

Optimizing Workloads & Budgets

Strategic Options for Market Research & Insights Teams



How Market Research & Insights Leaders Navigate for Team Success

Is your Market Research & Insights team busy? You're not alone. Many teams report having big goals, a lot of work, and all too often, a flat budget. This begs the question: what options exist to help the Market Research & Insights team succeed given increasing work volume, and often, complexity? While at the same resource capacity?

In our work, we often think of our budgets as falling into two categories: expenses (sampling, software, travel, etc.) and people costs (total compensation for market researchers, data analysts, consultants, etc.). Each has its own budget optimization options:



Expenses

We can manage many research-related expenses with periodic supplier reviews, rebids and re-negotiations. In addition, for some expenses, an up-front investment can lead to a total lower annual cost. For example, some teams invest in private, custom panels.



People Costs

People costs are trickier: more work often requires more researchers. And people are expensive (deservedly so!), so we only want to "add headcount" when we have confidence and clarity about our long-term needs. Thus, a lot of teams manage their people costs by [running lean teams](#).

As Market Research & Insights team leaders know, running very lean teams also poses risks. In extreme cases, the lean team experiences employee fatigue, deadline stress, and even work quality degradation. The good news: risk-mitigation strategies for these situations are well-known. Three common ones are as follows:

1. **Automation.** This can be as simple as standardizing on questionnaire templates for select project types, or as sophisticated as automating select data analysis and visualization output. But automation alone is rarely the entire answer (and does not apply to all teams).
2. **Training.** Is it time to upskill some team members? New or increased [market research skills](#) can help with team efficiency, especially if the team has known "bottlenecks" to be relieved.
3. **Temporary staffing.** Augmenting lean teams with consultants (freelancers), sometimes in partnership with staffing agencies, can be done on an as-needed basis.

Of course, there are pros and cons to each. For the scope of this article, let's focus on the pros and cons of strategy 3, temporary staffing.



Pros: 6 Ways Just-in-Time Staffing Optimizes Budgets

We looked at staffing data from various sources to see what benefits hiring managers experience when using temporary staff (sources listed on Page 5). Some of these will apply more to some teams than others.

1. Savings from Temporary Versus Perm Hires

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that, “a new employee costs an average of \$57,967.88 when you account for costs like wages, taxes, and benefits.”(1) For those in Market Research & Insights, the costs can be much higher. Thus, when we need more “bench strength” as project loads fluctuate, temporary staff can be a solution to gain the needed capacity without adding permanent team members. Indeed, this option is popular in many sectors, including high tech. Angela Rochester, an assistant general counsel and HR consultant for Engage PEO, suggests that companies like Google choose temporary staff “...because of the cost savings from having to contribute to employee health and pension plans... saving \$100,000 per year on each American job by hiring a contractor versus a full-time employee.”(2)

2. Avoiding Rushed Perm Hire Selections

According to the Wall Street Journal, “Companies are at risk of missing out on scarce top talent as hiring processes get longer. A search for a staff-level accountant or financial position takes as long as four weeks on average, while recruitment of a manager is taking an average of five weeks.”(3) In market research, it can take even longer. But what if you could really take your time to find that top talent? By hiring qualified temporary researchers, the team can keep meeting deadlines without rushing the hiring process or needlessly compromising on hiring criteria.

3. Getting Quality Team Members with the Right Skills

It's not always just about adding more researchers, but adding those with precise skills needed for upcoming projects. A given team may have lots of great talent but have a new need for a market researcher who has experience with 3rd party data sources or [marketing automation](#) (for example). Finding, and screening, researchers with less common skills is very time consuming. The 2018 Staffing Buyer Study, which surveyed 859 U.S. hiring managers, found that “52% [of hiring managers] reported that their biggest pain point during the recruiting process was gaining ‘access to qualified candidates.’”(4) The study also found that “66% of hiring managers felt that utilizing staffing firms would be very helpful in helping them reach candidates with the right skills.”(5) The time-to-hire for temporary staff is typically faster since [temporary specialists have qualified candidates already identified and screened](#).

4. Reducing Staff Time Spent on Onerous Hiring Processes

Teams that do their own hiring can spend countless hours to hire the right candidate. That means someone on the team, typically a manager, is spending many more hours than ideal. And team leaders knows it is hard to focus on hiring when important project deadlines are looming. Temporary staff can be faster to find and engage, since staffing firms supply pre-screened candidates, and facilitate the matching and engagement process.

Pros: 6 Ways Just-in-Time Staffing Optimizes Budgets

5. "Try Before You Buy"

Hiring freelance consultants to work on a temporary basis can also be a "try before you buy" option that lets the employer gauge a person's work quality. "These arrangements may not always work for every company, but for some, it may be a great opportunity to get hands-on experience before filling a position."(6) Staffing firms generally refer to these as "temp-to-perm" agreements. And if it's not love at first sight? No worries. You can move on. No performance plans, no hard feelings, just not a match.

6. Tax Advantages

Hiring temporary workers minimizes a firm's tax burden. "1099 independent contractors are responsible for filing their own taxes. This completely removes any obligation for the employer to offer benefits..."(7) Still, many states have strict laws defining 1099 status, and some employers have had issues when a 1099 "contractor" was later deemed to be an employee—with benefits owed. Just ask [Uber](#) about 1099 risk! Thus, some companies require the use of staffing agencies to source freelancers while reducing risk of 1099 status disagreements.

Cons: 3 Temporary Staffing Risks to Mitigate

Of course, there are no perfect solutions. Using temporary staff has known risks. Might some of them apply to your team? And if so, could these risks be reasonably mitigated?

1. Recurring Training

When starting a new work engagement, even freelancers with top skills need to be onboarded to complete assigned tasks to your specifications. This can be challenging if you need "rush" or same-day help.

2. Morale Concerns

Hiring freelancers can, in some cases, negatively affect both freelancer and permanent employee morale. "Morale and employee relations problems can arise when you have temps working alongside permanent employees for months...regular employees might look down on temps as "outsiders.""(8)

3. Reliability

Some teams have had poor past experiences, leaving them understandably wary. And indeed, quality varies: one freelancer may fall short, while another exceeds expectations. "While there will always be individuals who don't perform up to expectations, on the average temp workers will be as reliable as your regular employees if you're working with a reputable staffing agency."(9)

Tip: Mitigate this risk by having onboarding materials ready (for use and reuse) and by using the same freelancers over time, as needed.

Tip: Transparency is the best bet to reduce this risk. Team leaders need to clearly, and often repeatedly, communicate the roles of temporary versus full-time team members.

Tip: Reputable staffing firms screen their "pools" very carefully, and in a worst case scenario can offer fast replacements.

Will Demand for Staffing Services Increase in 2020?

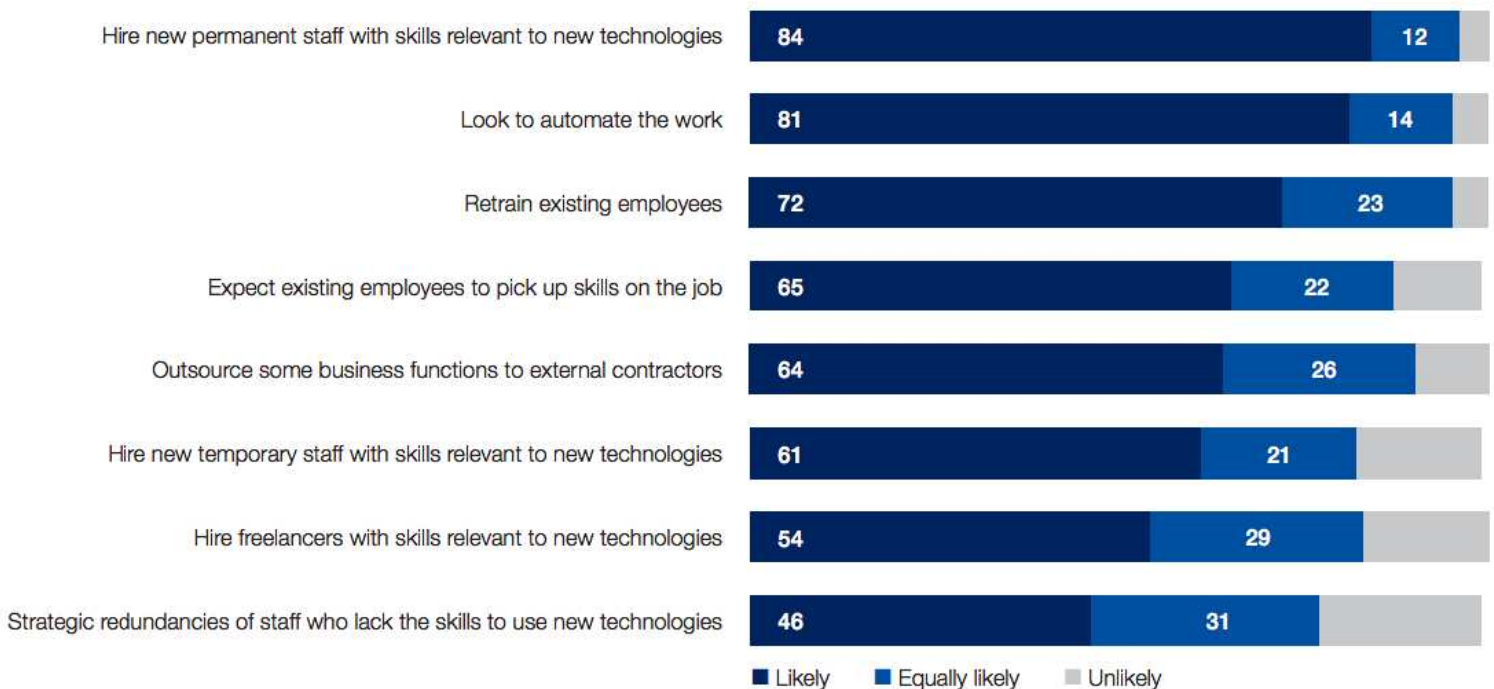
Yes. "Running lean" is certainly not unique to market research; organizations from many industries do so, and also turn to temporary staffing as a strategy to mitigate the risk of running lean. In its 2018 survey of 859 hiring managers, the annual Staffing Buyer Study reported that over half (54%) of hiring managers surveyed, "planned to increase their utilization of staffing firms over the next five years."⁽¹⁰⁾

Further evidence of the rise of temporary workers:

1. An NPR/Marist poll conducted in 2018 found that "contractors currently make up about 20 percent of the labor market, with a prediction that contract workers could make up half of the American workforce within a decade."⁽¹¹⁾

2. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report also reports a projected shift in the increase of hiring freelancers (see Table).

Projected (2022) strategies to address shifting skills needs, by proportion of companies (%) ⁽¹²⁾



Source: World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2018.

Automation, Training, Just-in-Time Staffing: What Will Work for Your Team?

Here at Research Rockstar, we are admittedly biased, and see many situations where Market Research & Insights teams benefit from adding temporary team members. Gaining a little team elasticity with [just-in-time](#) staff can add both capacity and special skills. And given that many teams run lean these days, being able to take on more work (capacity) or new work (skills) without increasing overhead is a proven option.



Still on the fence? Not sure if it would work for your team? It may be worth a test. Next time you see some upcoming late nights or deadline risks for yourself or your team, consider hiring a screened market research freelancer for just a small engagement of ten to twenty hours. Delegate a few tasks, and see what happens: did the completed work meet or exceed your expectations? Did you have to re-do any of it? Did the freelancer add any extra value? Trying it out will quickly reveal if temporary staffing is a viable option for your team. Perhaps in combination with automation and training, your team will find that rising work volume and complexity can be well-handled, even when budgets are flat.

Rent-a-Researcher is a division of Research Rockstar Training & Staffing

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- (1) [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (2019).
 - (2) John Moreno, [Google Follows A Growing Workplace Trend: Hiring More Contractors Than Employees](#) (2019).
 - (3) Ezequiel Minaya, [Tight Labor Market Calls For Speedier Hiring Process](#) (2019).
 - (4) Inavero, CareerBuilder, and ASA, [2018 Staffing Buyer Study](#) (2018).
 - (4) Ibid.
 - (5) Ibid.
 - (6) Patricia Schaefer, [The Pros and Cons of Hiring Temporary Employees](#) (2019).
 - (7) Ibid.
 - (8) Ibid.
 - (9) Ibid.
 - (10) World Economic Forum, [The Future of Jobs Report 2018](#) (2018).
 - (11) Ibid.
 - (12) Ibid.