

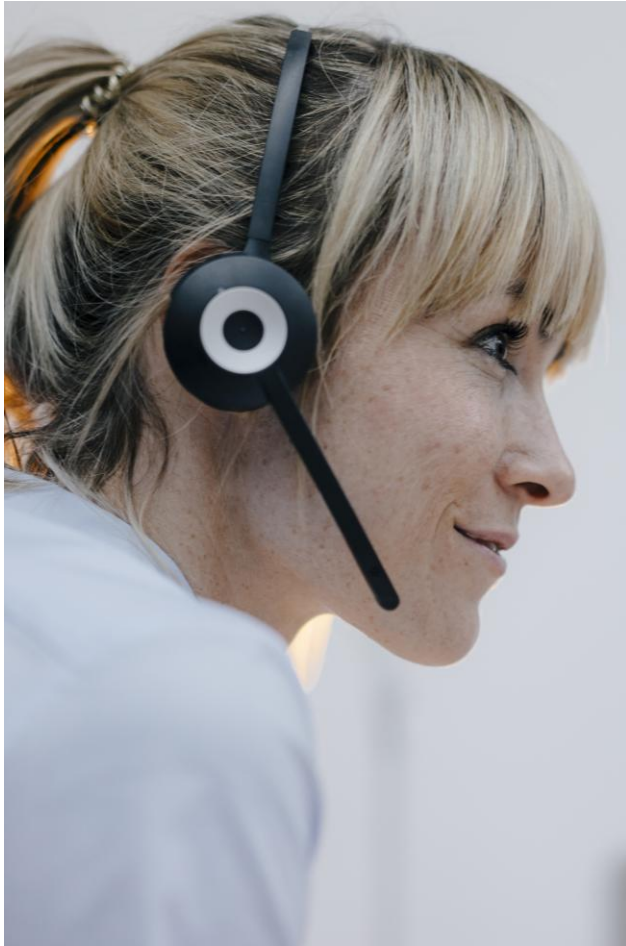


# Back to the Future:

Is it time to add phone surveys back into your quant toolkit?



# Live interviewer phone surveys have many benefits



Data Quality



Niche Geographies



Response Rates



Representativeness of Population



Personal Touch



Better Open-Ends



## Data Quality

*“[Open AI’s Operator] made \$1.20 for me by setting up accounts on websites that offer small cash rewards for filling out surveys. (I might have made more, but I started to feel guilty for spamming the surveys with fake, robot written answers.)”*

Source: The New York Times, “How Helpful is Operator, Open AI’s New AI Agent?”

*“A recent study from the Pew Research Center found errors in opt-in online surveys to be about twice that of probability-based panels due to ‘bogus respondents,’ or those who usually say ‘Yes’ regardless of the question.”*

Source: Retail Wire, “Are Online or Phone Surveys Better?”



# Data Quality



- AI and bots are making it harder than ever to find online panel you can trust.
- We typically throw out 30%-50% of panel data!
- Live interviewers can screen to survey target respondents.

## **Zeldis Research Case Study:**

A Fortune 500 healthcare services company wanted to understand the competitive landscape for third-party billing and key decision drivers for choosing partners. They needed to speak with individuals who were knowledgeable about how their organization works with medical supply vendors. A phone survey allowed us to screen to speak with the correct person.



## Niche Geographies

*“Telephone surveys are great for reaching niche groups of consumers within a specific geographic area or connected to a particular brand, or who aren’t very active in online channels.”*

Source: GWI, *“Types of market research: Methods and examples”*





# Niche Geographies



- Many online panels don't have feasibility in a smaller geography.
- Geo-targeted phone list can be an effective alternative.

## **Zeldis Research Case Study:**

An insurer serving a small number of counties wanted to assess advertising recall and refine messaging with EBDMs (employee benefits decision-makers). Using a mix of client B2B phone records and a purchased geo-targeted B2B phone list, 150 live phone interviews were completed in an unbranded study with clients and prospects. Panel could not support the niche geography.



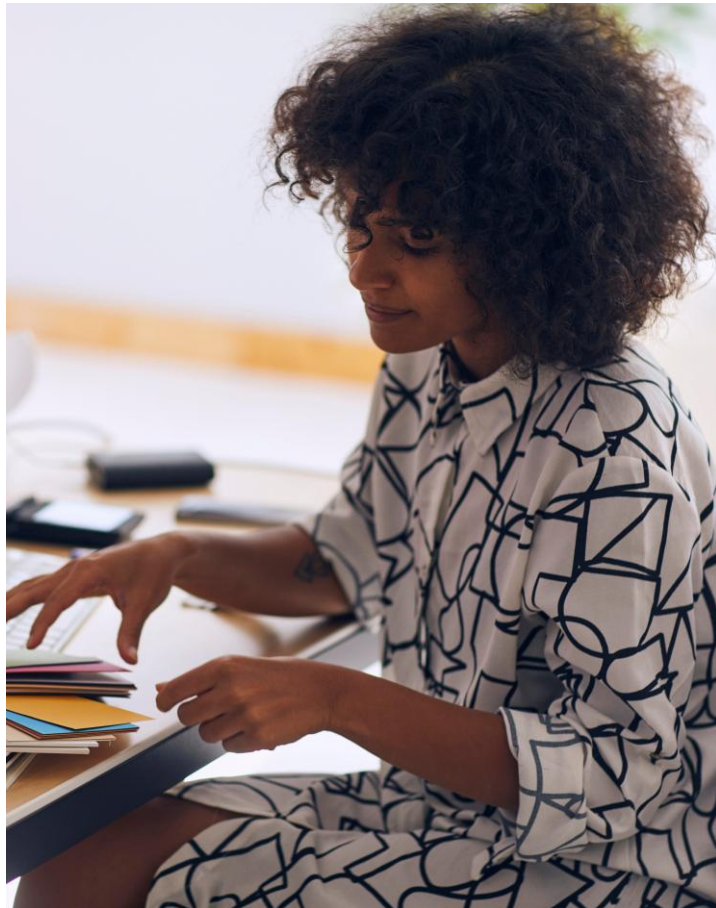
## Response Rates

*“People ignore emails. That’s why it’s not quite as simple as purchasing a bunch of emails and expecting a good response. It’s easier for people to click ‘delete’ on an email than it is with a phone call, which is why online surveys tend to need a bit of priming, or a larger population from which to sample.”*

Source: Survey Methods, “Millions of Americans Still Don’t Have Internet at Home, U.S. Census Data Says”



# Response Rates



- Online surveys with client sample email list typically have a less than 1% to 2% response rate.
- Online surveys often have delivery issues, such as getting caught in spam/junk.
- Phone finds real people and often results in higher response rates.

## **Zeldis Research Case Study:**

A national health insurer wanted to survey Medicare members to evaluate their internal IVR messages. The company had over 67,000 pieces of email sample. The online survey yielded fewer than 40 completes. Due to the low response rate, the study was moved to phone and 715 surveys were completed.





# Representativeness of Population

*“An estimated 8.8% of households in the United States—or around 11.5 million homes—don’t have a home internet connection, according to 2022 survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau.”*

Source: Reviews.org, “Millions of Americans Still Don’t Have Internet at Home, U.S. Census Data Says”



# Representativeness of Population

- Phone surveys can also reach individuals who do not have an email address or internet access.
- You have a member list, but many don't provide email – reach them by phone.



## Zeldis Research Case Study:

A national life insurance carrier conducted a quarterly customer satisfaction tracking survey among life insurance and annuity policyholders. The survey was conducted online, but the client felt they were not adequately representing their full customer population because only one-third had provided email addresses, the response rate was 2-3%, and the customers skew older and rural. Phone data collection was added to the research design.



## A Personal Touch - Who Answers Emails Anyway?

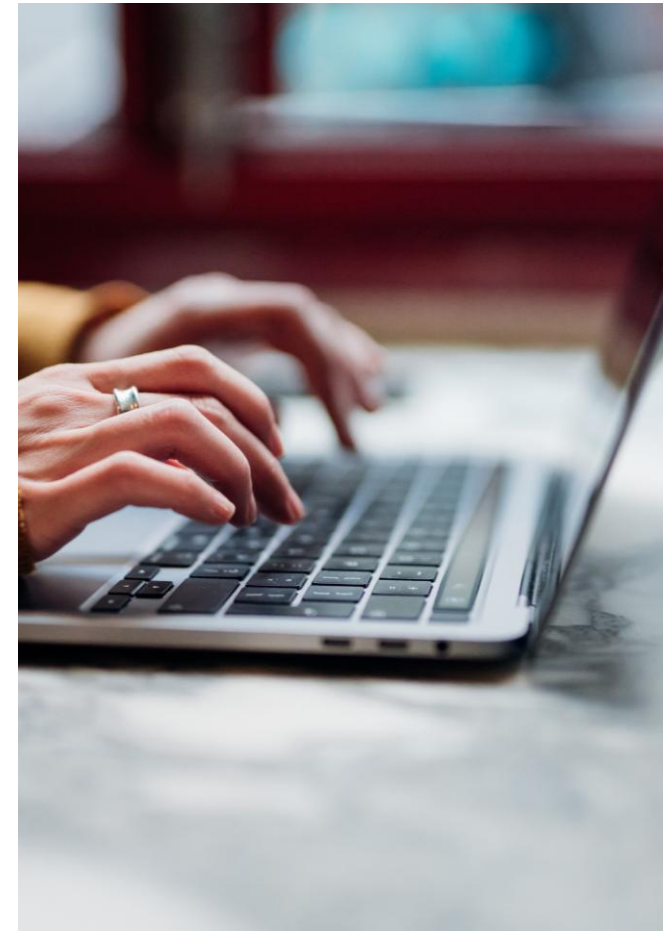
*“During a 2022 survey carried out among consumers from the United States, 17 percent of responding millennials stated they liked being contacted by brands via phone calls. The same was true for 25 percent of respondents from Generation Z.”*

Source: Statista, “Popularity of telephone marketing among consumers in the United States as of June 2022, by age group”



# A Personal Touch - Who Answers Emails Anyway?

- Who answers emails with the uptick in online scams, spam filters & junk mail?
- You can have surprising success with seasoned live phone interviewers, from studies with one hundred to up to several thousand completes.
- Live interviewers can help alleviate concerns about scams.



## **Zeldis Research Case Study:**

A large insurer wanted to understand Medicare Advantage voluntary disenrollment drivers at the contract and metro-area level, given hyper-local plan competition. 2,000 live phone interviews were completed (~100 to 400 per quota group) in a branded study as abundant phone records supported specific geographic targets while email records and panels were insufficient.



## Better Open-Ends

*“An email survey might get you basic responses, but a phone call? That’s where the real gold is. If a customer mentions a problem, the interviewer can dig deeper, ask follow-up questions, and uncover insights you didn’t even know you needed. That’s how you move from surface-level feedback to real understanding.”*

Source: FFIND Beyond Data, “Why telephone surveys still win for Customer Satisfaction”





## Better Open-Ends

- Live phone interviewers may garner more thoughtful verbatim responses.
- They can get richer feedback as live interviewers can probe on open-end questions.
- Audio clips can be used in reporting.

### Zeldis Research Case Study:

Member disenrollee studies explore, in detail, why members voluntarily disenroll from their health plans. Phone surveys allow the interviewer to make a connection with respondents and understand the, often multifaceted, reasons for leaving the plan.



# Things to Consider Before Using Phone

- **Target audience:** Hard-to-reach audiences are better suited for phone surveys
- **Number of completes:** Phone surveys typically have a higher response rate and may garner more completes from a small sample size
- **Cell phone vs. landline sample:** Cell phones have a higher CPI than landlines as auto-dialers cannot be used when calling cell phones, though it is still feasible
- **Survey questions:** Phone surveys are well-suited for detailed surveys that require probing, though not for complex questions such as a conjoint
- **Survey length:** Phone surveys are often 2x the length on online surveys
- **Budget:** Phone surveys typically have a higher CPI than online surveys (but targeted sampling can improve ROI)
- **Timeline:** Phone surveys require a longer field period

*But the budget and timeline may not be as bad as you think!*

# Phone Survey Best Practices



## SAMPLE AND RESPONDENT DATA

- Adhere to TCPA and GDPR regulations and DNC lists
- Handle any PII or PHI securely



## SURVEY

- Ideal survey length for a phone survey is under 10 minutes; typical length is 10-15 minutes
- Limit the number of open ends to 2-3
- Include probes and interviewer notes in the survey to clarify responses

# Phone Survey Best Practices



## **SURVEY ADMINISTRATION**

Use experienced interviewers

Use a standardized system, such as CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing), to allow for efficient, accurate data collection

Establish timeframes for calling (not too early and not too late)



## **QUALITY CONTROL**

Conduct a soft launch with a small sample to identify any potential issues with the survey

Conduct live monitoring (or review recordings) of the initial surveys for quality check

# Want to discuss further?

Feel free to follow up with me:

Leanne Storer-Benvignati  
Vice President, Zeldis Research  
[leanne@zeldisresearch.com](mailto:leanne@zeldisresearch.com)