



Internal Do-Not-Contact Lists: Best Practices for Researchers

Respondents are becoming accustomed to having control over who may contact them, when, and in what context. While the laws at the state and federal level often only apply to sales-related telephone calls, emails, or faxes, most respondents do not differentiate between survey and opinion research contacts and telemarketing calls, spam, and junk faxes.

Establishing, communicating and maintaining internal do not contact lists is an essential aspect of respondent cooperation. In addition to the benefit to respondent cooperation, such opt out capabilities will assist in assuaging many state attorneys general who are beginning to expect them from any business/organization, sales-related or not.

Be aware of respondents' expectations for internal do not contact lists

- How long do they expect the opt out to last?
- How quickly do they expect it to take effect?
- To whom do they expect it to apply and in what context?

Adhere to your stated policy -- what you say is a promise

Statements made by researchers on a phone call, in an email or fax, OR in their privacy policies bind them to that "promise". Breaking such promises can harm the reputation of the researchers and their organizations, and the entire research profession. More importantly, breaking such promises can bring negative legal consequences at the federal and state level.

Directly address how respondents will not be contacted again

Researchers should consider *how quickly* they will act upon and *for how long* they will honor respondent opt out requests -- and explain both to their respondents. The federal regulations for telemarketers and senders of unsolicited fax advertisements require that requests be honored within 30 days. A telemarketing opt out must last at least 5 years, but federal law demands that opt out requests from unsolicited fax advertisements or commercial email do not expire.

Clarify who is covered by your internal do not contact list -- be specific

- Does the policy cover the entire research organization, a specific business unit within the organization, a specific project, or the client?
- Does the policy cover the number/email only, or a particular person or household when they use that number/email?
- Separate divisions or business units can be treated as separate senders as long as they operate separately and a fax, email, or call clearly identifies the business unit.
- If sharing opt out requests with the client, ensure that they are implemented.

More Information

For more information on laws and best practices impacting research, contact MRA, and consider becoming a [member](#) to get free access to the [MRA Compliance Guide](#).