



By

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It isn't uncommon for clients to attempt to cut costs by bringing recruiting for a research project in-house. However, we've seen time and again why avoiding professional recruiting ends up costing more in the long run. Here are some reasons why we (strongly) recommend against this approach.

1. Finding the right participants takes time

We estimate that on average it takes two hours to find one qualified participant. For a 12-person study, 24 hours may not sound like a lot. But often adding 24 hours to a client's workweek is rarely realistic. And if they aren't sure how best to proceed, you can bet this work will get deprioritized as it's not a core responsibility. We've seen the unfortunate situation in which the study begins with stakeholders present and there are no client-recruited participants to be had.

2. Finding the right participants saves time

For usability studies in which many stakeholders are observing, discovering the participant is not qualified becomes extremely awkward. If the participant is cut loose early, there may be 30 minutes or more of "dead air" until the next scheduled session. This is plenty of time to all silently reflect on the fact that the hard cost and effort to find this recruit was wasted.

3. A bad apple can ruin the bunch

It's not only that unqualified participants waste time during the study. More importantly, a bad recruit can damage the integrity of the entire project. Not to be melodramatic, but with low sample-size work, a clearly "off" respondent can introduce the idea to a key stakeholder that all the other participants may also not be representative.

4. "Soft" qualifications take practiced expertise

Someone might seem amazing—a rare unicorn of a person with just the qualifications you desire, on paper. What might be missing however is his or her ability to communicate clearly with the right level of detail. For some, getting more than several words out can be a struggle. For others, the opposite is true—there's too much "noise-to-signal." Professional recruiters have an array of tricks for ensuring participants can articulate their thoughts effectively.

5. Sample bias exists

As tempting as it may be to rely on client lists, this adds the risk that the sample may be biased in some unknown way compared to the general population. This can be mitigated through investigation on how the list was created and managed, but it takes extra effort and care. This issue is true regardless of who does the recruiting, obviously. An alternative to using client lists can be a well-managed panel provider. These companies have become more resourceful and careful over the years.

To close, the opportunities to get great insights that solve business and user problems exist only from representative and articulate participants. It is tempting to see recruiting as a commodity and look there to cut costs. While we sometimes see these issues even in professional recruiting, the chance of wasting time, money, and generating sub-par results grows rapidly when professionals are not involved.

Nick has 15+ years of experience helping companies create digital experiences that meet both user and business goals. When not creating user-experience strategies and measuring their performance, Nick races road bikes on dirt trails.