

When Is Market Research Actually “Good Enough”?

Why you never have all the information – and when it is still time to make a decision

By the DTO Editorial Team

Market research has a built-in dilemma: every answer creates new questions. Another competitor could be examined, another interview conducted, a segment defined more narrowly or a forecast cross-checked against a second source. For companies, the decisive question is therefore not whether an analysis is complete. It is whether the evidence is robust enough to make a specific decision responsibly.

Completeness is rarely achievable in B2B markets

Especially in industrial niches, data often does not exist at the desired level of granularity. Market sizes have to be derived from several sources, suppliers disclose only parts of their business and purchasing decisions depend on factors that no database captures. The ambition to know everything is therefore unrealistic. Quality comes from knowing which gaps matter for the decision and which can be handled through assumptions, ranges or targeted validation.

The decision determines the necessary depth

A first market screening requires a different level of evidence than a factory investment, an acquisition or the launch of a new business model. The greater the consequence of a wrong decision, the more important it becomes to validate critical assumptions through multiple sources, interviews and scenarios. Research depth should follow decision risk rather than a generic standard of completeness.

More data does not automatically create more certainty

Additional sources can improve a picture, but they can also repeat the same underlying information or introduce new definitions that are not comparable. The central task is not to accumulate documents, but to assess independence, relevance and quality. A smaller set of well-understood sources can be more useful than a large collection that looks impressive but cannot be reconciled.

Contradictions are not a quality defect

Different sources often produce different market sizes, growth rates or interpretations. That does not necessarily mean one side is wrong. Definitions, time periods, geographies and data collection methods may differ. Good research makes these differences visible, explains them and uses them to define plausible ranges rather than forcing a false point estimate.

A sensible stopping point needs criteria

A project can stop when the critical assumptions behind the decision have been tested, the remaining uncertainty is transparent and further research is unlikely to change the decision materially. This is a more useful standard than asking whether every open question has been answered. Good research does not eliminate uncertainty; it makes it manageable.

Research is “good enough” when the remaining uncertainty is understood and additional information would no longer change the decision in a meaningful way.

FAQs

How many sources are enough?

There is no fixed number. The important questions are whether the critical assumptions are covered, whether the sources are sufficiently independent and whether definitions can be reconciled.

When is additional primary research worthwhile?

When important assumptions cannot be validated through public information alone – for example purchasing criteria, switching barriers, price acceptance or market practices in a niche.

How should uncertainty be presented?

Through ranges, scenarios, explicit assumptions and a clear indication of evidence quality. This gives decision-makers a more realistic basis than artificial precision.

About the DTO Editorial Team

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The DTO Editorial Team brings together perspectives from interdisciplinary teams with backgrounds in business administration, sociology and psychology. We examine emerging market, customer and strategy topics with close attention to detail, combining rigorous desk research, qualitative and quantitative market research, and experience from more than 1,500 projects. Our goal is to make complex B2B markets easier to understand, identify relevant developments early, and give decision-makers a robust basis for action.