



VansonBourne



**A brief guide to...**

# Sampling



**Lucy Coleman**

## What is sampling and why is it so important?

In market research, **sampling** is the selection of a subset of the population of interest in a study. Sampling is used to attain the opinions of a proportion of people within a group, which researchers can then use to generalise to the wider population of the group. As collecting responses from everyone in a target population would usually be a very difficult task – due to time and budget restraints, as well respondents having the right to refuse to take part in research – sampling allows for the opinions of a representative sample of the target population to be gathered.

**Not sure where to start?** Here's four things to consider...



# 1 Who do you want to interview?

## Principles of sampling

The **target population**, or **population of interest**, is the market from which the sample is drawn in order to collect data that is relevant to your research objectives. That target will vary depending on your requirements and the objectives of the research study. Target populations may comprise different cohorts that are of relevance to the research, for example the country, organisation sector or the roles and responsibilities of the individuals within the target population.

### Choosing the right sampling technique



At Vanson Bourne we typically employ a non-random sampling approach, also known as **quota sampling**.

#### **What is it?**

Quota sampling is a sampling technique which identifies the population of interest and assigns quotas that mimic the target population, ensuring the sample is as representative as possible. We ensure the sample is representative of our target population in order to deliver results that are as close as possible to the results that would have been obtained if the entire target population was interviewed.

#### **What are the benefits?**

Quota sampling ensures fieldwork is as time efficient and cost effective as possible. To ensure bias is kept to a minimum, we ensure the target population is as representative of the wider sample as possible.

# 2 How many interviews do you need?

## Getting the right sample size

**A sample size refers to the number of participants included in a study. Ensuring a robust sample size is important as this allows for a more accurate representation of the target population to be attained and ensures reliable analysis and representative cross-tabulations - giving you data you can depend on.**

So what's the magic number? Well, for B2B research on decision-making level respondents, many press publications consider 100 respondents to be a credible number to represent a single country. But (there's always a but) this does vary depending on the size of a country. The US, for example, has a far larger population than New Zealand, which would need to be reflected in the sample size to ensure that the base numbers stand up to any scrutiny, whether from the press or your stakeholders.

The numbers used to represent a sample are important, not only from a specialist or industry press perspective, but also from the perspective of allowing additional analysis of respondents and deeper cuts of the data to be undertaken. When it comes to these subsets of respondents, there is no single recommendation that will be appropriate in all circumstances - but as a good guide, 30 respondents are usually deemed to be sufficient to support analysis in B2B studies. In certain cases, it may be necessary to draw a larger sample than would be expected from some parts of the population: for example, to select more from a minority grouping to ensure that sufficient data is obtained for analysis on such groups.





# A little bit of science on minimum sample sizes

Here at Vanson Bourne, we ensure our sample sizes are designed to get you the robust and reliable data for the outcomes you need - from supporting strategic business decisions to creating content for public release. All the while, ensuring that the fieldwork process is cost and time effective.

As best practise we recommend only analysing and reporting on any subsets of data of 30 respondents or more, as any less is not a robust enough sample. To add justification to this recommendation, we ran a study using our **VB Community** to allow us to analyse the effect of sample size and representation. The study consisted of 100 UK IT decision maker respondents. The findings are represented in the below chart where we've pulled out the key things you need to know:

1

On the left scale we have the difference from the average response or the *standard deviation* (the closer to 0 the standard deviation is, the more reliable the results).

2

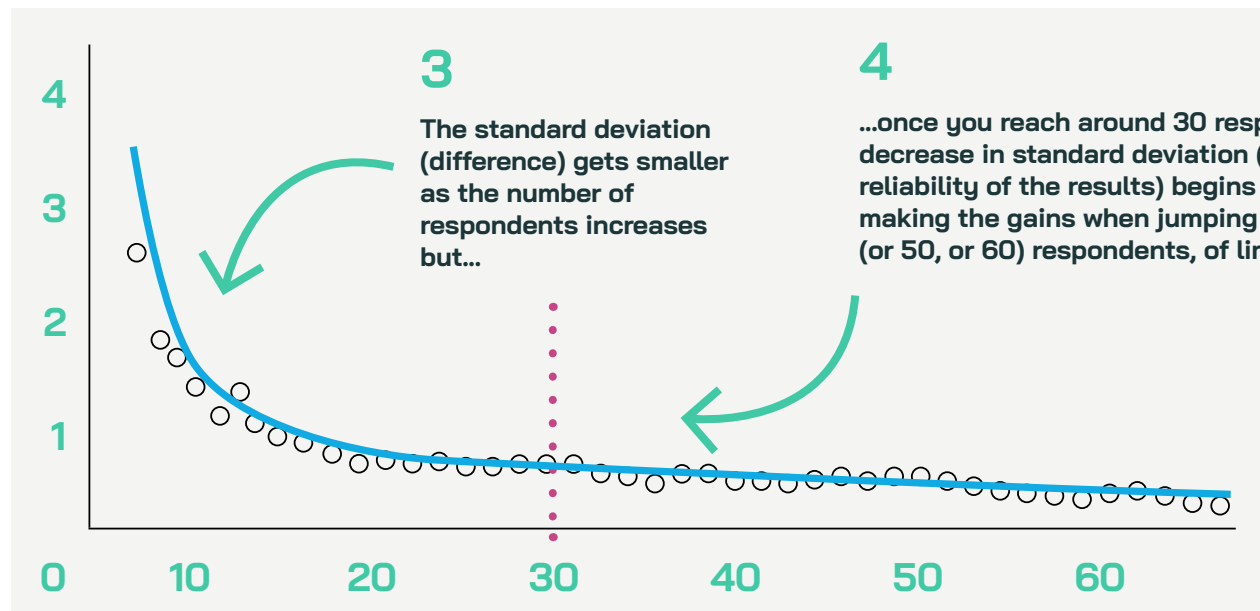
The bottom scale shows the number of respondents.

3

The standard deviation (difference) gets smaller as the number of respondents increases but...

4

...once you reach around 30 respondents, the decrease in standard deviation (the increasing reliability of the results) begins to level off, making the gains when jumping from 30 to 40 (or 50, or 60) respondents, of limited benefit.



**Remember:** this is only a guide and will vary depending on the research scope and if you're looking to drill down into the data e.g. by size, sector etc.

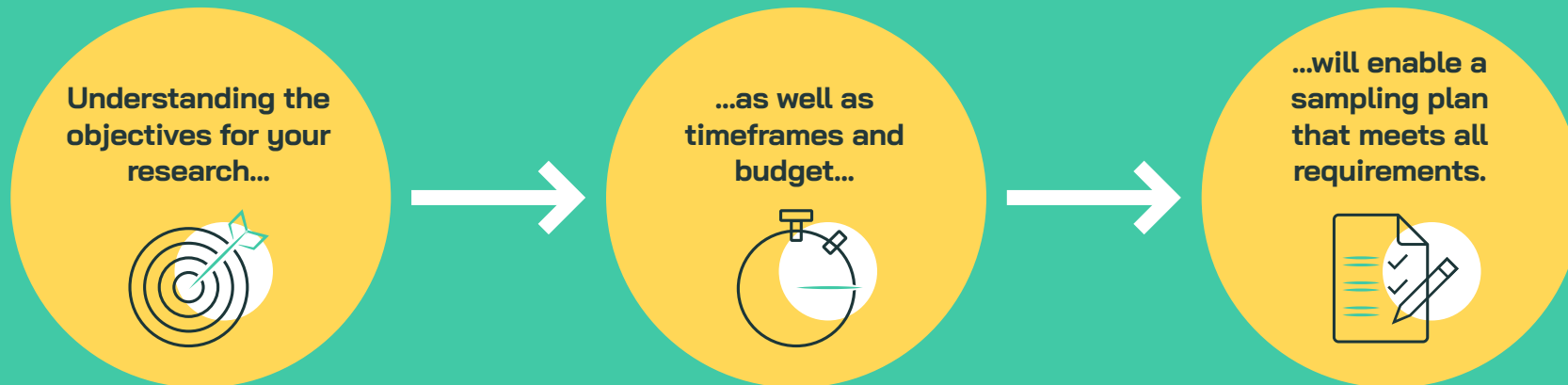
# 3 Getting it right first time

## Minimising sample error

Errors can occur when an ineffective sampling model is used, which can result in data that is inaccurate or less valuable to you. This could be because the wrong target population was interviewed or there was too little information to accurately use quota sampling to represent that target population. Issues with sample sizes could also arise, and all of this can lead to bias or poor-quality data which won't give you the robust, representative insights you need.

We work to ensure that the chance of error is as small as possible. Our experienced, MRS certified Research Consultants will work closely with you during the proposal and project stages to ensure we have all the relevant information we need to create a tailored sampling plan that will hit your objectives the first time round.

### Creating a tailored sampling plan





# 4 Sourcing the sample

Finding and interviewing the people you need

**There are two main ways we would recommend, depending on your objectives:**

## Sourced by Vanson Bourne:

In addition to our **VB Community**, we also use a wide range of quantitative online panels, as well as having access to qualitative and telephone suppliers, which gives us the ability to interview respondents from all around the world. All our panels are ESOMAR and MRS certified, and many specialise in targeting business and IT decision makers. Every provider we use goes through a careful vetting and testing process to ensure that they meet our requirements and we additionally run multiple rounds of checks during fieldwork to ensure data is of the highest quality.

## Sourced by you:

Have an existing group of people in mind that you want to survey? No problem! We can also interview client databases and will work with you to ensure that this is done in accordance with GDPR. This can be done through inviting people from the database to take part in the survey itself, or through providing you with the tools to send a survey invite to your customers. We're then able to process and analyse the data, ensuring we are compliant with all data protection regulations throughout the project.



## Why Vanson Bourne?

### Experience and skill

Sampling will vary for each project, and there is no concrete recommendation that suits all circumstances. This is where we can help. When scoping out projects to hit your objectives, our consultants will guide you to the most appropriate and cost-effective options to ensure our data is as reliable as possible and meets your needs. Through creating effective sampling plans, we ensure that we can deliver research results that are reflective of the larger target population, increasing the external validity and reliability of the results to allow you to make informed decisions from the data.

### Our ability to source sample

Certain attributes can make respondents much more difficult to source. Senior decision makers, for example, are inevitably, busy people. And the more senior, the busier they are – so taking part in research is not necessarily a priority for them. But it's not just about seniority. For example, workers (regardless of decision-making influence) in defence or security-focused organisations can also be a challenge to encourage participation, due to the amount of confidential information they can hold on their business or clients. We're experts in sourcing niche respondents in order to meet your outcomes. By working with our specialist fieldwork suppliers, and allowing more fieldwork time and budget, we've enabled our clients to collect responses across the globe – from Peruvian miners to Norwegian Aerospace CISOs!

### What are you looking to achieve? Let's talk!

Whether you know exactly who and how many respondents you want to interview, or whether you need some extra guidance, we can help. Talk to us today about building a robust B2B research programme that will give you data you can depend on.

**[enquiries@vansonbourne.com](mailto:enquiries@vansonbourne.com)**