

AUGUST 2026

What your clients won't tell you

An honest assessment of a \$3 billion industry, drawn
from client-side evidence only.

31%

of surveyed experts
reported taking calls
they weren't fully
qualified for.

Woozle Research, n=1,368,
October–November 2025

Among the experts surveyed, close to a third acknowledged taking work slightly outside their expertise, on calls billed at \$1,000 to \$2,000 per hour. It is a self-reported figure from one study rather than an audit of the industry, but it points at a real incentive, and at a second problem arriving on top of it: experts reading answers off a language model while the call is live.

\$3bn

global industry, growing
12% a year

<20%

of the client fee reaches
the expert

11,200

firms now using expert
networks

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1,368	participants in the anchor study	1,000+	verified client reviews reviewed	84	providers in the G2 category
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Strip out the expert reviews and the picture shifts

The highest public ratings in this market, 4.8 to 4.9 on Trustpilot, are largely expert reviews.

This report synthesises client-side feedback only, the firms and individuals who hire expert networks, not the experts who get paid by them. That distinction matters enormously, because the two groups have very different experiences of the same industry.

What follows is what clients actually say when they think no one is listening: on review platforms, in case studies, in industry research, and on LinkedIn. Some of it is encouraging. Much of it is uncomfortable. All of it is useful.

THE SEVEN COHORTS USED THROUGHOUT THIS REPORT

01	First-generation incumbents	Largest databases, annual contracts, deepest compliance functions
02	Custom-sourcing specialists	Experts recruited per brief, service-led, 24–48 hour turnaround
03	Credit-based providers	Analyst-led calls and transcript access sold through credit bundles
04	Database networks	High-volume matching from a standing panel, best per-call economics
05	Consolidated platforms	Transcripts, filings, news and broker research in one search layer
06	Aggregation platforms	One workflow across many networks, pay-as-you-go, unified oversight
07	Regional depth networks	Unmatched coverage in one geography, with the risk that implies

Findings are attributed to business-model cohorts rather than to named providers. Every pattern described here appears at more than one firm, and the useful object of study is the structure, not the scoreboard. Where a number comes from a single provider's public record, it is reported as a market data point without the name attached.

Five things you need to know before reading on

- | | |
|----|---|
| 01 | 31% of surveyed experts reported taking calls they weren't fully qualified for. <i>Woozle Research, 2025</i> |
| 02 | Clients pay \$1,000–\$2,000 per call. Experts receive less than 20% of that. The gap in the middle is the industry's most uncomfortable open secret. |
| 03 | The single largest network's share has halved in a decade, falling from 51% to 24%. The second generation now holds more market share than the first. |
| 04 | When AI moderation was deployed, 81% of those who experienced it rated the quality as worse than human moderation. Clients paid the same price anyway. |
| 05 | Experts are now reading model-generated answers on live calls, and the transcript archive shows none of it. Detection today is reactive: the client finds it first. |

Sections one to three describe the industry as clients have experienced it for a decade. Section four describes what changed in the last eighteen months.

Clients haven't stopped using expert networks. They've started shopping around.

The expert network industry is worth approximately \$3 billion globally and growing at 12% per year, a healthy clip, sustained even after the "Era of Uncertainty" between 2022 and 2023, when deal volumes collapsed and discretionary research budgets were cut hard. Recovery since has been real. Inex One's market research puts active buyers at roughly 11,200 firms, up sharply since 2022.

But aggregate growth figures tell only part of the story. Underneath the topline, the industry is undergoing a significant redistribution of value. On Inex One's market estimates, first-generation networks now hold around 37% of the market, down from clear dominance a decade ago, while second-generation firms hold roughly 44% and are still gaining. Most of the first-generation total sits with a single provider.

FIGURE 1. MARKET SHARE BY NETWORK GENERATION



LARGEST SINGLE NETWORK, SHARE OF MARKET



The largest single provider accounts for most of the 37% first-generation total.

Source: Inex One market estimates

Four first-generation and database networks sit at the top of the market and are routinely benchmarked against each other by procurement teams. A fast-growing second tier of custom-sourcing specialists, consolidated platforms and aggregators sits behind them, and below that a long tail of over 80 providers tracked on G2 alone.

Client-facing pricing by model

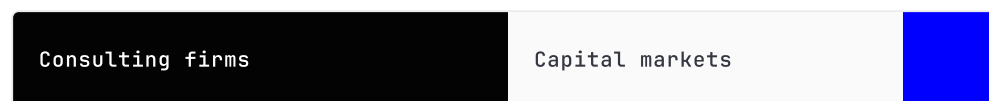
COHORT	PER CALL / HOUR	ANNUAL COMMITMENT
First-generation incumbents	\$1,350-\$2,000 / hr	\$50k-\$150k+
Custom-sourcing specialists	est. \$1,000+ / call	Per-call, rarely published
Credit-based providers	\$300-\$1,200 / hr	\$30k-\$100k+ (credits)
Database networks	about \$1,000 / hr	\$20k-\$80k+
Consolidated platforms	Subscription	\$20k-\$80k+
Challengers and aggregators	Per-call, no subscription	30-50% cheaper

Table 1. Reported client-facing rates by business model, January 2026

Roughly half of industry spend comes from consulting firms and most of the remainder from capital markets, on Inex One's estimates. Corporates are the mirror image: close to half the client base by headcount, but only around a tenth of revenue. Estimates from different sources are drawn on different bases and different vintages, so they should be read as approximate rather than additive. Asset managers are quietly shifting budget away from live calls and toward transcript libraries, a behavioural change with significant implications for anyone whose revenue model depends on per-call volume.

FIGURE 2. WHO THE INDUSTRY SELLS TO, BY SHARE OF SPEND AND SHARE OF CLIENT BASE

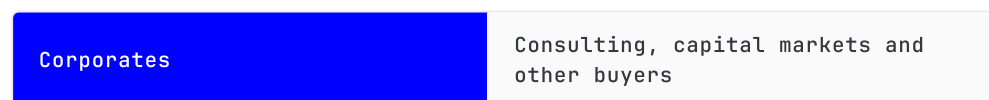
SHARE OF SPEND



■ Consulting firms, roughly half □ Capital markets, most of the remainder

■ Corporates, around a tenth

SHARE OF CLIENT BASE, BY HEADCOUNT



■ Corporates, close to half □ The balance

Inex One estimates. Figures are drawn on different bases and vintages and should be read as approximate rather than additive.

They compress months of relationship-building into hours

Let's start where the industry deserves credit, because there is plenty of it. Expert networks do something genuinely valuable. They give an analyst at a PE firm access, by Tuesday afternoon, to a former operations director at a target company who would otherwise take six months to find through a warm introduction. When they work well, clients notice.

"Their ability to quickly connect us with experts has been a game-changer," wrote one management consultant in a verified G2 review of a database network. A tax manager at a large transport enterprise gave the same provider four stars with a simple, credible rationale: "It helped me find a highly qualified consultant for a very specific issue within a day." Another reviewer, in internet services, described it as a service that "slices through the noise of finding the right expert."

Custom-sourcing specialists attract consistent praise for responsiveness: "quick, quality responses," "smooth overall process," "responsive communication, well-organised schedule." The 24–48 hour turnaround for expert scheduling is real, and clients value it.

"Expert interviews are excellent: the breadth of coverage is extremely impressive."

Associate, venture capital firm • on a consolidated research platform

The consolidated platforms, expert interviews alongside filings, news, sell-side research and broker documents in one place, are what clients most often describe as transformative. A managing consultant at a global consultancy scored one 10 out of 10 in June 2025: "Providing more information than competitors, especially when it comes to expert interviews." An associate director for corporate strategy at a large automotive OEM uses the same category of platform for competitive intelligence.

Transcript libraries, 15,000 to 50,000 interviews depending on the provider and the source, are described as "genuinely useful for getting smart on a sector before you brief a call." They are one of the industry's real innovations: primary research you don't have to commission. Clients use them to reduce prep time and avoid redundant calls on well-trodden topics.

At the newer end of the market, the leading aggregation platform has held G2's most-loved primary research position for six consecutive quarters (4.9

out of 5 across 47 verified client reviews). One client described it as having "streamlined the process of primary research commissioning and brought it into the modern marketplace economy." The 2–4 hour turnaround is mentioned repeatedly, and cost efficiency versus legacy providers is among the most cited benefits.

AI-first challengers rating 4.9 on G2 are building reputations in PE and management consulting as alternatives to the legacy concierge model. A private equity professional offered a testimonial that will resonate with anyone who has managed these relationships at scale: "Throughout my career, I have been a heavier user of expert networks. It has always been a time sink."

In short: the good is real. Clients who get precisely matched experts, fast turnaround, and transparent pricing come away satisfied. The problem is that these outcomes are inconsistent, and the gap between what is promised and what is delivered is where the industry's reputation corrodes.

The bad is structural, not a bad week for an account manager

It is about business models that are misaligned with client outcomes, and pricing architectures designed to obscure rather than illuminate value.

31%

of surveyed experts took calls they weren't qualified for

<20%

of the client fee reaches the expert

81%

rated AI moderation worse than human

The pricing opacity problem

Clients across every major model describe the same experience: they do not know what they are buying until after they have bought it.

Credit systems are the most frequently cited example. As one analysis puts it: "The credit system makes it nearly impossible to compare costs on an apples-to-apples basis." Clients "rarely know how many credits a call will cost in advance" and "don't always know what each credit is worth in dollars." One documented case: a client anticipated paying \$800 per call; the actual cost approached \$1,200. A 50% variance on a line item that can run to hundreds of thousands of dollars annually is not a rounding error. It is a trust problem.

Annual contract structures at the incumbent end are described as "opaque and skewed toward large, repeat buyers," with pricing "often embedded in annual contracts making true per-call rates unclear." Once a client is locked into a \$100,000+ commitment, they feel pressure to use credits whether or not the calls are delivering value.

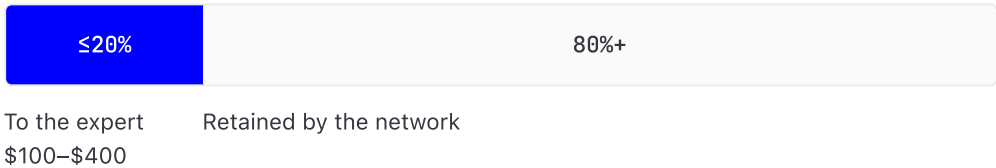
"We prepaid \$100k and didn't get good results."

LinkedIn post about a first-generation incumbent, cited independently by multiple sources

The dynamic described across models is consistent: clients buy 50 expert calls, find that the last ten are of diminishing value, but use them anyway because the credits are expiring. This is not a feature. It is a trap that erodes trust slowly and then all at once, at renewal.

The margin story compounds this. Clients pay \$1,000 to \$2,000 per call. Experts receive, on average, less than 20% of that, most commonly between \$100 and \$400 per consultation. The Woozle Research study found that 65% of experts earn under \$400 per consultation, and 82% believe fair compensation should exceed \$500 per hour. Only 18% achieve it. This matters to clients not as a moral question but as a practical one: experts who are poorly compensated accept calls they are not qualified for. The compensation structure is a root cause of the quality problem.

FIGURE 3. WHERE A \$1,500 CALL GOES



The expert quality problem

The number most damaging to the industry's core proposition comes from the industry's own research: in the Woozle study of 1,368 participants, 31% of surveyed experts reported taking calls they weren't fully qualified for. The root causes are structural rather than malicious, self-certified expertise with no robust third-party verification, matching driven by keywords rather than context, and the 24–48 hour turnaround pressure that has become standard. Speed and quality are in tension, and the industry has consistently chosen speed.

Client reviews corroborate the matching problem independently. "Some mismatch of skills is leading to less productive calls," wrote one client of a first-generation incumbent on G2. A VC and private equity reviewer who gave a database network two stars put it plainly: "Way more expensive than other networks... unpleasant the entire time." That firm now runs competitive bids across multiple providers.

Custom-sourcing specialists, despite their reputation for speed, are noted in comparative research for deploying associates who are "typically recent graduates", a problem when the brief requires genuine technical depth. Last-minute expert cancellations are a related pain point: a client builds a research plan around a Tuesday morning call; the expert cancels Monday night; the day is in ruins.

The administrative burden

Major institutional clients maintain relationships with three to four expert networks simultaneously. They do this because no single network provides everything they need, and because competitive sourcing keeps pricing honest. The operational consequence is a compliance and administrative headache the industry has not solved: each network has its own portal, brief format, attestation process and billing cycle. Managing them in parallel creates "added admin and coordination costs," and peak demand periods create capacity constraints and "inconsistent response times."

Consulting firms have responded by reducing usage 15 to 25%, leveraging documented previous research rather than commissioning new calls. This is not an endorsement of expert networks. It is the market correcting for inefficiency.

The AI moderation problem

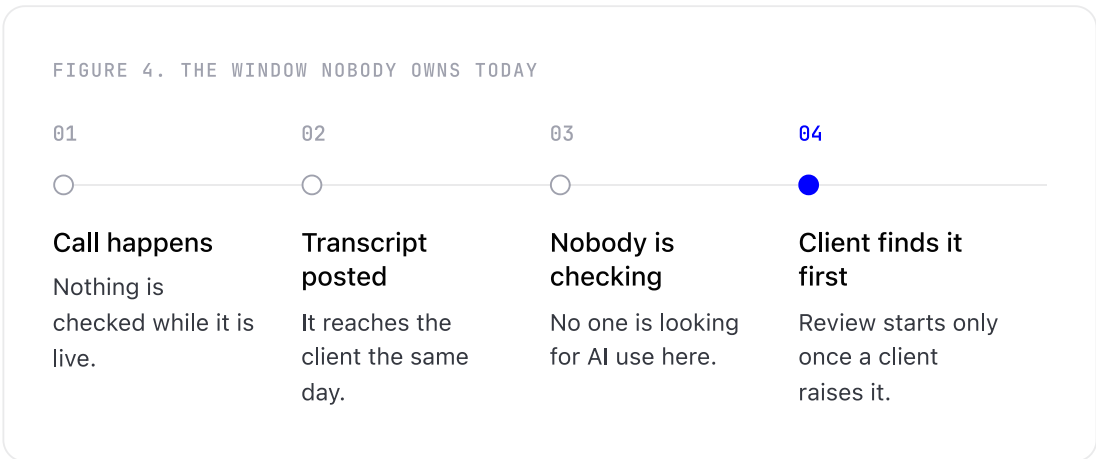
The industry is rushing toward AI-moderated calls as a cost reduction and scalability play. The clients who have experienced it are not impressed. Of the 17% in the Woozle study who encountered AI-moderated consultations, 81% rated the quality as worse than human moderation. Missed follow-ups, poor contextual understanding, technical failures, with no corresponding reduction in price.

Networks that deploy AI moderation without transparency about what clients are receiving, and without adjusting pricing to reflect the change in value, are effectively billing for a premium service and delivering a discounted one. There is a second consequence, addressed next: when no human is on the line, nobody senses that the expert on the other end is reading.

Experts are reading AI-generated answers on live calls

The qualification gap described in section three has a new companion. An expert who is not fully qualified for a brief no longer has to admit it, hedge, or decline: a language model open in another window will produce a fluent, plausible, sector-appropriate answer in the length of a pause. The economics make this predictable: an expert paid \$100 to \$400 for a call has every incentive to accept an invitation slightly outside their expertise, and now has a tool that closes the gap in real time.

The exposure is largest on calls with no human in the loop. AI-led channel checks and AI-moderated consultations remove the one control the industry has always relied on: an analyst who can hear that something is off. Quality leads describe the tell in almost identical terms, a long, unnatural pause after the question, then a block of unusually fluent, unusually generic speech.



"A lot of what we're doing today is reactive. We get a flag from a client reading a transcript, then we go in and review it. The biggest indicator is that pause after the question is asked."

Expert quality lead, Tier 1 expert network

Nine methods, and why the transcript archive shows none of them

INFLXD's detection research, published at detect.inflxd.ai, groups the observed methods into three families. None of them leave a mark that a keyword search or a human skim of a transcript will reliably find.

01-04

Live assistance on the call

A language model window kept off-screen, pre-generated answers prepared against the brief, funded overlay software, and homemade copilots built for the purpose.

05-07

Someone else in the seat

A second device out of frame, proxy experts taking the call on someone's behalf, deepfaked video and cloned voice.

08-09

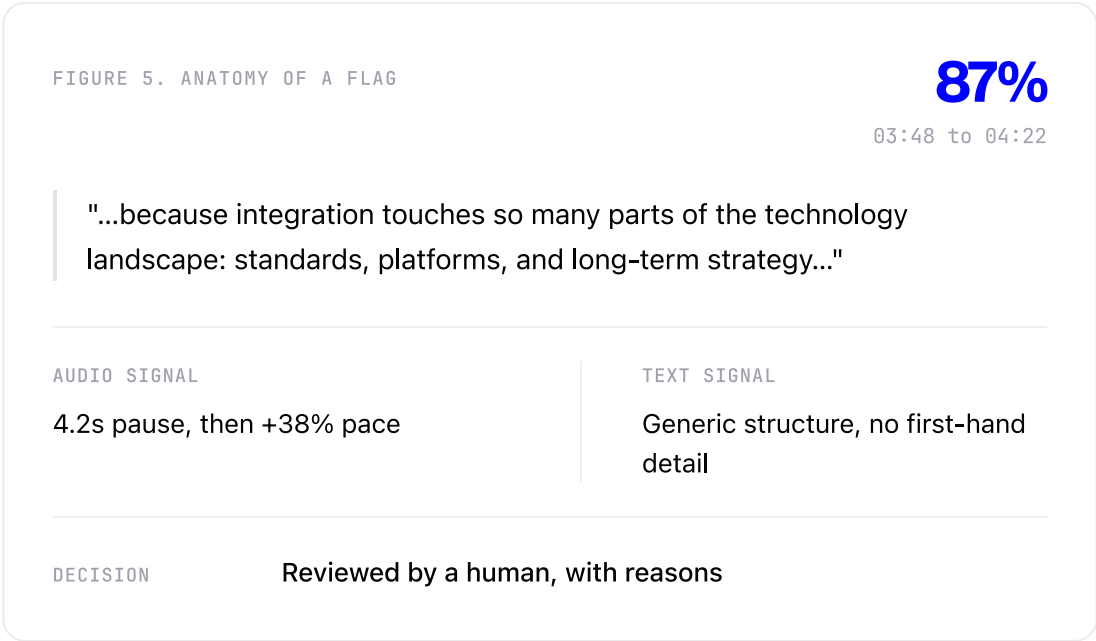
Fraud upstream of the call

Profiles tuned to clear vetting, and model-produced numbers delivered to the client as first-hand knowledge.

The channel matters. Expert calls run without video by design, because experts are anonymised. On INFLXD's own sample of network call recordings, under 10% carry video at all, and those that do are vetted webinars rather than where the risk sits. Detection tools built around a face on screen are checking a channel these calls do not have. What every call does have is audio and a transcript: how something was said, and what was said.

What the detectable signals look like

Two independent signals, pointing at the same passage, are what distinguishes a reader from a slow thinker. On the audio side: an unnatural pause after the question, then a jump in pace, with pitch and volume that don't match how that speaker sounds elsewhere on the call. On the text side: generic structure and wording on exactly the same passage. INFLXD's published methodology checks 15+ independent audio and text markers per call, and requires both signal families to agree before a flag fires.



Why this belongs in the quality conversation

A 31% qualification failure rate was already difficult to defend at \$1,500 a call. Combined with model-assisted answers, it becomes something harder: the client cannot tell, from the transcript, whether they bought lived expertise or a fluent summary of public information they could have generated themselves for nothing.

The commercial exposure is concentrated. One undetected expert typically speaks to several clients before anyone notices, and the remedy is refunds plus a relationship conversation with whoever is on the largest retainer.

WHERE BUYERS SAY THE WIN IS

Detection at screening is where buyers say the win is: catch it before it reaches the client, and the network is the party that found it rather than the party that was told.

Regulatory and operational shocks the market has absorbed

Fifteen years of public record show the same lesson repeatedly: the industry's risks are not reputational abstractions. They arrive as raids, settlements, redundancies and rule changes, and they show up in service quality afterwards.

FIGURE 6. FIFTEEN YEARS OF REGULATORY AND OPERATIONAL SHOCKS

2011	SEC charges hedge fund portfolio managers over MNPI sourced through expert network consultants; illicit profits exceed \$30m.
2022	A top-four network agrees to pay \$4.4m to settle two overtime lawsuits covering 500+ former employees.
LATE 2022	A credit-based provider loses its President, CFO and Chief People Officer in quick succession.
MAY 2023	Chinese police raid a major regional network's Shanghai offices; the national security investigation is televised by state media.
DEC 2023	A top-four network closes its German operation, approximately 60 people.
OCT 2025	Woozle Research fields the industry's largest client and expert study (n=1,368).
AUG 2026	EU AI Act provisions take effect: traceability obligations, penalties to €15m or 3% of turnover.

Two of these events deserve closer reading, because they describe risks that have not been retired: geopolitical exposure in single-geography networks, and the compliance floor that MNPI enforcement has set for everyone.

Geopolitical exposure in regional depth networks

In May 2023, Chinese police raided the Shanghai offices of the region's largest expert network as part of a national security investigation. The raid was not a quiet internal matter; it was televised by state-sponsored media in a 15-minute segment. Two consultants appeared to be serving prison time for what was described as providing national and corporate secrets. A major Chinese investment bank terminated its relationship immediately, and the provider's planned Hong Kong IPO is described as "clearly dead."

For Western clients, that network's China database still represents unmatched depth, 134,000 consulting calls in the first nine months of 2021 alone. For those who continue to use it, the reputational and legal exposure is non-trivial. Any firm with a compliance function that has not reviewed the relationship since 2023 has a gap.

THE BROADER SIGNAL

The episode signals something broader: the geopolitical risk embedded in global expert networks with China operations is real, and it is not receiving adequate attention.

Operational turbulence shows up in service quality

One network serving nine of the world's top ten consulting firms agreed to pay \$4.4 million in 2022 to settle two lawsuits concerning overtime compensation for more than 500 former employees. In December 2023, it closed its German operation, approximately 60 people. These are facts available in the public record, and turbulence of this scale has a way of showing up in service quality. Clients in Europe noticed.

Leadership stability is not a glamorous topic either, but at firms where client relationships run through a small number of senior people, the simultaneous loss of a President, a CFO and a Chief People Officer, as happened at one credit-based provider in late 2022, creates service continuity risk. Some clients reported "inconsistent response times" during the peak demand periods that followed.

FIGURE 7. THE 2023 SHANGHAI RAID AND THE DECEMBER 2023 GERMAN CLOSURE



The insider trading shadow

Expert networks operate close to a bright regulatory line. The 2011 case in which the SEC charged hedge fund portfolio managers with trading on material non-public information sourced through expert network consultants, with illicit profits exceeding \$30 million, set a precedent that has shaped industry compliance ever since. More recently, a fund adviser paid \$1.8 million in civil penalties for MNPI control failures despite no evidence of illegal trading, the systems themselves were inadequate.

The ongoing risk areas are not historical artifacts. Experts are still self-screened. Conflicts of interest are still undisclosed in some cases. Documentation across multiple network relationships is still largely manual. The EU AI Act, with provisions effective August 2026, adds obligations around decision support traceability in automated research workflows, with penalties of up to €15 million or 3% of global turnover.

Hedge funds managing relationships with two to five networks simultaneously are tracking a separate compliance portal for each, which is where documentation gaps appear.

For network executives, compliance is not a differentiator; it is a floor. Failing to clear it closes off entire client categories.

An honest scorecard, by business model

Each cohort has a shape of strength and a shape of failure that follows from how it makes money. Read your own model first, then the one your clients are switching to.

FIGURE 8. HIGHEST CLIENT RATING IN EACH COHORT

COHORT		RATING	REVIEWS
Challengers, low-cost		5.0	23
Aggregation platforms		4.9	47
AI-first specialists		4.9	22
Marketplace models		4.7	58
Consolidated platforms		4.7	—
B2B research recruiters		4.3	11
Database networks		4.3	8
First-generation incumbents		4.2	11

Highest-rated representative provider in each cohort, G2, January 2026. Category average 4.67 across 84 products. Review counts vary by two orders of magnitude, read volume alongside score.

01

G2 4.2 ·
Trustpilot 4.3

First-generation incumbents

The established anchors of the industry, the largest networks (over a million experts at the top end), the strongest compliance infrastructure, the broadest institutional relationships.

Professionalism and team expertise score highest of any attribute in their client feedback. But share has moved away from this cohort for a reason: pricing is high, opaque and contract-locked; technology is behind the curve; and clients in specialised niches find matching inconsistent.

BEST FOR Large, multi-sector programmes where compliance infrastructure matters more than agility or price.

02

Public ratings
heavily expert-
side

Custom-sourcing specialists

Fast, service-led, and consistently praised for responsiveness. Recruiting experts per brief rather than pulling from a static database produces higher match relevance on niche projects, and the AI tooling being built here shows genuine intent. The weaknesses are thin transcript libraries, re-sourcing models that penalise ongoing research on the same topic, and expert ghosting that affects client timelines. Associates are sometimes junior for highly technical briefs.

BEST FOR Time-sensitive projects requiring precise, fresh expert matching; investment-focused research teams.

03

Credit-based providers

Trustpilot 4.0

The transcript library is genuinely useful and changes how research teams approach the early phase of a brief; analyst-led interviews produce better-quality calls on average than pure concierge models, and the compliance technology in this cohort is industry-leading. But the credit system is the least transparent pricing architecture in the industry from a client perspective, and the cost shock when credits run lower than anticipated is a persistent complaint. "Cost-prohibitive for startups" is limiting in a market where the buyer base is expanding.

BEST FOR Asset managers and PE firms doing ongoing sector coverage who value transcripts as much as live calls.

04

Database networks

G2 4.3

The best economics of the top tier for high-volume programmes, and a broader client base, corporates and smaller funds included. Healthcare depth is genuine and differentiated. But standing-panel matching is less precise on specialised briefs than custom sourcing, and interfaces are consistently described as outdated. One VC/PE reviewer switched to competitive bidding after finding "competitors charged \$200–\$450 less for identical experts."

BEST FOR High-volume, cost-conscious programmes; healthcare and life sciences diligence.

05

62 4.7

Consolidated research platforms

The most interesting strategic position in the industry: expert interviews plus broker research plus filings plus news in one AI-powered search layer, showing up in client reviews from a global consultancy, a large automotive OEM and a venture capital firm. The main complaint is pricing opacity, the most common by a wide margin, and annual commitment rigidity.

BEST FOR Teams needing primary and secondary sources consolidated; corporate strategy and investment research.

06

62 4.9 • 47
reviews

Aggregation platforms

Not traditional networks but a workflow layer across 30+ of them: one interface, pay-as-you-go, AI transcript summaries, unified compliance oversight. The highest-volume verified client signal in the market, with 2–4 hour turnarounds and explicit cost savings versus legacy providers. The gap is coverage, the largest incumbents are not on these platforms, which matters for institutions with existing relationships there.

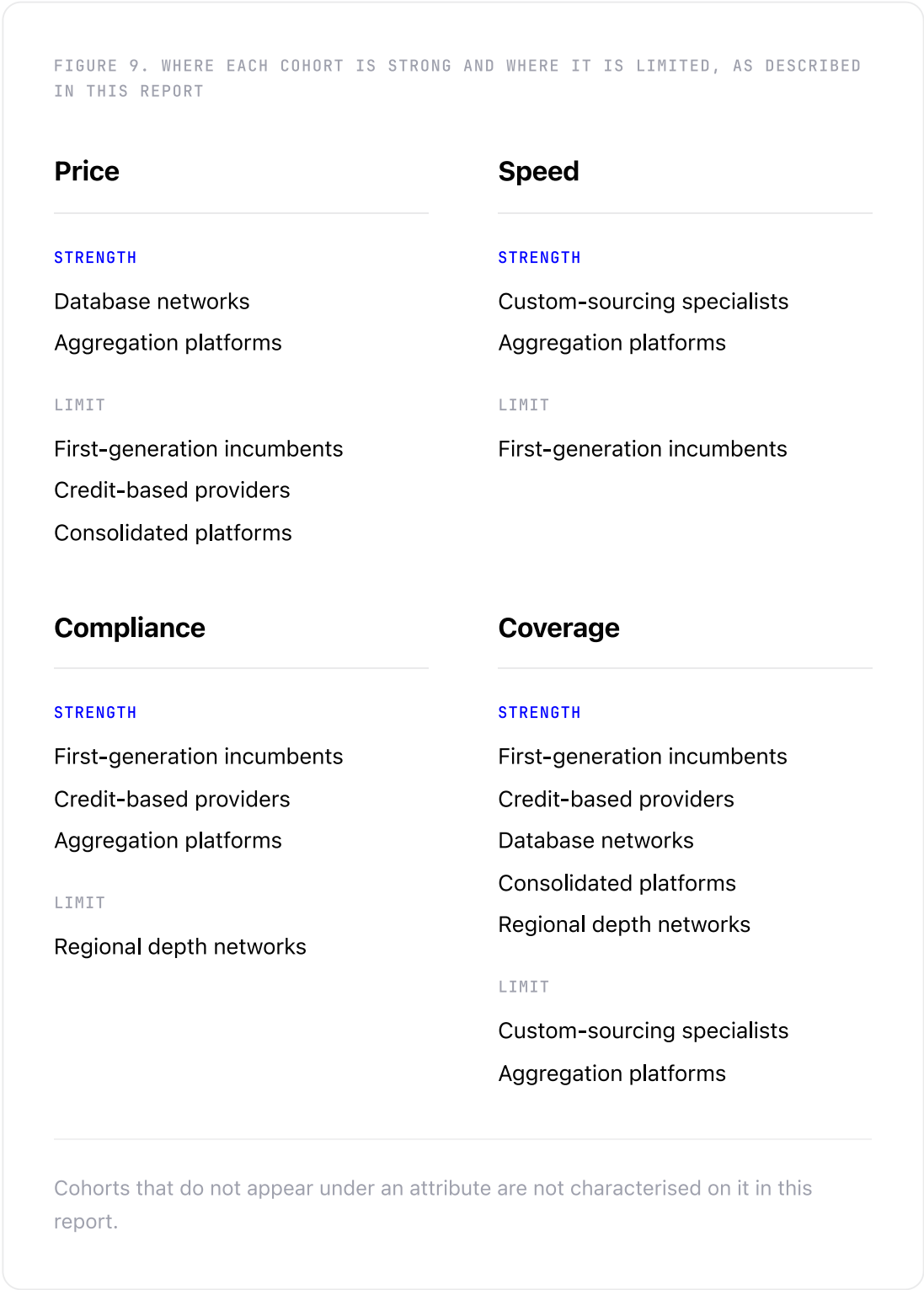
BEST FOR Research operations teams running 20+ calls a month across multiple relationships.

07

Review the
compliance
position

Regional depth networks and B2B recruiters

Regional networks offer database depth no global provider matches in their geography, at the cost of concentrated legal and political exposure, as the 2023 raid demonstrated. B2B research recruiters are a different product again: survey and qualitative recruitment with strong enterprise client lists, where "quick and impressive results in one week" and "exceptional data quality and excellent project management" are the recurring client verdicts. Direct comparison to call-based networks is imperfect.



What satisfied clients say in verified reviews

"Providing more information than competitors, especially when it comes to expert interviews."

Managing consultant, global consultancy · scored 10/10, June 2025

"Expert interviews are excellent: the breadth of coverage is extremely impressive."

Associate, venture capital firm

"It helped me find a highly qualified consultant for a very specific issue within a day."

Tax manager, large transport enterprise
· 4 stars, G2

"Throughout my career, I have been a heavier user of expert networks. It has always been a time sink."

Private equity professional

"Quick and impressive results in one week." · "Exceptional data quality and excellent project management."

Director of business development, and a second enterprise reviewer

NOTE

Quotes are reproduced from published verified reviews. Reviewers are described by role and organisation type rather than by name, and no quotation here should be read as an endorsement by any named individual or employer. Provider names are withheld throughout.

The most telling signal is not what clients say, it is what they do

Major PE firms are running three to four expert networks simultaneously rather than committing to one. This is expensive and administratively painful. They do it anyway, because competitive sourcing keeps pricing honest and reduces dependency on any single provider's quality. That is not a vote of confidence in the industry.

Consulting firms have reduced their expert network spend by 15–25% by leveraging previous research rather than commissioning new calls. They are not eliminating expert networks; they are using them more efficiently, which means less. Volume is declining from a client segment that represents half of total industry spend.

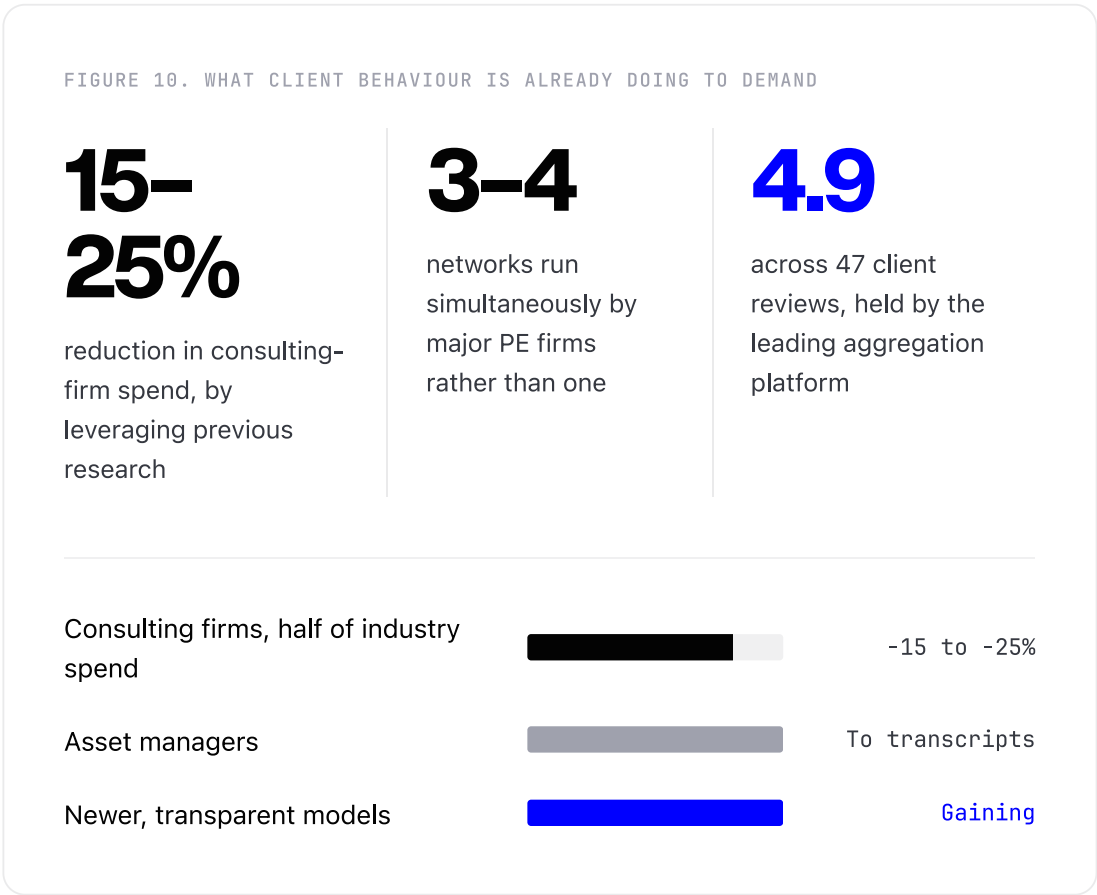
Asset managers are shifting budget from live calls to transcript libraries. This is a structural shift in how research is done, not a temporary cost-cutting measure.

"What we're looking for is more signal. If I see high indications, we do a deep dive on the expert. We need to know when to really dig in, especially when there's no human in the loop taking the call."

Expert quality lead, Tier 1 expert network

Clients who have had a bad experience are moving to competitive bidding rather than single-provider relationships. The VC/PE reviewer who gave a database network two stars described the shift explicitly: "Firm now uses competitive bidding across multiple networks." This is a rational response to pricing opacity and inconsistent quality.

The clients who are most satisfied are those using newer, more transparent models, pay-per-use, no subscription, explicit pricing, AI-enhanced matching. The 4.9 rating across 47 client reviews held by the leading aggregation platform is the highest-volume verified signal in the market. It is not an accident.



Eight openings, and what each one is worth to the firm that moves first

Read as a commercial brief rather than a critique: each item below is a place where client behaviour is already shifting revenue, and where moving early is cheaper than responding late.

01

Transparent pricing is now a retention lever

Clients who cannot forecast their spend cannot defend the line item internally, and unforecastable line items are the first to be competitively bid at renewal. Challengers already publish per-call rates, which is why they win the comparison before the conversation starts. The first incumbent to publish a simple rate card takes the transparency argument off the table.

02

The qualification gap is where substitution starts

A 31% self-reported qualification failure rate sets the bar that AI-processed transcript libraries have to beat, and that bar is falling every quarter. Self-certified expertise matched on keywords is the part of the product a cheaper tool can replicate. Verifiable expertise profiles, client feedback loops and evidence-based matching are what a transcript library cannot copy.

03 **Whoever finds the AI use owns the narrative**

Model-assisted answers are the fastest-moving quality risk in the industry, and today the client usually finds them first, which converts a quality issue into a credit note and a renewal conversation. Checking audio and transcript together, at screening as well as after the call, changes who reports the problem. The network that finds it first is the one that keeps the account.

04 **Workflow friction is the switching cost you can own**

Clients running three to four networks in parallel lose hours a week to administration that no provider is paid for. Whoever absorbs that work becomes the system of record, and systems of record get renewed by default. Another portal to log into does not.

05 **AI moderation has to be priced to what it delivers**

An 81% dissatisfaction rate among clients who have experienced AI moderation is a pricing problem before it is a product problem: the same rate is being charged for a service clients rate lower. Two defensible positions exist. Demonstrate parity with human moderation and hold the price, or disclose the difference and price accordingly. The undisclosed middle is what generates refund requests and procurement questions.

06

Expert compensation is a quality input, not a cost line

At \$100 to \$400 against a \$1,500 client fee, the rational expert accepts every invitation regardless of fit and, increasingly, closes the gap with a language model. That is the mechanism behind both the qualification and the AI findings in this report. Networks paying \$500+ for verified senior experts buy a measurably better pool and gain the one thing that justifies premium client pricing.

07

Compliance is billable when it is auditable

The clients most exposed to MNPI risk, hedge funds and PE firms, hold the largest budgets and the lowest price sensitivity. Compliance infrastructure that is unified across their network relationships and auditable in real time is not overhead; it is the feature those clients will pay a premium for. The EU AI Act, effective this month, gives them a reason to ask for it by name.

08

Client-side reviews are where procurement looks

Most high-volume Trustpilot profiles in this industry are expert-side, which means the public record says little about client satisfaction either way. Procurement teams research vendors on G2 and TrustRadius, where several challengers hold 4.9 ratings and most incumbents hold single-digit review counts. Verified client reviews are both a competitive asset and the cheapest quality signal a network can collect.

The data in this report is not a verdict. It is a mirror.

The expert network industry is at an inflection point. It has three to five years before the forces currently building, AI-powered transcript analysis, agentic research tools, aggressive pricing from new entrants, model-assisted answers on live calls, and client sophistication about what they are actually getting, create a genuine market restructuring.

The firms that survive and grow in that environment will be the ones that earned client trust in this one. Not through marketing claims, but through measurable quality, honest pricing, and the kind of operational rigour that gives a research director at a PE firm confidence that when they pay \$1,200 for a call, they are going to get \$1,200 worth of insight.

The industry that clients describe in their reviews is one with real strengths and serious structural problems, problems that are well understood, frequently discussed, and rarely fixed.

The networks that read this report as a to-do list rather than a threat will be better positioned in 2028 than those that don't.

APPENDIX G2 CATEGORY SNAPSHOT

Expert Networks category, G2, January 2026 · 84 products · average rating 4.67/5.
Providers are described by model; ratings and review counts are as published.

PROVIDER MODEL	RATING	REVIEWS	AS PUBLISHED ON G2
Aggregation platform	4.9	47	Most-loved primary research platform, 6 quarters running
Low-cost challenger	5.0	23	Pricing 20–50% below market average
Global boutique	4.9	24	48-hour connections, 150+ countries
AI-first specialist	4.9	22	ML-based matching; PE and consulting focus
Marketplace model	4.7	58	Highest G2 review volume; expert payment issues flagged
Consolidated platform	4.7	–	AI-first search across transcripts, filings and research
Knowledge marketplace	4.6	23	Direct expert booking
Pay-per-use network	4.6	7	No subscriptions
B2B research recruiter	4.3	11	Niche matching; enterprise B2B surveys
Database network	4.3	8	Serves nine of the top ten consulting firms
First-generation incumbent	4.2	11	Established 1998; declining market share

NOT LISTED

Notable absences from G2: the largest custom-sourcing specialist (one review only), the leading credit-based provider (content not accessible), and one fast-growing European network (limited client data).

REQUEST THE FULL LIST

For the de-anonymised list, email hello@influxd.ai with the subject line "deanon list" and we will send it over.

This report draws on the following primary sources. Client quotes are reproduced as published; provider names are withheld in the body text.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

Woozle Research Study (n=1,368, October–November 2025)
barchart.com/story/news/36468329/

INFLXD AI plagiarism detection research and methodology
detect.inflxd.ai

MARKET AND BUYER ANALYSIS

Market sizing and growth
inex.one/blog/expert-network-market-size

Comparative buyer research
insights.woozleresearch.com

Industry trend analysis
alpha-sense.com/blog/trends

Hidden cost analysis
nexusexpertresearch.co

REVIEW PLATFORMS

G2 Expert Networks category, 84 products
g2.com/categories/expert-networks

TrustRadius reviews of consolidated research platforms
trustradius.com

Trustpilot review profiles across nine providers (107 to 456 reviews each; several profiles run past 100 pages, predominantly expert-side)

RISK AND PROVIDER TRACKING

MNPI and expert network risk
fieldsignalhq.com

Provider tracking, 33 networks
expertnetworks.net/networks/

Expert-side review archives and provider case studies (ExpertOpportunities.com; provider-published equity research case studies)

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Talk to us about anything in this report

Including the de-anonymised provider list, the detection methodology, or a review of your own call archive.

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AI detection for expert networks
