

Bringing Probability Principles to Digital Recruitment

How an ABS-guided hybrid approach can bring greater structure, transparency and representation to digital research

Digital recruitment offers researchers speed, scale and flexibility. But it also presents a fundamental challenge: social platforms lack a defined sampling frame, making it harder to understand how the audience reached maps back to the population researchers intend to study.

With EveryAnswer, Marketing Systems Group (MSG) set out to explore a different approach: Could the rigor of Address Based Sampling (ABS) be used to guide digital recruitment and bring greater structure to how digital audiences are identified and recruited.

The Challenge

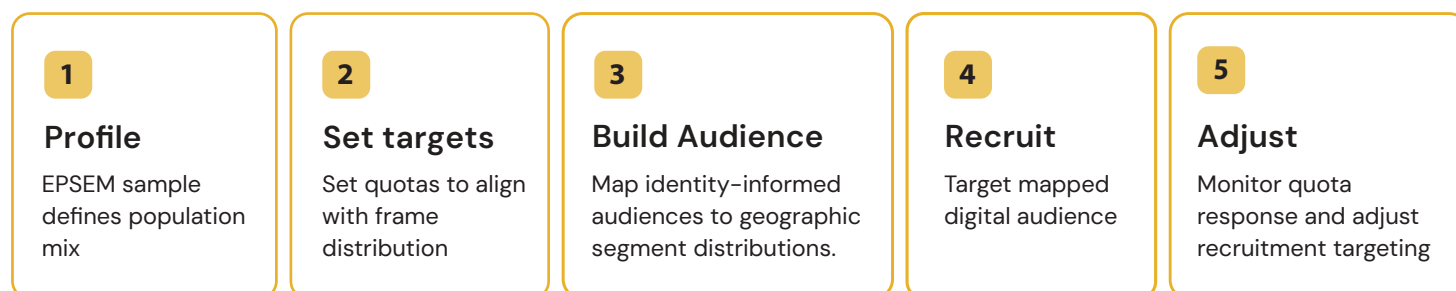
Digital recruitment is powerful. But who are you really reaching?

Digital audience selection is heavily influenced by platform algorithms and optimization, giving researchers less visibility and control over selection, coverage and audience composition.

The MSG Approach

Start with the frame, not the platform.

MSG used its enhanced ABS frame as a control system for digital recruitment. Rather than relying on platform algorithms alone, the process uses known characteristics and distributions within the target population to help guide who is recruited digitally.



THE DIFFERENCE: Digital recruitment now becomes a controlled component, with checks in place to reduce ad platform introduced bias.

Putting the Approach to the Test

Could an ABS-guided hybrid design produce results that align with a traditional probability-based ABS benchmark?

We tested the EveryAnswer augmented hybrid approach through parallel surveys in one Massachusetts and one Georgia congressional district using different samples but the same questionnaire and demographic weighting benchmarks. Health and behavioral estimates from MSG's hybrid ABS + Digital samples were evaluated against an independent traditional ABS benchmark.

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Districts

EPSEM sample defines population mix

923

Hybrid Completes

Quotas mirror frame distribution
484 MA + 439 GA

652

ABS Benchmark

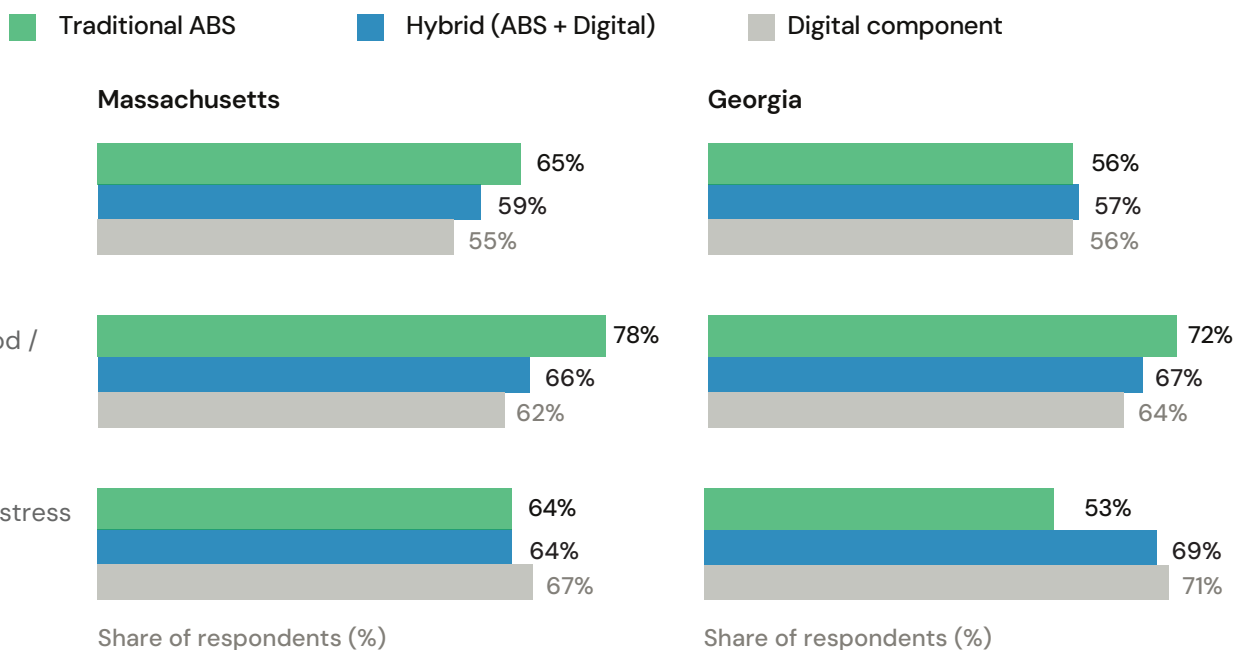
329 MA + 323 GA

What we Learned

The results showed encouraging alignment and meaningful differences.

Rather than simply evaluating whether the hybrid sample looked like the ABS benchmark demographically, we compared substantive health and behavioral outcomes across the traditional ABS benchmark, the full MSG hybrid sample, and the digital component of the hybrid sample.

Selected study outcomes



Afford quality healthcare

Georgia showed little difference in affordability across methods, while Massachusetts showed lower affordability among digital respondents compared with ABS.

General health

Both Massachusetts and Georgia showed lower general health ratings among digital respondents compared with ABS.

Healthcare cost stress

Both Massachusetts and Georgia showed higher healthcare cost stress among digital respondents compared with ABS.

Alignment is encouraging, but this is not an equivalence claim.

What it means for Researchers

A controlled digital supplement can reduce costs while minimizing tradeoffs in research quality.

The opportunity is not to turn digital respondents into probability sample members. It is to use probability information to bring greater structure and control to digital recruitment.

Digital can operate inside the sampling design

Rather than functioning as an independent respondent source.

Probability information can guide nonprobability recruitment

Population structure can influence targeting and quota management.

Hybrid designs can balance coverage, cost and representation

Recruitment channels can be deployed strategically.

Continuous controls improve transparency

Researchers can identify drift and intervene during fielding.

The larger opportunity is to use probability principles to inform who is targeted, how recruitment is controlled, and how results are evaluated.

As researchers continue to balance coverage, representation, cost and the realities of modern data collection, ABS-guided digital recruitment offers a promising framework for bringing probability principles into new recruitment channels.

To learn more about EveryAnswer and MSG's ABS-guided digital recruitment, contact us www.m-s-g.com.