HUMAN? ROBOT?

How to Tell if Your Traffic is Legitimate

What If Media Group

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Technology is ever-evolving. The tech world has gotten smarter, and it seems as if everything is automated.

We are so used to interacting with chatbots and automation that the technology is practically invisible. Need to send an email or text? Just ask Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant, or any other personal voice assistant tool, and it's instantly done for you.

Got a quick question about something you found online but don't want to call and wait on hold? Ask the chatbot—they're always ready to help!

You joke with your friends or colleagues about thinking about buying a cat tree, and the next thing you know, you see an advertisement on your Instagram feed for cat trees.

Anybody can buy likes, views, comments, and followers on social media. We can even program bots to comment on our page engagements automatically.

Automation and bots were created to make our lives easier, but like all good things, there are pros and cons to consider. On the plus side, bots can lighten the load for customer support, filter requests, and provide immediate information to satisfy customer queries.

But bots are not real. From a marketing standpoint, their interactions lack meaning and could skew your analytics in the wrong direction. In other words, you might believe your efforts are working, but if bots are driving your traffic, there are no paying customers at the other end. Simply put, that's money squandered.

False signaling could quickly lead you to make business decisions based on smoke and mirrors.

In this white paper, we'll dive deep into the world of bots and talk about what you can do to avoid the inherent pitfalls.

What is a Bot?

Bots are computer programs designed to perform automated tasks. These tasks can range from simple things like adding products to a shopping cart or directing your call to the correct department to more complex tasks like ordering a pizza or booking a hotel room.

Bots are often used to mimic human behavior and can be very convincing! Their ability to understand and respond naturally makes it challenging to tell the difference

between human and robot traffic. If you misjudge the data, you could end up making decisions based on false assumptions.

So, what's the difference between bots and actual performance in marketing? To answer this, we need to understand how bots work and what they do.

Bots are designed to imitate human behavior by interacting with websites as a human would. They can click on links, fill out forms, and even generate their own web traffic.

While this may sound like a good thing (more traffic is better, right?), it can actually be a big problem. Bots can distort your data and give you a false sense of how well your website performs.

Of course, not all bots are bad. Google uses bots to index websites, for example. Some bots are designed to track website load times, monitor downtime, or search for

copyrighted images. Bad bots, on the other hand, can be designed to interact with your site for nefarious purposes, to fill out contact forms, bombard your site with spam, or click on ads to fraudulently boost payouts.

Let's say you run an online store. You might see that your store visits have increased by 50% over the past week. But what you don't know is that half of those visits were generated by bots. At this point, you might make the mistake of thinking that your marketing campaign is working better than it is and could end up overspending on ads.

Alternately, if you see a decrease in traffic, you might think there's something wrong with your website. If the slowdown is due to a bot, there is nothing wrong with your website—the problem lies with the data.

But how do you tell the difference between human and bot traffic?

Human v. Bot Traffic

Bounce rate is one reliable indicator. Humans usually land on a webpage from a search engine. They will then click around your site until they find what they're looking for (or not). Bots don't look around. They land on a page and then leave, which results in a higher bounce rate.

Other signs of bot traffic include short session duration, excessive page views, or exceedingly slow site load metrics, the latter of which could indicate a surge in bot traffic—or even a DDoS attack.

Bot traffic is a real problem in a performance marketing scenario where companies and affiliates are paid based on actions taken (clicks, views, impressions, lead capture, etc.).

If these actions originate from a bot, the advertiser may believe they're spending wisely when the opposite is true. Even if the interactions do not lead to bona fide sales, the advertiser will continue throwing money at the initiative, essentially wasting their budget on vapor.

This is just one example of how bots can distort your data and lead you to make bad decisions.

Have you ever interacted with what you thought was a bot on social media?

> 18% **Yes**   > 82% **No**

Of course, the above survey results are just someone's best guess. Bots are so integrated into our daily lives that most people don't even realize they are not interacting with a human. If they can complete their desired action, there would be no reason to question it.

The solution? Eliminate the guesswork. You need data to make smart business decisions, but where your data comes from matters. Actual leads and accurate results only happen when input comes from real people. This is the foundation of what we do at What If Media Group. As performance marketing specialists, we drive customer acquisition through first-party insights gained through contextual surveys. We collect and provide data you can rely on to move your business forward.

Different Types of Bots

Not all bots are bad. They are all created for a specific purpose, and many are quite helpful, such as bots that index your website for search engines or monitor website performance. Bad bots are created for malicious purposes, like spamming your comments section, stealing information, or launching attacks. Here are a few of the most common types of bots:
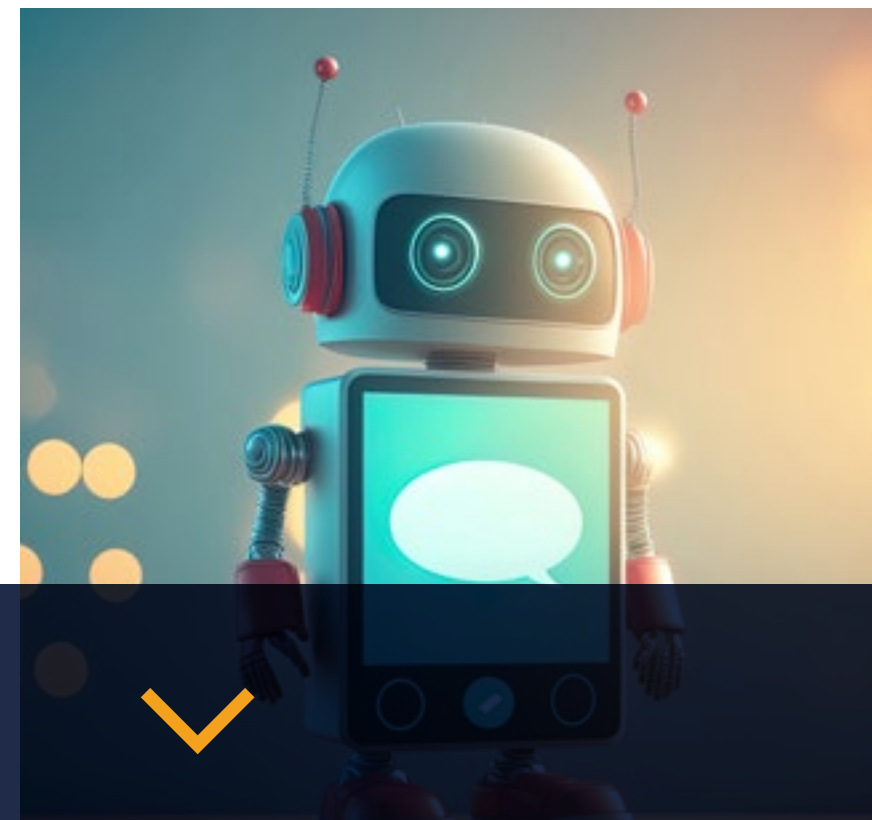
Chat

Chatbots on company websites and social channels allow customers to access simple help and information instantly. They can't often handle complex problems, but they usually satisfy the customer's intent, such as finding an address or checking the status of an order.

Social

Social media bots are used to engage on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. They can be programmed to comment on or re-share posts based on keywords or topics and can easily be used for either honest or dishonest purposes.

Download

Download bots are often designed to steal content from websites. They can be used to download entire websites, or they can be programmed to target specific types of files like PDFs, apps, or images.

Review

Review bots are designed to generate fake reviews. These bots can be used to post positive or negative reviews on websites, products, or services. Can you tell the difference between genuine and bot reviews?

Ticketing

Ticketing/purchasing bots are designed to purchase tickets or products in large quantities. They can be used to buy out entire inventories or can be programmed to target specific items. Do consumers get upset at retailers that don't protect them against this? If they knew the truth, they certainly would!

But are customers and prospects turned off by chatbots? Our data says YES! We asked more than 21,000 people whether talking to a chatbot made them trust a company more or less, and more than 88% said less.

The Pros & Cons of
Social Media Bots

Social bots aren't all bad. On the plus side, they can be used to engage on social media and encourage interactions. But social bots can also be used in dishonest ways. Recent estimates suggest that as many as 65 million Twitter accounts are actually bots—and that's just one platform! Mind you, not all are bad bots, but it's still a jarring statistic.

Of the following social media platforms, which do you think has the highest percentage of bots?

> ### 60%
> **Facebook**

> ### 17%
> **Instagram**

> ### 13%
> **Twitter**

> ### 8%
> **LinkedIn**

When you advertise on LinkedIn, Instagram, etc., it's hard to say how many of those impressions are due to bot, fake, or spam impressions. What If Media Group can prove that our data is 100% legit and we are fully transparent about how we acquire our data.

How confident are you in your ability to identify whether a post on social media comes from a bot?

> ### 12%
> **Very confident**

> ### 26%
> **Somewhat**

> ### 62%
> **Not at all**

Fortunately, there are some unambiguous identifiers that indicate bot behavior. For example, bots use emojis and other special characters in a more uniform format than humans. In other words, if you're seeing a user consistently post using the same format, it's probably a bot. Also, bots have higher activity than humans. Though they are good at mimicking human behavior, bots don't get distracted or hesitate as humans do.

Working with What If Media Group gives you access to honest human impressions collected in context from prospective customers in your demographic. We use a combination of strategies to acquire data and opt-ins, making meaningful connections with every interaction.

Ticketing, Downloading & ChatBots

Ticketing bots automate ticket purchases to popular events, preventing real people from gaining access and causing frustration with the ticketing company. Over time, this practice will impact the company's reputation.

Download bots also send false signals, telling consumers that more people are using an app than actually are. They can also be implemented maliciously to automatically download software or plugins the customer doesn't want.

These two types of bots are also used to launch attacks against companies, "sell out" events without any tickets sold, or overwhelm servers to prevent sales.

The truth is, most businesses have experienced bot attacks. According to recent data, 58% of companies have encountered more than 50 bot attacks in the last 12 months. As bot attacks become more complex, they also take longer to detect. Bots use this additional time to cause substantial damage. Companies report loss of brand reputation, infrastructure damage, and significant financial impact as a result.

For which of the following do you use chatbots most often?

> 50%
Finding a human customer service agent

> 31%
To get a quick answer to questions

> 11%
To resolve a complaint or problem

> 7.5%
To get a more detailed answer to a query

Based on these responses, we can surmise that chatbots are most needed and trusted to complete simple actions.

If you speak to a chatbot instead of a customer service rep, does that make you trust a company more or less?

> 11.91%
More

> 88.44%
Less

Knowing how your customers feel about chatbots, how will this affect your decision to implement the technology? With verified data at your fingertips, it's easier to make these decisions and ensure you are satisfying customer needs.

Bots &
Skewing Social
Polling

Social bots can significantly affect public opinion. Does this lead companies to make bad decisions? Absolutely!

Customers exposed to false information are profoundly influenced. We have only to look to political events of the past decade for evidence. "Fake news" is prevalent, but people still don't know how to tell the difference or don't take the time to research the facts before they buy in.

This is a concerning trend for companies as it leads to poor decision-making. If a business receives volumes of opt-ins or impressions, it indicates public approval or interest. However, if those impressions are bot-driven, the data means nothing and could lead to channeling resources into campaigns that aren't getting any traction.
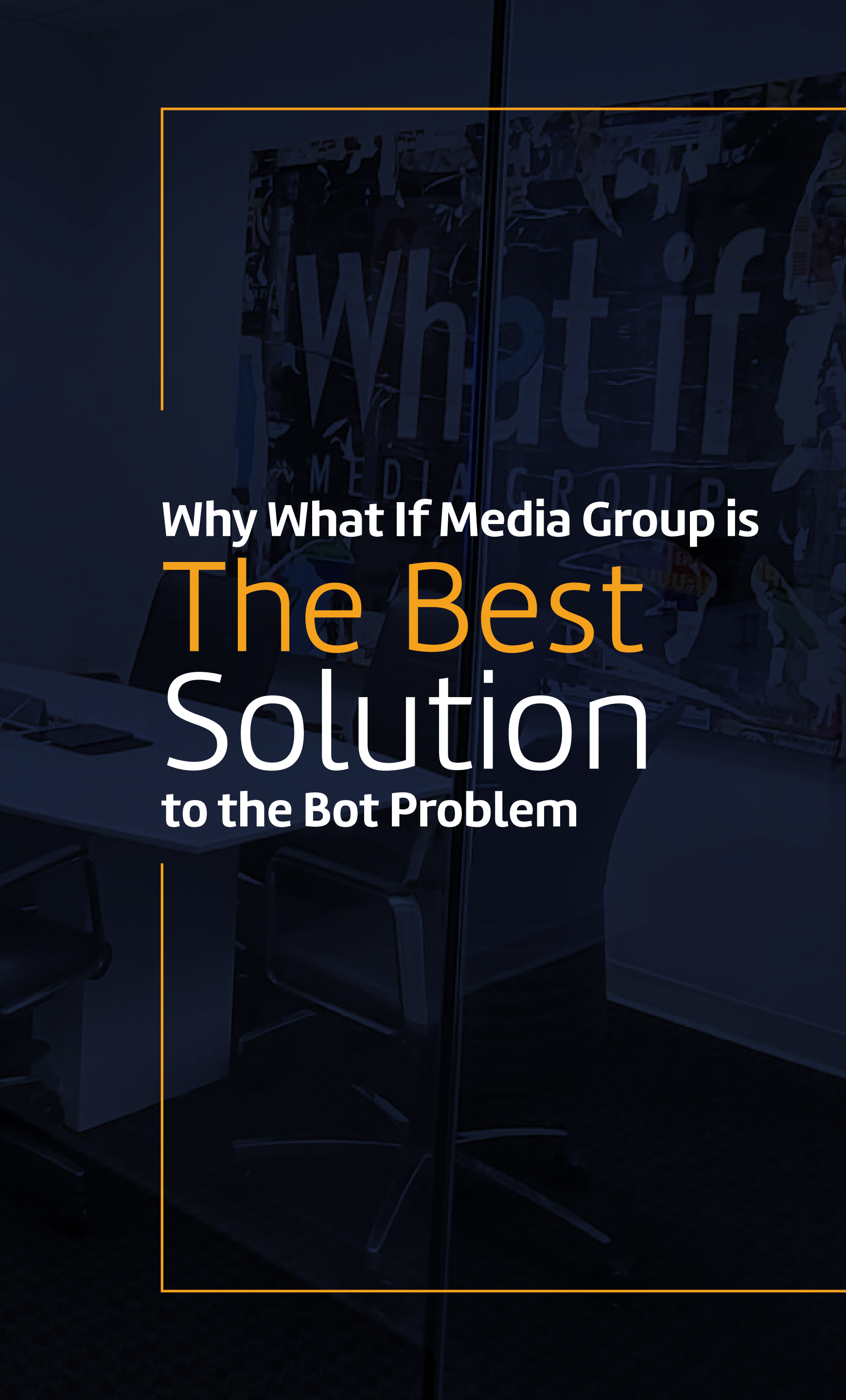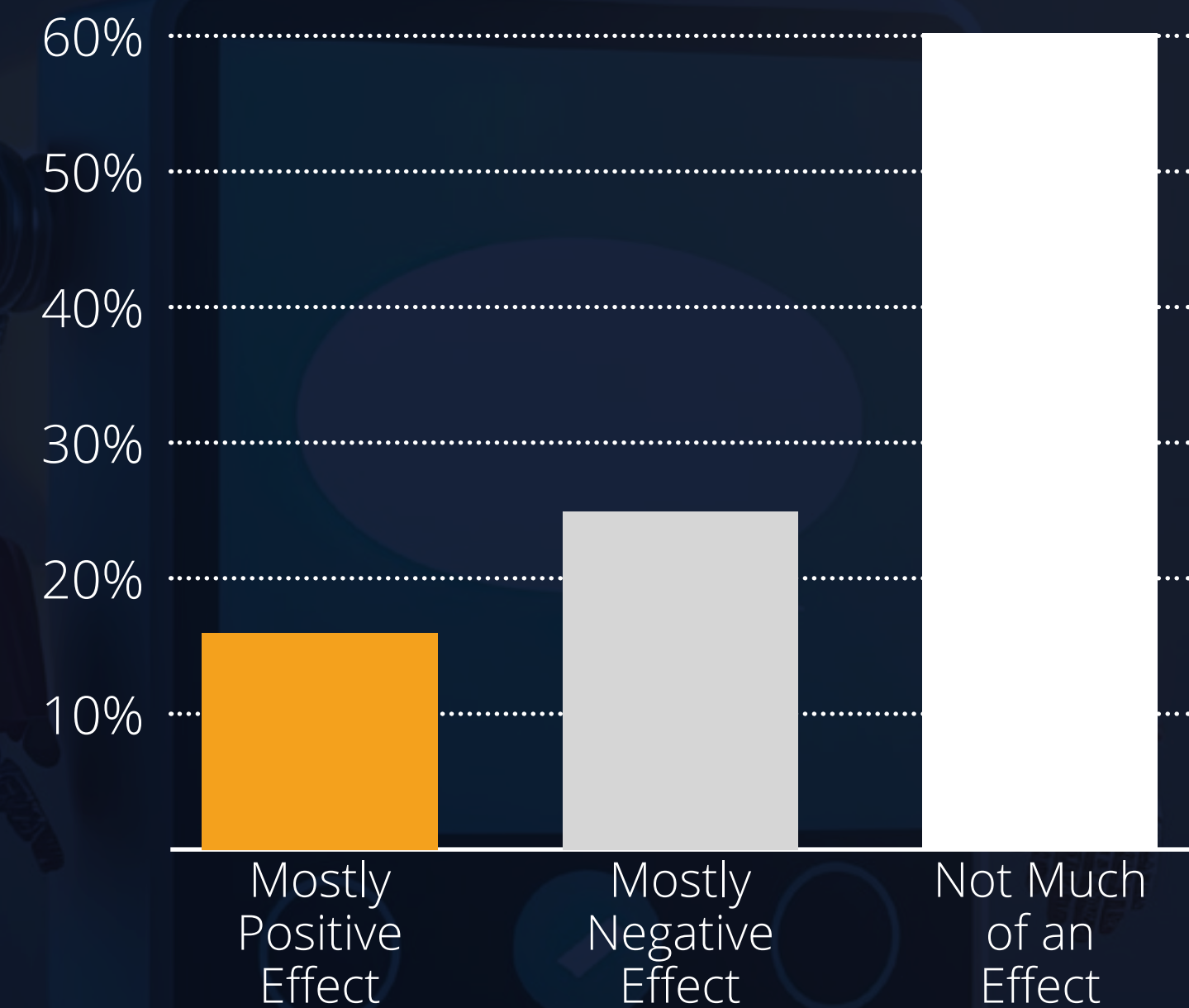
Do you believe bots are:
Skewing Online Polls?

75%
No

25%
Yes

The survey results for the previous two issues indicate that most consumers still trust what they see online, underscoring the urgency for companies to ensure the information they present is real. If your customers can be so easily misinformed, perhaps it's time for you to control the narrative. What If Media Group can help you do that.

When it comes to how well–informed Americans are about events and issues in the news, would you say that social media bots have had a...

60%		
50%		
40%		
30%		
20%		
10%		
Mostly Positive Effect	Mostly Negative Effect	Not Much of an Effect

Why What If Media Group is
The Best Solution
to the Bot Problem

What If Media Group helps companies in all industries gain valuable insights into their customers and what motivates them. Our surveys are offered in context, and our responses come from real people, based on permission-based opt-ins plugged directly into your funnel.

High-touch Results Maximize Value

Our Voice Division offers a 360° solution, allowing marketers to connect directly to consumers at scale, supporting inbound, outbound, IVR, and live agents to manage more complex tasks.

We leverage a massive database of unique first-party data and consumer insights, advanced ad-serving technology, and proprietary marketing channels that include web interactions, push notifications, SMS, TCPA-compliant telemarketing, and one of the world's most extensive opt-in email databases. Through these methods, we help brands acquire qualified, high-value customers that contribute measurable benefits to loyalty and the bottom line.

Our proprietary AI platform ARIA uses advanced analytics, first-party data, content, offer, and channel matching that speaks to user affinity, allowing us to deliver the right offer to the right consumer at precisely the right time. Once we've made that match, the consumer is highly qualified and ready to convert.

Conclusion

Brands today are constantly challenged by the influence of technology we use daily. Bots and automation are ubiquitous in today's online landscape and can be used to achieve both positive and malicious outcomes.

Marketers rely on data to drive advertising decisions, so it is essential to trust the integrity of that data to ensure your budget is well spent and efforts are applied to the right things. Working with What If Media Group puts real customer data at your fingertips, illuminating the truth behind customer intent and informing the way forward.

By removing data ambiguity, we can help you convert more customers, reduce acquisition costs, and make business decisions that bring verifiable results.

As the tech landscape continues to advance at breakneck speed, the smart money is always ahead of the curve.
With What If Media Group driving your trajectory, there's no limit to the heights you can reach.

Set Up a Call Today
to find out how we can help

What If Media Group

About Us

Founded in 2012, What If Media Group is an award-winning performance marketing company enabling the world's leading brands to acquire valuable new customers at scale. By leveraging data-driven engagement and re-engagement strategies across multiple proprietary marketing channels and sophisticated targeting technology, and leveraging insights based on millions of consumer ad interactions daily, What If Media Group delivers the most cost-effective and highest-performing marketing campaigns for its clients.

Headquartered in Fort Lee, New Jersey, What If Media Group is a recipient of Crain's 2019 Fast 50 and is a member of the Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America.

Company Website: https://whatifmediagroup.com/