

Strategic Sample Blending: A More Intentional Approach to Sample Design

Online sample panels are not a commodity; they are not all the same. Each source has its own respondent composition, recruitment methods, behaviors, strengths, and limitations. Those characteristics can also change over time, creating differences in awareness, attitudes, behaviors, brand ratings, and concept evaluations.

Panel Bias Problems:

- Single-Source Bias
- Running Out Of Sample
- Poor Quality
- Data Inconsistencies

Combining multiple sample sources is common, but not every approach is designed with data quality or representation in mind. In many cases, providers are added primarily to reach feasibility, fill quotas, or accelerate fieldwork. This can be either stacking or aggregating panels, where sources are combined to hit a feasibility goal without fully considering differences in panel composition, recruitment practices, respondent behavior, or potential bias that could be introduced.

Because online sample panels differ from one another and change over time, stacking or aggregating them can introduce inconsistencies into the data. Adding more providers does not automatically create a stronger sample plan, particularly when source selection and allocation are not carefully controlled.

Ways of Combining Sample

- Stacking
- Aggregating
- Blending

EMI's Strategic Sample Blending methodology takes a more deliberate approach. We intentionally select complementary sample providers and manage their contribution to the study based on the audience, objectives, feasibility requirements, and potential data risks. The result is a customized blend designed to improve representation, support more consistent fieldwork, and reduce the behavioral, attitudinal, and source-related effects that can influence research outcomes.

Built Around the Study, Not a Predetermined Panel

Every project has different feasibility requirements, target audiences, incidence rates, quotas, and research objectives. EMI develops each sample blend around those requirements rather than trying to make the study fit a particular panel or existing sample asset.

Our team considers factors such as:

- Target audience and demographic composition
- Respondent attitudes and behaviors
- Historical partner performance
- Feasibility and quota requirements
- Study methodology and complexity
- Geographic coverage
- Data quality risks
- Requirements for trackers or recurring waves

By selecting complementary sources and managing their allocation, EMI can reduce single-source dependency, improve overall feasibility, limit the need for late-stage top-up sample, and help maintain greater consistency throughout fieldwork.

Awareness levels can vary by as much as 25 percentage points

Brand ratings can vary by as much as 20 percentage points

Concept ratings can vary by as much as 30 percentage points

Quality Starts with the Sources We Select

Strategic Sample Blending is supported by EMI's broader, layered approach to data quality. Every panel provider in our network must complete our rigorous Partner Assessment Process, which evaluates the consistency, reliability, and integrity of its sample. Only a limited percentage of providers meet EMI's standards for inclusion, and continued participation is never guaranteed.

Using our proprietary Quality Optimization Rating, we monitor partner performance across multiple stages of the research process. This includes pre-study traffic health, in-survey respondent behavior, and post-study data-validation measures. Providers that do not maintain our standards are addressed through our partner feedback process or removed from the network.

This continuous evaluation helps ensure that Strategic Sample Blending is not simply combining available sources. It is combining carefully vetted sources whose quality and performance are actively monitored over time.

Informed by Ongoing Research-on-Research

Panel composition and respondent behavior can evolve, which means a successful blend should not remain static indefinitely. EMI conducts ongoing research-on-research to evaluate changes across the sample landscape and identify differences in respondent attitudes, behaviors, and quality between sources.

New providers are also included in this research to establish a baseline before they are fully incorporated into client sample plans. These findings help our team understand how sources differ, where potential bias may exist, and which combinations are most appropriate for different audiences and methodologies.

This evidence-based approach allows EMI to continually refine sample strategies rather than relying solely on historical performance or provider claims.

Data Quality Protection Throughout Fieldwork

Once a customized blend has been developed, EMI applies layered quality controls to help protect the study as respondents move through the research process. These protections can include:

- Layered bot and fraud detection
- Proprietary digital fingerprinting and de-duplication
- Respondent activity-level tracking
- Centralized block-list controls
- Real-time traffic and quality monitoring
- Proactive project oversight
- Post-study validation and data scrubbing



By monitoring quality across the entire blend, EMI can identify risks that may extend across multiple panels or studies rather than viewing each source in isolation. This broader perspective helps prevent duplicate respondents, known fraudulent participants, excessive survey takers, bots, and other low-quality traffic from compromising the data

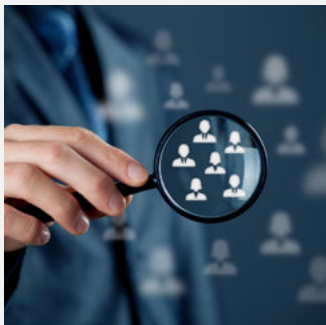
Benefits of Strategic Sample Blending

A carefully designed and actively managed sample blend can provide:

- Reduced single-source bias
- More representative sample composition
- Improved feasibility
- Greater quota-delivery flexibility
- Better consistency across the study
- Less reliance on top-up sample
- Faster and more controlled fieldwork
- Broader access to specialized audiences
- Reduced data-quality risk
- Greater confidence in research outcomes

A Broader Range of Sample Sources

Depending on the needs of the study, EMI can build blends using multiple types of sources, including:



- Traditional online panels
- Specialty panels
- Expert network
- Social media sources
- Custom communities
- Other controlled, non-traditional sources

EMI maintains a global network of more than 150 panel partners, supplemented by relationships with specialized expert networks. This breadth gives our team the flexibility to develop a sampling strategy around the audience rather than defaulting to a single source.

Best Applications

Strategic Sample Blending can support a wide range of quantitative research, including:

- Ad hoc studies
- Concept testing
- Brand and awareness research
- Customer experience studies
- Political and public opinion research
- Global and multi-market research
- Tracker studies
- Recurring wave studies
- Other complex sample designs



Expert Management from Planning Through Completion



Technology and methodology are only part of an effective sample strategy. EMI's experienced research management team works as an extension of your organization, providing strategic consultation, hands-on fieldwork oversight, and proactive communication throughout the study.

Our team monitors provider performance, sample allocation, quota delivery, traffic patterns, and quality indicators across the blend. When conditions change, we can adjust the strategy while preserving the integrity of the original sample design.

The result is a customized and controlled approach that combines the reach of multiple providers with the transparency, quality oversight, and expert management needed to deliver more reliable data and support confident decisions.

About EMI

EMI Research Solutions is a leading market research and online sample consultancy. With more than 25 years of experience operating in the insights industry, we provide you with trusted solutions, backed by our commitment to quality, that help you have the data you need to make better decisions.

Our team of research experts understands the ongoing complexities of the insights landscape and builds custom solutions designed to meet your study objectives.

Our world-class project management team, proprietary SWIFT platform, and comprehensive quality controls work together to ensure every project is executed efficiently and every respondent source is carefully managed. The result is high-quality, cost-effective insights delivered with the responsiveness, flexibility, and expertise our clients expect.

EMI's unique combination of industry expertise, unbiased consultation, proprietary technology, and personalized service is what sets us apart from other providers. Whether identifying the right sample strategy, managing complex fieldwork, or ensuring data quality, we partner with you every step of the way to deliver insights you can trust and results that drive action.

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DISCUSS YOUR PROJECT

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