



Why Consider Custom Panels?

Surveys are an excellent instrument to measure customer sentiment and test product ideas. Yet many companies that sell to a very specific audience face the problem of finding the right respondents: individuals that use their products or services in a personal or work context or could possibly use them in the future. Commercial survey panels offer abundant access to a variety of standard respondent groups, mostly for consumers, but usually cannot provide access to highly specific groups, such as the users of a particular type of equipment or service.

This is where a **custom panel** can offer a very attractive solution: it allows any company to build a group of devoted and targeted individuals to contact for their own research, ensuring ready access whenever new questions emerge. Compared to a simple list of existing product users, a custom panel is much more representative of the entire market for a given product by ensuring that all relevant groups, even those who may prefer a competitive offer, are included. Custom panels also have the potential to offset a considerable portion of the startup cost by giving others access to the panelists.

How are respondents found and recruited?

Customer and prospect lists are typically great starting points to creating a custom panel. To expand the custom panel and make sure it encompasses the entire base of actual and potential customers, we suggest using any media or outlet used by the target groups – trade magazines or associations are good avenues, but leads for additional panelists can come from a variety of channels, depending on the target population. We typically recommend offering some type of incentive to respondents since that keeps panelists more engaged in the long run. Incentives can be offered in a variety of ways, not just as cash. Anything that is of clear value to respondents can be considered, such as discounts or credits for products, services, literature, or educational offerings.

How would the panel work?

When building a custom panel, there are four main steps to ensure valuable survey results:

1. **Initial Review**: In this step, we evaluate what type of research will be conducted through the custom panel, what type of lists may already exist, and which additional respondents need to be found to generate research that is meaningful and will have impact.
2. **Building Efforts**: In this step, we would contact organizations or channels of interest, obtain access to their members or subscribers, and invite them to join the panel. We would also develop an incentive structure, and conduct a staging study to gain additional information about new respondents to confirm our custom panel building approach works for the planned research.
3. **Launch and Operation**: During this step, we would establish the custom panel as a database and start contacting panelists to participate in research studies. One very important component of panel operation is finding a balance that keeps respondents engaged and interested but does not overtax them, so we would make sure that each respondent gets contacted about once a quarter but not much more often than that.



4. Operation and Extension: Once the custom panel is up and running, it is important to regularly refresh it with additional participants, since some respondents are bound to move on over time. In addition, the custom panel owner can decide if other organizations are given access to panelists for a fee. Such a step can serve to offset costs and also serve as a great tool to engage panelists during times where the panel owner does not need to conduct any studies.

What do we offer?

We can help you develop and launch your custom panel in a variety of ways. Our involvement can range from consulting support in evaluating panel options all the way to full-scale panel building and day-to-day management. Please contact us and we will find a custom panel solution for your needs and your budget.

Further questions? Please contact:

Stefan Hartmann – Principal – Sounding Weight Research

stefan@soundingweight.com

206-905-9470