

## ***The Quiet Collapse Of Market Research: How Report Mills, Counterfeiting, And Consolidation Are Undermining An Industry***

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Several years ago, buying a market research report was simple: you paid a reputable firm, and you received credible, data-driven analysis. Companies such as Dataquest, IHS, Yole, Gartner, Forrester, WSTS, Nielsen, and McKinsey shaped strategy across the technology sector. Their reports were trusted, rigorous, and—crucially—authored by analysts with deep domain knowledge.

Today, the landscape looks very different.

### ***A Surge In Report Mills***

The market research industry is now flooded with what insiders call *research mills*—firms that generate low-quality reports very quickly in 23 to 36 hours sometimes in high volume, often using scraped public data, AI-generated text, and recycled content. These “reports” are then marketed aggressively through SEO campaigns, mass email blasts, and flashy websites designed to mimic legitimate firms.

Many of these organizations appear to operate from virtual offices or mail drop locations in the USA—if they even claim to have sites in the Americas. But more likely they are operating in far off lands. Prices are negotiable, often falling from an initial asking price of several thousand dollars to a few hundred with minimal pushback from the customer. And they will happily produce a report on any topic—no matter how obscure—Semiconductors or screwdrivers, no problem. What’s the difference?

For instance, if they offer a report on the wide-bandgap (WBG) semiconductor market, ask them instead for a study on the global accordion market or snow-cone machine industry. (I tried it to see what would happen and they quoted it and promised delivery after a wire transfer, of course.) Ask for a discount, and the price drops instantly. In every respect, the sales process resembles flea market haggling—not a transaction with a research institution. So, what happened to the honorable report and analyst profession?

### ***Consolidation At The Top***

While the bottom end of the industry expands, the top tier of established and reputable marketing research firms is shrinking or transforming through mergers and acquisitions:

- IHS Markit merged with S&P Global in 2022.
- Forrester is undergoing restructuring after recording an \$83.9 million goodwill impairment in early 2025.
- Kantar is being broken up and sold off by its private-equity owners.
- Dynata, a major research provider, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2024.
- Nielsen has been split, with NielsenIQ now owned by a private equity firm—that must be fun.

These shifts reflect mounting financial pressure. Corporate clients increasingly push for lower prices, and many are cutting research budgets, forgoing purchase of market reports altogether.

### ***The Perfect Conditions For Counterfeit “Insight”***

Several forces have opened the door for fraudulent or low-quality research:

- Low barriers to entry: Anyone can launch a “research firm” with a website, a room full of cheap labor, templates and AI tools.
- Rising demand: Small and mid-sized companies want market data but cannot afford the fees asked by premium firms. In today’s business world everyone needs more data to do anything and everything. Yet, with organizations run by finance and operations, typically they want to pay little to nothing for the

data. And management today cannot discern the bird seed from the bird droppings. But the insatiable desire for more data is there. Management also says you can't make any decision without more data!

- Internal corporate incentives: Some managers seek reports that confirm pre-chosen strategies rather than challenge them. If a marketing person already has their mind made up on a particular plan of action and are looking for data to support it, the scammer will certainly tailor their report to meet that need. "Just make sure it says this and that and I will pay you." It's the scammers scamming the scammer. I am almost certain this is going on these days, so that the purchaser can justify their strategy to their management: "But boss, we bought a market report!"
- Advances in AI: AI makes it easy to generate pages of plausible-sounding analysis quickly reducing the number of low-cost humans needed! A bonus for the scammers—cost reduction.
- Survey fraud: Industry analysts estimate that fraudulent survey responses, bots, and fake interviews cost the industry \$350 million in 2024.<sup>[3]</sup> We can assume that figure has grown since then.

The result of all these factors is a marketplace where real insights compete with counterfeits.

### **How Fake Reports Cause Real Damage**

Poor-quality reports do more than waste money. They distort decision-making.

Companies risk launching products into nonexistent or distorted markets, misjudging competitors, budgeting based on inaccurate forecasts, or citing misleading data in investor presentations.

In extreme cases, knowingly (or unknowingly) using fabricated data to justify strategic decisions could violate fiduciary responsibilities at publicly traded companies.

### **Spotting A Scam**

Experts recommend several checks before buying any report:

- *Verify the source.* Legitimate firms such as Gartner, IDC, WSTS, S&P Global, Yole, McKinsey, and Deloitte explain their methodology, cite primary research, maintain a public track record and have industry involvement.
- *Look for transparent methodology.* Authentic reports describe data sources, sample sizes, forecasting models, and assumptions. Fake ones appear transparent and sound true, but they are not. Sometimes the fakes are quite good in appearance but lack the documentation on methodology.
- *Examine the authorship.* Credible analysts have biographies and industry experience over time in your area of interest with track records, published work, expertise and industry conference participation. In other words, they have a footprint of involvement with the industry you are interested in. If they can say they report on the AI processor market or bowling pins with the same high competence, beware.
- *Scrutinize the numbers.* Be wary of overly precise CAGRs, perfectly round forecasts, or projections that contradict established industry data or even common sense.
- *Test credibility.* Ask for sample pages. Compare them with reputable research. Seek reviews or contact past buyers. Look for the proven track record of success. If there is not one, run.
- *Watch for red flags.* Reports available on every obscure topic, negotiable prices, high pressure tactics, requests for wire transfers and unconventional payment methods or offices located only in low-cost markets are signs of a report mill. Ask to use a corporate purchasing card and watch them refuse. If you find you have been taken, you can dispute a credit card charge. They can't have that!

### **The Bigger Picture**

The rise of counterfeit research mirrors the broader surge in counterfeit goods worldwide. The OECD has warned that fake products—and now, fake information—undermine trust, distort markets, and damage legitimate businesses.

The research mills operate because the model works. Companies keep buying. Budgets are tight. AI and a building of low-cost labor on computers make it easy for the scammers to pivot whenever they are exposed. When trouble catches up with them, research mills just re-open under a new name at a new location.

### ***The Bottom Line***

Market research once guided billion-dollar decisions with authority and credibility. Today, the signal is harder to separate from the noise. As report mills multiply and premium research firms consolidate, buyers must be more vigilant than ever. I encourage you to review the references provided below which have even more information and thoughts on how to not be ripped off by the scammers. Some are both informative and humorous especially one where they asked for a market report on the "time machine market" and got a response!

While the pressure to obtain marketing data quickly and on a limited budget can make the phony marketing reports tempting, doing your due diligence now and investing in legitimate research from reputable sources could very well save your business both time and money later. The old saying, let the buyer beware is very true in the report market.

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### **About The Author**



*Kevin Parmenter is an IEEE Senior Member and has over 30 years of experience in the electronics and semiconductor industry. Kevin is currently the leader of Pins Out Engineering, a consulting firm providing expert consulting across power electronics, semiconductor applications, and technical sales and go-to-market execution. Previously, he served as director of Field Applications Engineering North America for Taiwan Semiconductor. Other past roles include vice president of applications engineering in the U.S.A. for Excelsys, an Advanced Energy company; director of Advanced Technical Marketing for Digital Power Products at Exar; and various positions in management and applications engineering at leading semiconductor companies. Kevin also has design engineering experience in the medical electronics and military electronics fields.*

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