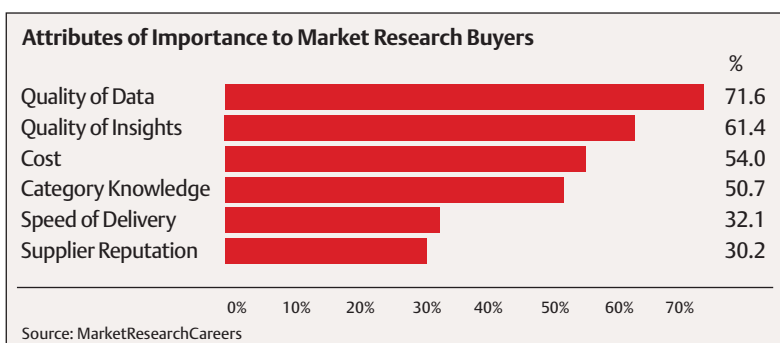


Quality concerns

Despite the emergence of new research techniques, one item remains of critical importance: the quality of the underlying data. By Mike Carroll

Collected data, the foundation for recommendations and changes in business strategy, must originate from reliable sources and be projectable to the population under investigation. So critical is data quality to research professionals that a January 2008 survey of more than 700 US market research professionals conducted by MarketResearchCareers reveals it as the most important attribute to market research buyers when selecting a research vendor.



When further examining the topic of data quality among market research organisations that purchase online samples, important dimensions include:

- Representivity of the delivered sample
- Honesty of answers provided by participants
- Source/recruitment method of the sample
- Aggregate size of the provider's sample universe
- Frequency of historical survey participation by respondents.

Divided opinions

Reflecting a shift in society's online behaviors and 'always on' lifestyles, nearly two-thirds (63%) of all market research professionals believe that online methods provide superior research data quality compared to mail. Yet research professionals are nearly equally divided between telephone and online methods when identifying the technique that provides the greatest research data quality.

With 93% of market research professionals employing online survey methods to gain insights into their businesses (compared to 66% for telephone, 49% for in-person, and 35% for mail), a familiar topic is threatening the quality of internet-based data collection: declining cooperation rates. The pervasive challenge of consumer time compression and parallel impacts of answering machines and high volume direct mail upon telephone and mail-based collections methods, respectively, are clearly showing signs that impact the quality of internet-based survey data collection.

Currently 60% of research professionals (up from 57% in 2007) are concerned about the quality of online surveys due to declining cooperation rates. Perhaps coincidentally, yet particularly insightful, fewer US organisations in 2008 view online research as a valuable decision-making tool despite its speed, cost, and respondent-friendly advantages.

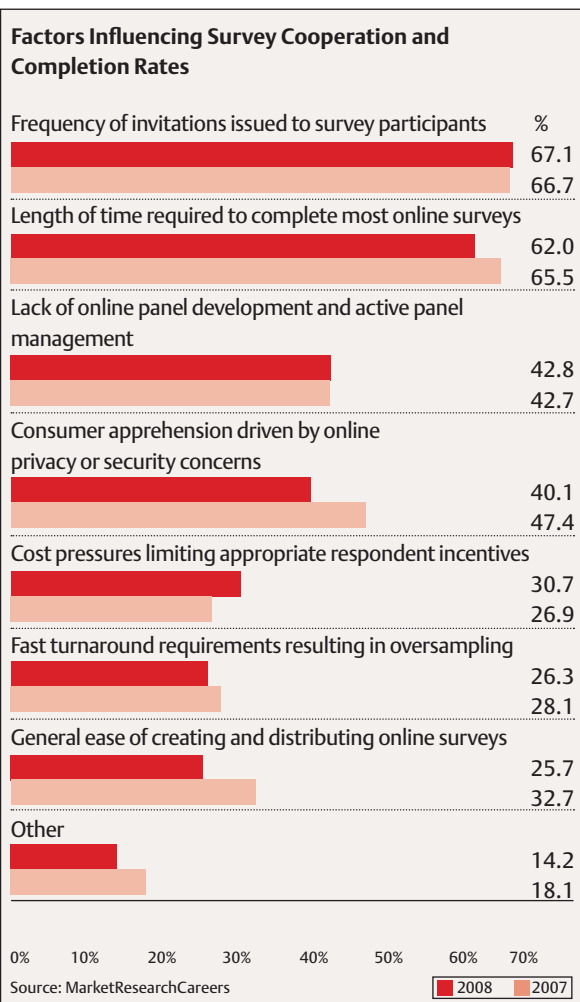
Market research professionals cite frequent contact, lengthy surveys, and the lack of online panel development as contributing factors to declining online survey cooperation and completion rates, impacting and eroding data quality.

Suppliers or buyers?

Unfortunately, the implementation of any solution may be difficult given that market research suppliers are significantly more likely to believe shorter surveys, larger incentives, and new sample management techniques are required. The challenge emerges because market research

that a cooperative effort between market research buyers and suppliers is necessary to address this critical data quality topic.

For surveys to maintain their effectiveness and their data quality, efforts must be made to increase cooperation and



buyers are increasingly under budgetary restrictions and are typically exclusively responsible for a survey's content, length, and target audience selection.

Reinforcing this apparent conflict, 42% of all market research professionals believe *suppliers* are exclusively responsible for rectifying the problem. Interestingly, only 3% of participants believe market research buyers should shoulder this responsibility, with nearly half (48%) believing

Top Five Solutions to Increase Survey Cooperation and Completion Rates

	All MR Professionals %	MR Buyers %	MR Suppliers %
Limit the number of questions or time required to complete a survey	63.9	59.9	66.6
Make surveys generally more engaging for respondents	60.6	61.3	60.1
Better target surveys to individuals with an interest in the researched topic	55.9	57.5	54.8
Attempt to identify respondents providing insincere or fraudulent answers to surveys	46.2	39.0	51.2
Increase the use of survey incentives	40.7	38.7	42.1

Source: Market Research Careers

completion rates. A true partnership approach between research buyers and suppliers is essential to reduce survey length and increase respondent engagement. With these efforts, research professionals can maintain and even improve the tools available to them to capture accurate data upon which insightful recommendations and decisions can be confidently made. ■

Mike Carroll is director sales & marketing at MarketResearchCareers in the US.

About the survey

The research for the 2008 edition of *MarketResearchCareers' Annual Survey of Market Research Professionals* was conducted between January 9 and January 23, 2008. In total, 703 market research professionals in the US (both suppliers and buyers across all industries) completed an online survey. The survey completion rate was 74.0 % with a sampling error of +/- 3.7%.

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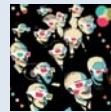
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