Research
Reimagined

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

Why now is the time to reimagine research and 5 ways to get started.

Reach3 RIVAL

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Intro

The status quo of old school market research has a stranglehold on our industry.
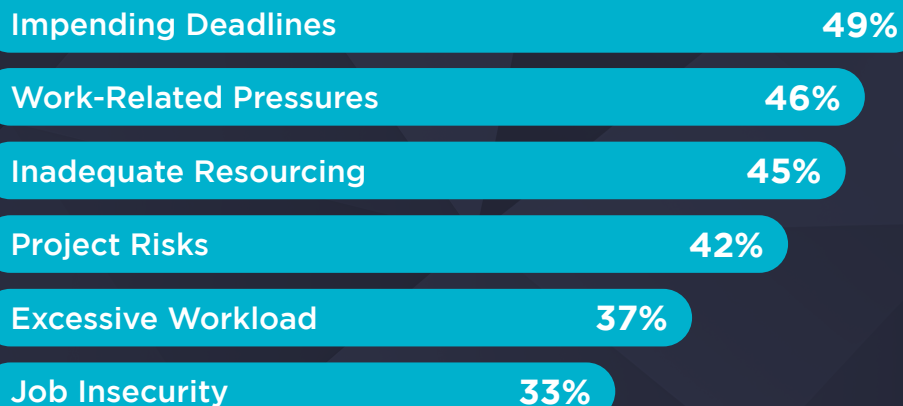
The inside joke is that even market researchers won't take a survey.

But this is no laughing matter.

As an industry we're doing the same thing, the same way, over and over again and the impact on our health, productivity and job security is real:

One in three researchers rate their jobs as highly stressful. Over half experienced burnout in 2023.

What's stressing out researchers?*

Impending Deadlines **49%**

Work-Related Pressures **46%**

Inadequate Resourcing **45%**

Project Risks **42%**

Excessive Workload **37%**

Job Insecurity **33%**

*https://www.insightsassociation.org/News-Updates/Industry-News/ArticleID/1139/Burnout-Exhaustion-Levels-Remain-High-Among-U-S-Market-Researchers

Deadlines, resourcing and job security, among others, are in lock-step with the challenges reported by researchers in various industry reports.

Concerns about representativeness, reaching the right participants cost-effectively, engaging niche segments, and the negative impact that incessant surveying has had on overall engagement rates has created a new sense of urgency. Jason Jacobson, Director of Consumer Insights at Sekisui House calls it the **"Great Respondent Revolt."** From his POV the time has come for brands to reassess their approach to customer engagement; surveys in particular.

Researchers need to abandon the status quo of stale research methods and boring questions. Not to mention a reliance on volume to meet their requirements. If not, the consequences of business as usual are clear: continued erosion of response quality and marginalization of the consumer voice.

The research industry is battling with:

- Bad sample quality
- Professional survey takers and bots
- AI-augmented fraud in the sample
- Estranged and hard-to-reach sample groups
- Declining participation

It's time to reimagine research

Do more, with less, faster. Those are the marching orders from the C-suite. Research from companies like REVOLT TV, Paramount, Pepsi, and Warner Bros. responded by looking for ways to disrupt the status quo of conventional research. They recognized the deficiency of traditional methods and embraced the opportunity to re-imagine research; blending years of experience with new technologies, conversational methodologies and next-gen storytelling underscored by a steadfast commitment to rigour and professionalism.

How Amy Maret reimagines the role of research

HubSpot

I wanted to spread our wings a little bit and get into some other parts of the organization. I wanted to try to figure out what opportunities there were for the research team that weren't immediately surface to us all the time...I wanted to come in and be a strategic partner to people."

Amy Maret, Manager of Insights and Thought Leadership at HubSpot

To support this transition into the third wave of modern market research, we created a roadmap to reimagine research that involves:

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- Embracing a conversational approach
- Tapping the full capabilities of mobile technology and SMS
- Utilizing quant and qual plus video in agile learning streams
- Inspiring change with next-gen storytelling and reporting capabilities
- Optimizing the research process with AI

These tactical considerations are underscored by 3 key principles:

1. **Sophistication:** Uphold time-tested methodologies and practices executed with sophistication and rigour.
2. **Agility:** Use tools that are versatile and dynamic and applicable across the full spectrum of research projects.
3. **Experience:** Embrace research experiences that create higher levels of engagement, faster project cycles and higher-quality feedback.

The participant experience paradox

The irony of our industry is that the participant is critical to the engagement, yet the quality of that engagement has been neglected for decades. As Jon Dore, EVP and Founding Partner at Reach3, quips, "Stakeholders want the insights, how we get those insights is of little concern." Now that's changing because consumers expect more from the brands they engage with. This reality is driving the slow and certain decline of cold, clinical and impersonal research conducted as fast and cheaply as possible.

How Jason Jacobson reimagines participant engagement:

For marketing research to retain relevance and accuracy, we need respondents who truly engage rather than automatically clicking (or simply deleting) through surveys without thought. Achieving this requires restraining our insatiable appetite for feedback."

Jason Jacobson, Director of Consumer Insights at Sekisui House

Embrace conversational methods to improve response rates and accelerate time to insights

In order to get authentic, unfiltered feedback from respondents, you have to get them out of "research mode." Traditional research approaches are overly reliant on recall and tend to let people rationalize their responses. Conversational approaches executed on mobile address this challenge by capturing feedback in-the-moment on the channels people prefer.

Here are three ways to make market research uniquely conversational:

1. **Make it a two-way communication.** Create activities that feel more like a natural conversation than a formal interview. Do this by mimicking the qualities of real conversations. Vary the question types. Adjust the length of the interviews. Ask follow-up questions to get more in-depth insights from participants. Be empathetic and transparent by asking for permission to continue the conversation at a later time.

2. **Explore ways to be more natural and engaging.** Participants are more likely to be honest and open when they are having a conversation with a market researcher, not just completing a survey. Consider your tone and language. Give people the opportunity to express themselves in a way that feels more natural

rather than relying on a scale of 1 to 10. Tap into the power of AI to help with **tone refinement**. Never "fake it" or pretend to be someone or something you're not, but be willing to massage the tone and tempo of your questionnaires so they feel more personalized and relevant.

3. **Make it contextual.** Connect with participants in key moments. Using SMS and action-triggered surveys makes it possible to engage consumers at key moments of the customer journey to understand exactly what's happening; not what they can recall days later. The ability to engage people in key moments, without taking them out of the moment is the goal here. SMS and chat-like engagements make that possible without sacrificing quality or rigour.

How Bill Trovinger reimagines time to insights

"**The best research will build-in time for customers to take a deep breath and vent without being judged and the insights in that venting about the world, their neighbor, the price of potato chips will be amazing. I am not saying to abandon objectives but giving participants that 5 minutes to collect and verbalize/type their thoughts is where the true insight will come."**

Bill Trovinger, Director of Customer Insights - Health & Wellness at Albertsons Companies

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To help researchers on this journey, we created **8 Principles of Conversational Research** that can be used to re-imagine your research. They are summarized below. If you want to go deeper, check out the **e-book** written by Reach3 CEO and Founder and conversational research pioneer Matt Kleinschmit.

Get Real Connect with real people, through the communications channels they actually use, for more authentic results.	**Be Present** Engage with people in the moment you want to understand, not days or even weeks later.	**Engage** Get consumers out of "test-taking" mode. Research should feel like a relevant, personalized engagement.	**Represent Yourself Well** Cold, and clinical is no longer the best approach. Research can amplify the overall brand experience.
Respect People's Time Short engagements in quick succession can lead to more thoughtful and authentic responses.	**Go Deep** Capture emotions and context in one research touchpoint for a more holistic and predictive perspective.	**Continue the Dialogue** Re-engage to drive ongoing, iterative learning by connecting at multiple touch points over time.	**Tell Compelling Stories** Video and other visual tools illuminate the customer experience bringing quant to life.

Tap the full potential of mobile and SMS to gather in-the-moment insights

Mobile phones are the primary connection between consumers and the rest of the world. They have also changed the way consumers engage with brands. According to research done by G2 **68% of survey respondents spend 3-6 hours a day on mobile devices. 54.8% of global web traffic comes from phones. 59% of consumers would prefer receiving direct communications from businesses rather than having to download a separate app on their phone.** Underpinning these expectations is an overwhelming preference for text messaging and chat; it's not a novelty, it's the primary and preferred point of contact for every demographic.

The pervasiveness and universal appeal of SMS messaging		
63% of Baby Boomers prefer messaging over emails and phone calls	**75% of Gen-Z** prefer texting over other forms of communication	**65% of Millennials** prefer messaging over emails and phone calls

6 Reasons why SMS helps researchers uncover deeper richer insights.

1. Using SMS and mobile makes it possible to make your research more conversational and engaging without sacrificing rigor. It is easy to adjust the tone and style of surveys to match the brand

voice and/or occasion which makes the activities feel more relevant and personalized.

2. Consumer preferences for chat allow more creativity in question types like image solicitation, for example.

3. It is far easier to use audio and imagery along with other elements like emojis to create more entertaining research experiences.

4. Using SMS-based survey eliminates the need to download an app. Participants simply complete the activities as though they're responding to a friend.

5. People respond to SMS. In fact, 98% of SMS messages are opened.

6. The asynchronous nature of mobile engaging encourages shorter activities which increase response and completion rates and facilitate recontacting participants for follow-up questions.

SMS stifles fraud

Sample is rife with fraud. Traditional research platforms often don't execute a double opt-in process or validate phone numbers; relying primarily on emails which are easy to clone and fake. SMS makes gaming the system far more complex for fraudsters. Here's why: SMS can be used for verification and authentication purposes. Those codes can only be sent to one phone number reducing the chances of fraudulent data submission and the use of bots.

Utilizing quant and qual plus video in one agile learning stream to work with efficiency and impact

Time pressure is one of the biggest challenges researchers face. Couple that with shrinking budgets and we expose an urgent demand for more streamlined approaches that do not sacrifice quality and rigor. The time and budget required to run discrete quant and qual projects is a luxury few can afford. Qual-quant approaches supplemented by video not only streamline research processes but optimize resource allocation, leading to substantial savings in time, money, and effort.

How Bianca Johnston reimagines qual at scale

I'm excited about the notion of qual at scale; the ability to incorporate qual into a quant project with large sample sizes. We've seen that in open-ends, but I'm excited to see more engaging media in the mix, like speech-to-text or video.

Bianca Johnston, Market Research Expert and LinkedIn Thought Leader

Quantitative rigor + qual at scale

Quantitative research, known for its statistical rigor and the ability to generalize findings, offers a foundation of precision. This scalability ensures that resources are directed towards data collection methods that can yield extensive insights without the necessity for constant researcher intervention, thereby reducing both time and financial investments.

Qualitative research provides depth and context, allowing researchers to explore complex questions with a nuanced understanding. Although traditionally more time-consuming, advancements in transcription and coding software have expedited these processes, allowing for quicker turnarounds and reduced labor costs.

The incorporation of video as a medium in research methods is a leap forward in data richness and engagement. Video can capture non-verbal cues and real-time interactions that might elude traditional qual methods. Additionally, researchers can now gather video feedback without geographic constraints, saving on travel expenses and logistics.

Flexibility and adaptability

Embedding these methods within an agile learning stream brings another layer of efficiency. Agile learning, characterized by its iterative, flexible approach, allows researchers to adapt quickly to new information and changing circumstances. By employing quali-quant methodologies, researchers can test hypotheses, gather data, and refine their approaches in real-time. This reduces the wastefulness associated with rigid, long-term research plans that may become obsolete as the landscape changes.

Economically, the combination of quant and qual methods ensures that resources are not squandered on repetitive and often redundant activities like recruitment and screening questionnaires.

5 key benefits of quali-quant learning streams:

- **Resource efficiency:**
  Using the scalability of quantitative methods as a baseline, new advancements in mobile engagement and SMS have made qual at scale achievable while saving time and reducing costs.

- **Context and colour:**
  Qualitative research offers depth, revealing subtleties behind behaviors, and advancements in technology have sped up data processing, conserving time and effort.

- **Enhanced engagement:**
  Video captures non-verbal cues and interactions, providing a fuller understanding of the subject matter and bringing quant data to life; validating feedback and strategic recommendations.

- **Agile adaptability:**
  The agile learning framework permits rapid hypothesis testing and method refinement, preventing resource waste on outdated plans and ensuring continuous improvement.

- **Shorter workflows:**
  Integrating quant, qual, and video within agile learning maximizes the strengths of each, leading to smarter work processes and reduced individual workload.

Video is the dominant medium of the age.

Researchers who have reimagined research recognize the unparalleled potential of video to:

- Capture the authentic voice, unfiltered and unrehearsed
- Add context to quant data that feels removed from the customer
- Tell more effective stories with data
- Focus the attention of stakeholders on key insights

With nearly 80% of the world owning personal recording devices, capturing videos is easier than ever. Video has become ubiquitous, especially post-pandemic, making it a preferred communication method across all age groups.

> **Don't tell me, show me... That's the best way to bring the research to life. Look for opportunities to use visuals and ground the research in testimonials and video."**
>
> **Sofia Gomez Garcia,** Director, Innovation, Special Projects and Global Community Management at Warner Bros. Discovery.

Here's 4 ways to help you reimagine the use of video in your research.

Lead by example:

Incorporate video into your surveys to demonstrate its ease. Use quick, candid selfie videos to build trust and show members the simplicity of sharing video feedback.

Get consent after the fact:

Try to remove any additional barriers for participants. If you think you might need consent to show the video publicly, consider waiting until all the responses are submitted, select the ones that help best tell the story, and then seek permission; the goal is get the most footage you can with as little friction possible. Participants are more likely to agree after the fact.

Make it optional:

Give participants the option to provide open-ends or video responses; remind them they can cover the camera and share audio-only feedback if they prefer. Platforms with sophisticated logic and branching can trigger video questions or open-ends based on a pre-determined set of criteria that can add depth and richness to quantitative answers.

Tap into the power of AI for analysis:

Take advantage of real-time transcription, sentiment analysis and other tools that simplify the process of extracting valuable information from video feedback. There are great tools available from OpenAI. Better yet, work with a vendor who provides robust video analysis capabilities like **Rival's AI Summarizer**.

Next-gen storytelling and reporting that drives real business outcomes

The root of compelling story telling is high-quality insights and feedback. However strong evidence is not always enough to inspire action. As Debra Logan, research vice president at Gartner explains, "It's not enough to manage data and create insights. These activities **must deliver measurable business outcomes**."

Research teams at Global Brands like **KDRP and Carnival Cruise Lines** are quick to point out that access to data is not the issue. In fact quite the opposite. According to research from Oracle, 95% of people feel paralyzed by volume of data at work.

This makes the role of storytelling doubly important. Not only do researchers needs to distill and synthesize the data so it is accessible and actionable, they need to help focus their leadership on the data that matters.

A simple storytelling framework:

The story: What's the story I want to tell?

Before delving into questions, take a moment to consider the narrative you aim to weave. This strategic pause allows for a more thoughtful approach, ensuring your ultimate story is meticulously crafted.

Sofia Gomez Garcia, Executive Director, Innovation, Special Projects

& Global Community Management at Warner Bros., says "Always start with an assumption or POV that you're either going to confirm or disprove. That gives you a kick-off point and a direction for your story. In terms of managing the volume of data, you need to be concise. Less is more."

The timing: *What's the best time to tell the story?*
Recognize the nuances of timing in research. Some scenarios demand swift responses, as exemplified by a Microsoft product developer's preference for quick insights. Conversely, complex subjects like sustainability may necessitate a more deliberate, iterative approach over an extended period.

The elements: *What raw materials can I use to bring my story to life?*
Tap into the diverse array of storytelling materials available in the contemporary research landscape. From dynamic video content to impactful infographics, leverage these versatile elements to bring your story to life.

Less is more: *What's the most compelling data?*
It's tempting to show all the work that goes into crafting compelling insights. Unfortunately that just adds to the clutter. More often than not, what sticks are highly personalized stories; often videos of actual customers. You need to show the key proof points, of course; however, one voice, one story or video from a customer can be incredibly effective at driving the insights home as long as it is representative of the overall research.

The delivery: *What the best way to share my story?*
Effective communication goes beyond isolated formats. Merge different mediums, such as video reels and traditional reports, to create a cohesive narrative that resonates throughout your organization. This ensures that insights not only capture attention but also endure in the organizational memory.

The audience: *How do I make sure the right people hear my story at the right time?* Tailor your message to your audience. Whether addressing colleagues, product developers, CMOs, or CEOs, adapting your communication style ensures that your story is not just heard but truly understood by diverse stakeholders.

> **Stories are the oldest form of learning that we have as humans. It's also the first style of learning we're exposed to as children. Our brains are pre-wired to connect to stories in a way they are not pre-wired to connect to tables and graphs."**
>
> **Jason Cook,** Senior Manager of Research and Design at Dell Technologies Services CX

Augmenting and optimizing market research with AI to stretch your budget and manage your time more effectively

Efficiency in research through AI integration

Artificial intelligence (AI) is going to have a transformative impact on market research. The near-to mid-term objective is embrace its potential to alleviate the burden of manual, time-consuming tasks, allowing researchers to channel their efforts into high-value activities. As former ESOMAR President Kristin Luck insightfully points out, this may mark a shift in the primary role of research from data collection and analysis to a more nuanced role of data synthesis and storytelling. This strategic reallocation of resources from repetitive and routine to tasks to the highest and best use of the researcher's time is the cornerstone of optimizing research processes with AI.

Enhancing participant engagement

Engagement is the heartbeat of market research. Today's participants seek interactive dialogues with brands that mirror the ease and familiarity of conversations with friends and family. This is where AI, especially when integrated with conversational interfaces and SMS technology, can enhance the participant experience. By employing AI in the authoring process, researchers can refine survey content, adjust tones to suit diverse audiences, and ask intelligent follow-up

questions. This not only enriches the participant experience but also bolsters response rates and nurtures lasting connections with the brand. AI's role is not to supplant the artistry of questionnaire design but to amplify it, allowing for scalable, customized interactions based on predefined parameters defined by the researcher.

Accelerating insight generation with AI

Speed and accuracy are of paramount importance. With the ever-increasing volume of customer feedback and data, researchers are challenged to distill vast quantities of information into coherent, actionable insights. AI excels in this domain, offering the capability to swiftly aggregate and analyze data, discern trends and sentiments, and summarize findings. At Rival, we encapsulate this capability as "speed to insight," enabling researchers to test hypotheses, iterate on findings, and launch initiatives with unprecedented agility.

AI tools like tone refinement, rapid summarization, and advanced probing across text and video formats, along with automatic image generation, are just a few examples of how AI is revolutionizing the field of market research.

Conclusion

The need to reimagine research has never been more urgent. As we navigate the changing landscape of consumer engagement, three critical catalysts for change—survey fatigue, erosion of trust in first-party feedback, and radical shifts in consumer communication—underscore the necessity of innovation.
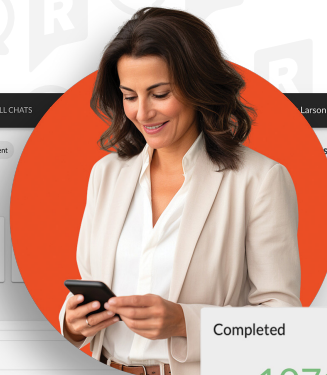
The demands and expectations on research teams mean that traditional methods are no longer sustainable. It's time to break free from the constraints of status quo and embrace the four key areas of opportunity we've outlined: conversational methods, a focus on the participant experience, tapping the full potential of mobile and video, and adopting next-gen storytelling and reporting.

Visionary leaders like Jason Jacobson emphasize the consequences of maintaining the old ways, predicting a continued decline in response quality and marginalization of the consumer voice. Reimagining research is not just a suggestion; it's a call to action. Embrace the principles of conversational research, prioritize the participant experience, leverage the full potential of mobile and video, and craft compelling stories that resonate with your audience.

Visit **rivaltech.com/reimagined**

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About Reach3 and Rival Tech

Rival Technologies and Reach3 Insights are the pioneers in conversational research and the leading authority on insight communities. Rival's mobile-first, conversational platform helps transform conventional surveys into personalized research experiences that emulate the way people communicate today. Reach3 is an award-winning full-service consulting firm that uses immersive, in-the-moment research designs and dynamic digital storytelling to deliver deep experiential insights. Amplified by AI, Rival and Reach3's conversational research approach delivers higher response rates, deeper engagement, and faster time-to-insights. To learn why brands like Coca-Cola, Dell Technologies, Kimberly-Clark, and Warner Bros. have made the switch to conversational, please visit rivaltech.com or reach3insights.com.

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