



top of the funnel are lowered, making it easy for bots to join panels and find surveys with minimal verification. Continuous survey opportunities from routers further incentivize bots and professional survey takers.

Since many clients haven't been fully aware of these intricacies, they've trusted insights partners to "handle it," all the while advancing the "pricing race to the bottom." This has devalued the cost of high-quality data and perpetuated a lack of fair compensation and robust respondent validation. This repetitive cycle ensures the industry remains stuck in a defensive mode, with bots and other fraudsters continuing to invade panels in droves.

We are now fighting a data fraud battle against bot software writers and other fraudsters that we cannot win with just defensive (reactive) methods alone. Seasoned and determined insights professionals and consumer research firms using the latest anti-fraud tools still struggle to match the sophistication of bots, some now enhanced by AI. To borrow an analogy from the 1983 film "War Games," "We're deep into an arms race where each side keeps enhancing their capabilities and the only way to win is not to play the game at all."

The root cause of fraud

At its most basic level, the fraud problem is not just about compensation. Sample providers and platforms use routers that direct respondents to posted lists of surveys or offer a "take survey now" button that lets fraudsters choose to take more surveys.

This "pull" model where sample providers/marketplaces try to pull in as many responses as possible exacerbates the data fraud problem because the posting of these lists or the otherwise offering of an almost unlimited supply of surveys to take at will is the mechanism that incentivizes bot creators and other bad actors with outsized rewards for those who crack the code. In other words, the "availability of choice" provides the fraudsters with their primary incentive: the ability to earn more compensation by taking more surveys.

The alternative "push" model, used by companies like IQ, aims to drastically decrease the incentive for fraud. In this model, surveys are only delivered (pushed) to individual, prequalified members based on n-size. There are no lists or "take survey now" options for bots or professional survey takers to abuse. There is nothing a respondent can do to take more surveys and they never know when they will get one. So that removes all the incentive.

Additionally, while there are many ways to commit to this principle, companies like IQ also have 100% of surveys answered via app or SMS from a validated mobile phone. Single panelist per physical, validated mobile device removes much of the opportunity for bot responses by design.

So the incentive and opportunity are eliminated. This is how we became 100% bot-free but ours is not the only solution. Other companies, many of whom have signed below, have made great strides in combating data fraud and should be looked at as examples as well. We commend all companies in the space who see the data fraud challenge with clarity and invest meaningful time, attention and capital to its solution.

Offense vs. defense

Almost all data fraud problems disappear if the ability of respondents (human or otherwise) to choose to take more surveys is eliminated. Offensively eliminating the fraudsters' capability (and motivation) rather than defensively trying to detect them after the fact is a far more efficient investment in the long run.

The switch from "pull" to "push" will take time and resources, including a technology investment, but the industry has no choice. This is a proven solution that anyone can implement. In the meantime, some steps can be taken immediately:

- **Treat and compensate consumers fairly.** Use only permission-based panels. End the use of river sampling or other non-opted-in respondents. (If we don't, regulators will make this decision for us.) Focus on an optimal respondent experience. Mobile-only design and the push model are great first steps. So is a "pay-per-response" approach, which discourages unnecessary survey questions with a financial penalty. Provide immediate and tangible compensation without hidden pitfalls. Fair cash compensation is essential for establishing trust. Quality data comes at a higher price.
- **Reduce open-source recruitment.** Invite-only panels with rigorous screening should become standard. Start building these panels now and