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Research Now

*You scratch my back...*

*How incentivising is  
crucial to successful  
online research  
and why you  
should  
care*

**TIME  
QUALITY  
MONEY**

*It's a fact of human nature that when you ask someone to do something for you, the general response is 'What's in it for me?' When it comes to doing online research, this rule takes on a whole new level of importance and necessity. People are increasingly time-poor. Even 10 minutes to complete an online survey must be appropriately rewarded. We are also living in a world where consumers see their relationships with brands as increasingly mutual. We understand that our views are valued and important, but are no longer happy to be plundered for information without the questioner or brand giving something back. Finally, a proper incentive will lead to people contributing more, and better quality, data - the reason why we have online research*

*panels in the first place. In a world where it is harder and harder to find people to take part in our surveys, we cannot afford to lose them by supplying poor or inappropriate incentives.*

*It is vital to use a research panel that understands the importance of these issues. We believe that incentives should be tailored to those receiving them, not just in terms of monetary value but in terms of relevance. Rewarding with incentives that bear no relevance to them results in an unhappy member and increased panel attrition. If panel retention falls and we suffer a high churn rate, we would be unable to build a member's profile beyond basic demographics and interests. This means future surveys would be increasingly difficult to target appropriately, and data quality would again suffer.*

## Three approaches to panels, three approaches to incentives

At Research Now we deal with these issues by managing our panels in different and appropriate ways. We have utilised three different recruitment vehicles for attracting people to each of our online panels. This means we are able to support the widest range of research surveys from a fast turnaround consumer 'dipstick' to a complex business to business segmentation. Each of our panels uses a different incentive model, tailored and appropriate for those that take part. In our view it is vital that the incentive model matches the members of the sample and the medium in which they were recruited.

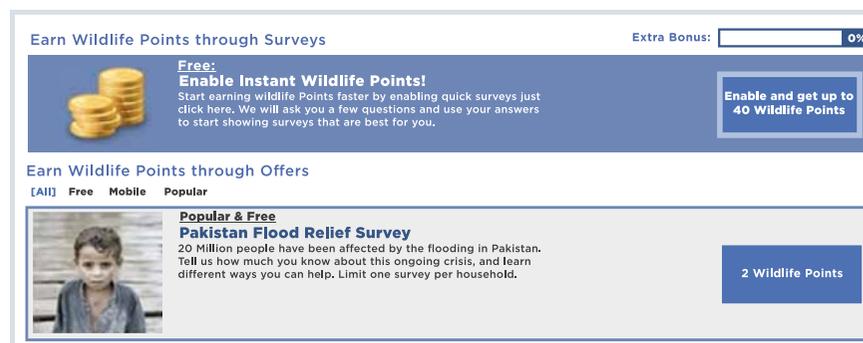
For example, our Valued Opinions Panel (VOP) panellists are recruited online and we frequently ask them to contribute to general consumer surveys. These then receive a cash reward for participating ranging from 50p to £5.

On the other hand, our e-Rewards panel recruits "by-invitation-only". Research Now partners with a diverse set of globally recognised consumer and business-focused brands and we invite their ongoing customers to join our panel. Brands that we partner with include Airmiles, Best Buy, Blockbuster, Air France/ KLM, Borders, British Airways, Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Hilton Honors and Virgin Atlantic Airways.

Due to the varied ways we recruit people to e-Rewards, rather than earning cash incentives they accumulate points which can then be redeemed for a variety of rewards applicable for them.

For example, someone who has been recruited by a hotel chain would most likely be interested in hotel loyalty points. Another benefit is that we offer a report on the findings of the research in which the respondent has taken part. As this panel is predominantly populated by business decision makers, they are interested to see the results and call upon these findings when making decisions themselves.

Our final pool of respondents comes from social media. This is an excellent source for recruiting people who do not typically communicate via email; predominantly 18-24 year olds. By engaging social media users who are using an application within a site (e.g. a game such as Farmville) we offer these members currency for that particular application, making the incentive relevant, attractive and immediate. An example showing how participants can be offered points through social media is below.



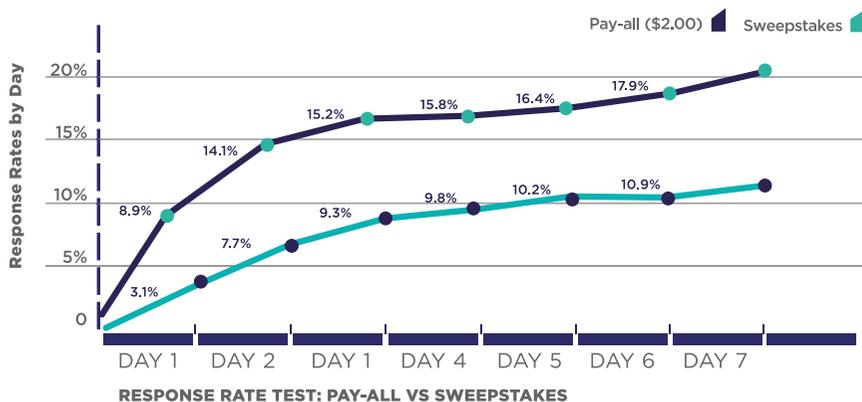
The screenshot displays a user interface for earning Wildlife Points. At the top, it says "Earn Wildlife Points through Surveys" with an "Extra Bonus: 0%" indicator. Below this is a section titled "Free: Enable Instant Wildlife Points!" which includes an image of gold coins and text: "Start earning wildlife Points faster by enabling quick surveys just click here. We will ask you a few questions and use your answers to start showing surveys that are best for you." A button on the right says "Enable and get up to 40 Wildlife Points".

The second section is "Earn Wildlife Points through Offers" with filters for "All", "Free", "Mobile", and "Popular". It features a survey titled "Popular & Free Pakistan Flood Relief Survey" with a small image of a child. The text reads: "20 Million people have been affected by the flooding in Pakistan. Tell us how much you know about this ongoing crisis, and learn different ways you can help. Limit one survey per household." A button on the right says "2 Wildlife Points".

## Are we doing it the right way?

There are other methods of incentivising that differ greatly from our 'reward all' scheme. Perhaps the most well known is the 'sweepstake' method whereby a panellist who completes a survey is entered into a prize draw. Prizes are usually the sought-after gadget of the moment (e.g. iPad, Kindle) and are worth much more than the average payout with 'reward all' schemes.

However there are problems with this method. We ran a side by side study on the effectiveness of both methods of reimbursement and the bottom line was that 'reward all' schemes produced 58% higher response rates amongst panellists. The average response rate for the 'sweepstake' method ran at a low 12% whereas the 'reward all' scheme fitted nicely within our typical response rate (15%-30%) at a healthy 19%.



## Why do you participate?

When we surveyed our B2B panellists about why they take part, here is what they said:

give EXPERIENCE  
 KNOWLEDGE benefit  
 FEEDBACK opportunity  
 rewards HELP  
 interesting OPINIONS  
 RELEVANT Points  
 interest professional  
 influence opinion  
 BUSINESS

As stated previously, our consumer VOP panellists are paid immediate cash incentives. When we asked them 'why do you like to participate?' their responses showed that rewards are the most important motivators.



## Creating sustainability

With alternative methods of online research becoming increasingly available, the ongoing sustainability of online panels has been brought into question. There have been suggestions that the future lies in online communities, 'river sampling' and 'gamification'. In our view, these are complimentary research methods and can and should be applied where appropriate, but this does not mean that they will totally replace online panels. In the same way that telephone research is still widely used we believe that online panels will continue to be essential. But panellists need to be properly incentivised - low rewards to any participation in research results in rapid churn and costs increase.

We are confident there is a clear role for panels in the future but only if they are well-maintained and panellists are treated with respect. As we have seen, if you fail to respect the time that consumers spend filling out your surveys, they drop out and we lose all of their profiling.

## Never compromise on data quality

Research Now's long term aim is ensure that panellists stay with us so that we can build important profiling attributes - and one of the most important ways to do this is through incentives. We recognise that participants in research are not only busy people, they also live in a world where the consumer-brand relationship is increasingly symbiotic. If you fail to treat respondents like real people, they will not share the insight and knowledge we need to fulfil their needs and help our clients build strong and lasting brands.