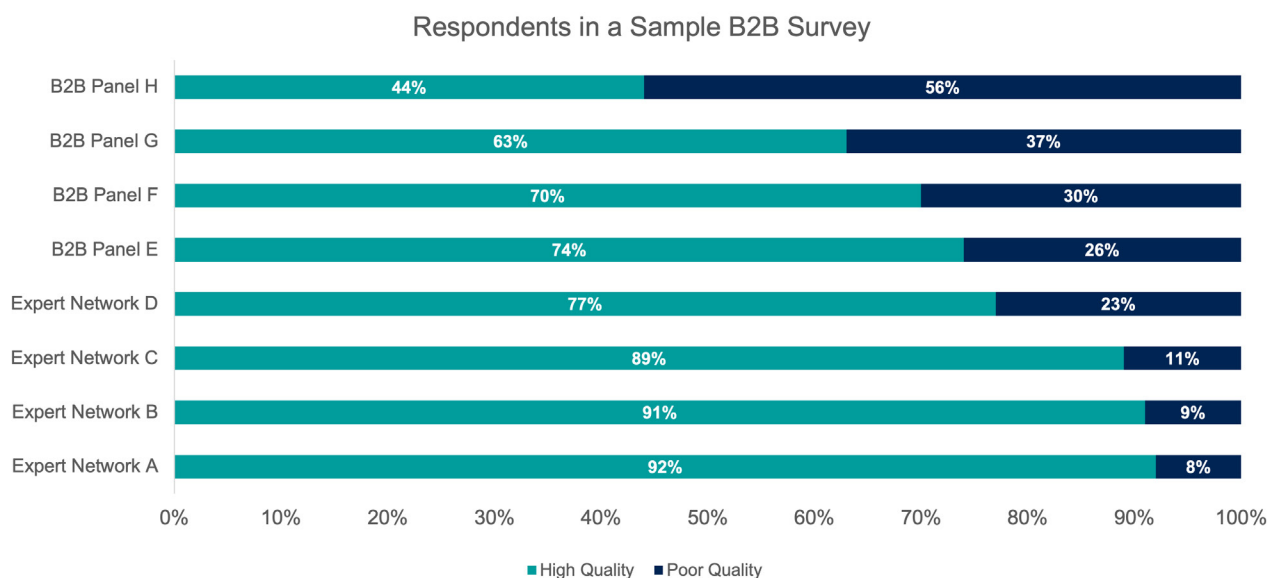
Having the wrong people that are not qualified to participate in B2B research or those who have not been verified as the appropriate target audience can lead to catastrophic research outcomes. Not only is this an inefficient use of valuable research budget, but the resulting poor data quality could lead to flawed business decisions that cost clients millions of dollars."

The two types of B2B survey audience sources

There are two types of sources for B2B survey sample: expert networks that handpick people in a given industry to respond to your surveys, and B2B panels that gather people who want to take surveys and send yours if it matches with their background. Some companies offer both expert networks and panels. Regardless of their approach, these B2B sample providers generate streams of professionals available for market research surveys. As a B2B market research leader, Ipsos works with B2B audience vendors on a daily basis around the world to assess the quality, consistency, and value each sample provider delivers. Ipsos ensures the professionals used on our research studies are of the highest quality, which means we vet every survey response from B2B sample providers at the individual level, and remove those that are invalid so they never get into our client's insight deliverables.

Quality varies greatly among B2B sample suppliers

Increasingly, we are seeing wide variations in quality amongst the vendors who deliver B2B audience sample. Businesses that are not working through Ipsos for their market research may not have visibility into these quality variations, so it's critical to inform the business decision makers that will rely on the insights derived from these surveys. Let's look at a recent, and typical, case:



As you can see, expert networks generally had higher quality across the board, although none delivered 100% high-quality respondents. B2B panels, while often less expensive, have high amounts of unqualified people and deliver lower quality in general. However, blanket assumptions cannot always be made, because even among B2B panels and expert networks, there are wide variations – and these can vary further from country to country, where different sources have stronger or weaker recruiting methods.

Blending panels is the answer

There is one key way to mitigate the challenges that any one panel or expert network might have on its own. Using a mix of sources is the strongest approach to ensure that your B2B research delivers insights you can trust. A typical blended approach might incorporate a few expert networks that entice handpicked respondents with high monetary incentives, alongside sample from a few B2B panels which can reach businesspeople who are actively seeking incentives to take surveys as part of a panel, and thus require lower incentives to participate. Cecile Carre, Vice President of Research-on-Research and Respondent Quality at Ipsos, is responsible for overseeing research on research and has seen the data that supports the use of a blended approach:



Blending is a surprisingly simple way to increase the overall quality of B2B research: it increases reach and coverage, and helps protect execution and feasibility, by giving you a range of levers to pull in case of issues. Most importantly, in a world where fraud is becoming increasingly sophisticated, using a blend gives us the ability to quickly detect an attack by giving us the ability to assess vendors against each other!"

Benefits of a blended B2B sample approach

Granular insights — With multiple sample providers, you have greater access to respondents and can get more people to take your survey. For example, if you only use one sample source, you might not be able to get 50 people who work in manufacturing, 50 in healthcare, and 50 in education in order to breakout your research by industry. With more access to sample across multiple providers, however, you can get enough people to fill each industry bucket. This means you can get deeper insights due to the higher feasibility of reaching more respondents from target populations.

Representative audiences — Each sample provider recruits people for studies in their own way. Some offer direct cash rewards, others provide points or gift cards. Some have ongoing communities where people are involved over time, others recruit someone for one survey and never engage with them again. These different outreach approaches draw in different audiences with different motivations for participating. If you only use one approach, you could bias the results to people who are inclined to that approach. For example, if you sourced your entire survey from a B2B panel that makes donations to charity when people take a survey, and then asked them about the importance of brand purpose in your marketing, you might see high levels of support for purpose-driven marketing. However, when you implement more purpose messages in your marketing in the real world, you may not see positive uplift in brand engagement. That could be because only a fraction of your audience cares deeply about brand purpose, and the rest cares more about price or ease of use. Because you selected your survey respondents from a pool with a predilection to charitable causes, your research sent your marketing in the wrong direction.



Comparability across studies — When using a properly blended approach, you can trend insights over time with confidence. No one sample supplier provides the majority of responses, so if a given supplier needs to be removed due to poor quality or their inability to deliver promised feasibility, another supplier can be inserted without drastically changing the makeup of the respondent pool. This allows for patterns in surveys to be evaluated over time to identify market trends. It also allows you to look at multiple B2B survey projects and compare them to each other. When you use different vendors for each project, the underlying makeup of the sample sets can alter the outcomes, causing projects to not be comparable for evaluation. For example, if a company created a brand tracker using only one sample source and that sample source was hit with a fraud attack, the results from the tracking trends would not actually reflect brand health. Or, imagine a company that tests creative with multiple suppliers using different underlying samples. The results of one creative test to another would not be comparable, and it would thus be impossible to know which messages were ultimately working best for the company at large.

Cost efficiency — While it would be nice to fill every study with people who were handpicked for the study and vetted with phone interviews and competency tests before they took your survey, the costs of doing this level of audience selection can quickly accumulate. With a blended approach you can include some individually selected and vetted respondents as well as those who also fit your criteria and belong to a B2B panel. This blend creates an overall lower cost while maintaining high quality for your research.





What should client-centric B2B companies do to ensure they are making decisions with high-quality data?

1 Work with market research companies who have a view across multiple sample providers:

In studies where you are only working with a single source of sample, the market researcher has no independent view of quality sample and no incentive to reduce it. Market research companies such as Ipsos can detect low-quality sample and immediately replace it with a better audience from a different source. It's a real-life example of why not putting all your eggs in one basket is sound advice.

2 Use a blend of sample sources.

Even high-quality sources have some low-quality responses. Once a bad actor figures out how to get around a particular source's quality detection, it can quickly infuse mass low-quality sample into the network or panel. When you rely on a single expert network or B2B panel, you are at risk if it gets hit with a fraud attack during your study. These attacks can delay study completion at best, as new sample has to be acquired. At worst, they can go undetected and damage your insights – and by extension, your entire strategy. When you have multiple sources, an attack on one has a smaller impact on your overall results. Low-performing or compromised providers can be easily removed from your research mid-study – without impacting the feasibility and timing of your research deliverable.

3 Choose researchers with B2B experience.

Working with professionals who have extensive experience in B2B market research provides two primary benefits. First, it ensures your research is deep, unique, and impactful to your organization, because they understand your target audience. A moderator who has interviewed hundreds of cloud developers and speaks their language will deliver a far richer discussion and more valuable insights than a researcher who typically works with beauty product clients. In addition, market researchers with deep B2B experience can quickly identify when something is not right with a respondent, whether in an interview or reviewing an open-ended survey response. They know the industry terms and trends, and can spot whether a respondent is just regurgitating surface-level information they saw online, or if they truly have experience in the sector.

4 Work with market research companies who have a view across multiple sample providers:

In studies Require independently vetted sample sources: Nearly every B2B sample provider says they have high-quality audiences. But how can you be sure those claims are true? When you rely on a market research firm that has a formal quality vetting process, you know experts in the field have pre-checked the source against standard variables such as compliance, sample sourcing methods, and data hygiene. Even more important is the ongoing vetting of sources and quality scoring over time to ensure sample providers continue to deliver the quality they had during initial vetting and onboarding. Market research firms that deliver a high volume of B2B research projects have many studies with which to build quality and feasibility profiles for each B2B expert network and panel, ensuring you get the latest blend of high-quality respondents for your project and insights you can trust.

5 Build protection into the study design.

When studies are written by B2B experts who understand common types of low-quality sample, they can write defensive questions into the survey to suss out low quality respondents. For example, they can add fake companies to lists of “brands you work with” questions to identify people who are making up answers. The list of defensive techniques is long but better left undocumented to prevent fraudsters from learning all the best secrets to fraud identification.



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Sources:

The following people were interviewed for their perspectives on accessing quality B2B audiences on expert networks and panels as part of this report.

- Cecile Carre, Vice President, Research-on-Research and Respondent Quality, Ipsos
- Michael Gunnels, President, Total Operations, Ipsos, North America

About Ipsos

At Ipsos we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands, and society. We deliver information and analysis that makes our complex world easier and faster to navigate and inspires our clients to make smarter decisions. Ipsos employs nearly 20,000 people and conducts research programs in 90 markets. Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos is controlled and managed by research professionals.