



Address-Based Sampling – The “New” Answer to an Old Question

QUESTION: What is the best way to gather information from an identified group of people?

ANSWER: Use data collection that allows the widest coverage of the intended population.

In the analytic hyper-drive generated by search engines and the internet, even the design of sampling plans for marketing research studies has been impacted. Elements of *convenience and efficiency* now seem to trump the importance of “*statistical projectability*” in more and more projects. Confounding the issue further, our ability to generate samples that cover a large proportion of a particular population has deteriorated as response rates decrease and technology fractionalizes the population even more.

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Often overlooked in the rush to increase efficiency in sampling is the reality that data collected from individuals who may all qualify as members of the identified target audience do not necessarily reflect that market as a whole. Unless everyone has an equal chance of being included, we cannot design a sampling plan that measures how closely results might mirror the entire population. Even though error ranges and Confidence Levels are frequently quoted on data sets, they are not always legitimate. The critical element of projectability must be present before the evaluation of the data can include such metrics.

But projectability alone is not necessarily enough when looking at marketing research results. The innocent-sounding question of “projectable to what” is one of the most important elements to consider. Regardless of other qualifying criteria, a sample of respondents from a web panel, for example, will only be projectable to people “in a panel” who meet those criteria – not all people in a general population of qualifying individuals.

The data collection method traditionally used to create a sample projectable to a general population has been telephone interviewing using a random sample of landline phone numbers. This, of course, only provided data projectable to the universe of landline households. However, because that used to cover an extremely high proportion of all consumer households, the accompanying limitation was minimal. Over the years, this has changed. Growth of cell phone use (both among people who use only cell phones and those who have both types of service but use their cell phone most of the time) as well as the common use of answering machines to screen calls have made traditional landline samples less useful in representing the general population.

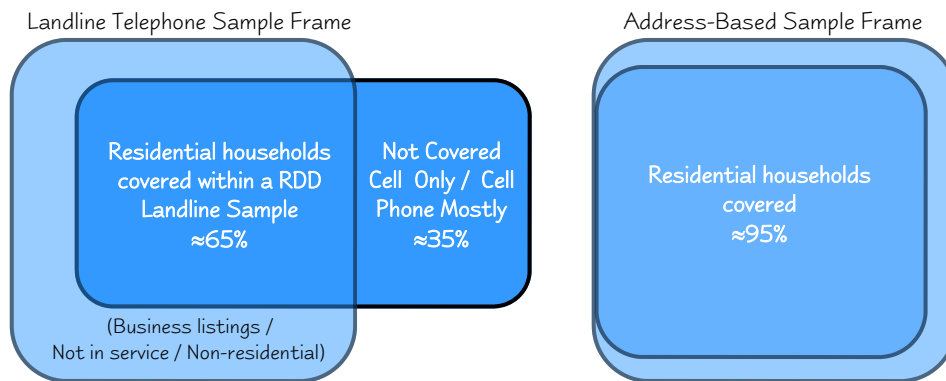
To include information from both types of telephone users in a study, interviews can be conducted among individuals with landline numbers and those with cell phone service. However, without accurate information on the number of cell phones that are active in a specified market area, the ratio of landline to cell phone interviews to be included in the data set is, at best, a guess.



A recent change in the policies of the US Postal Service has provided researchers access to a sample source with much more *complete coverage of consumer households* in a defined area than either landline or cell phone samples can provide. **Address-Based Sampling** provides what Michael Link, a well-known methodologist, refers to as “sampling from a near universal listing of residential mail delivery locations.” Because the selected households come from a single source, ABS eliminates the need for creating estimates regarding the relative populations of landline and cell phone households that should be represented in a data set.

Overall, using Address-Based Sampling as a starting point and offering multiple response modes – self-administered/mail back, telephone or online – the resulting database should represent the targeted population more completely than any single mode approach.

Residential HH Coverage



Overall, the best kinds of research for Address-Based Sampling are projects among a more general population and those using several types of response mechanisms.

- The best or most efficient use of ABS is for a general household population target. The lower the incidence of qualification, the less efficient an address-based sample will be. Postage on a large sample is an expensive element when only a portion of the targeted households would be interested or appropriate for the study.
- Projects using questionnaires that can be easily translated across different types of response methods are best. For ABS projects that involve multiple modes of response, the questionnaire will need to be created with a uni-mode orientation. There can be response differences resulting from the impact of a verbal/auditory/interviewer-assisted approach or a visual/self-administered approach to the mode of data collection. In order to control for such potential differences, having a professionally trained market researcher as part of your team becomes critical.

Address-Based Sampling answers today’s need for both accuracy and efficiency in the use of your marketing research dollars.

For more detailed discussions of **Address-Based Sampling** and the ways it can benefit research design please contact:

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