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OUTDOOR AGENCY



THE BAIT SWITCH

THE LIVE VS. ARTIFICIAL BAIT DEBATE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Live bait remains the most trusted option when success matters, but artificial bait has already earned a place in anglers' tackle boxes.

This study reveals a category defined less by loyalty and more by confidence. Anglers routinely switch between bait types based on conditions, target species, and what they believe gives them the best chance of a catch.

The opportunity is not simply driving trial. The larger opportunity is increasing usage by helping anglers feel confident choosing artificial bait in more situations.

Understanding what builds confidence may be the category's biggest growth opportunity.

Sample size: 500

Age: 18-64

Gender: 54% Male, 46% Female



MEET TODAY'S BAIT BUYER

EXPERIENCE

86%

describe themselves as casual or experienced anglers, suggesting that most respondents have spent enough time on the water to develop strong preferences and fishing habits.

ENGAGEMENT

59%

fish multiple times each month, making fishing a regular part of life rather than an occasional activity.

MINDSET

When asked what non-anglers misunderstand most about fishing, respondents repeatedly described it as relaxing, therapeutic, and rewarding. At the same time, many emphasized the importance of technique, conditions, and understanding fish behavior.

Fishing is not viewed as luck. Anglers see it as a skill that combines patience, knowledge, and experience.



KEY FINDINGS

MOST ANGLERS USE BOTH

50% regularly use both live and artificial bait, while **76%** are likely to try a new bait product in the next year.

Most anglers are not committed to one bait type. They move between live and artificial bait depending on conditions, species, and what they believe will work best.

LIVE BAIT LEADS

62% trust live bait most when success matters, and **39%** believe fish respond to it more naturally.

That preference becomes even stronger in higher-stakes situations. Live bait is preferred by **41%** of anglers when fishing new waters, **44%** in tournaments, and **49%** when targeting trophy fish.

WHAT DRIVES BAIT CHOICE

Ease of use (81%) ranks slightly higher than **catch success (77%)**, showing that anglers value simplicity as much as performance. Natural movement (80%) also matters more than realistic scent (62%), suggesting anglers care more about presentation than smell.

CONVENIENCE CREATES AN OPENING

Live bait comes with friction. **44%** say it is messy to handle, **35%** say it requires extra effort, and **26%** say it is difficult to store or transport. Yet among live-bait loyalists, **87%** finish trips with unused bait at least occasionally, including nearly one-quarter who do so most trips or nearly every trip.

ARTIFICIAL BAIT IS A SKILL

38% believe artificial bait works only if you know how to use it, while **47%** say soft baits that resemble live bait feel easiest to try.

Artificial bait rejection falls from **24%** among new anglers to just **3%** among **avid anglers**, showing that confidence grows with experience.

PEOPLE SHAPE BAIT DECISIONS

46% rely on friends and family when making bait decisions, while only **22%** say brands are an important or very important factor.

PROOF BUILDS CONFIDENCE

Most anglers who changed their opinion about artificial bait describe a specific moment when it unexpectedly produced results. Whether through personal success, trusted recommendations, or learning the right technique, confidence comes from proof more than marketing.

BRAND IMPLICATIONS

Anglers build confidence through results, recommendations, and experience. Brands should show artificial bait catching fish in real-world conditions and teach anglers how to choose, present, and retrieve it successfully. Brands that build confidence can move artificial bait from a backup option in the tackle box to a trusted option in the angler's arsenal.

THE MOST SURPRISING FINDING

THE BATTLE ISN'T TRIAL. THE BATTLE IS BELIEF.

Among anglers who trust live bait most, 86% still use artificial bait at least occasionally, and 31% use it regularly.

Artificial bait is no longer fighting for trial. It is fighting for a larger role when success matters most.

BRAND IMPLICATIONS

Growth depends on winning more high-confidence fishing occasions. The challenge is not getting anglers to try artificial bait, but getting them to trust it when the stakes are highest.

THE KEY TENSION

Gain the convenience of artificial bait without giving up the confidence of live bait.

Live bait builds confidence through familiarity, natural presentation, and a long track record of success.

Artificial bait offers convenience, durability, and ease of use.



UNDERSTANDING REGIONAL PREFERENCES



WEST COAST

Experience expands acceptance

53%

are experienced anglers, while most regions skew casual.

15%

use artificial bait more than live bait.

20%

believe artificials can work just as well as live bait.

MIDWEST

Familiar habits dominate

29%

mostly rely on live bait.

66%

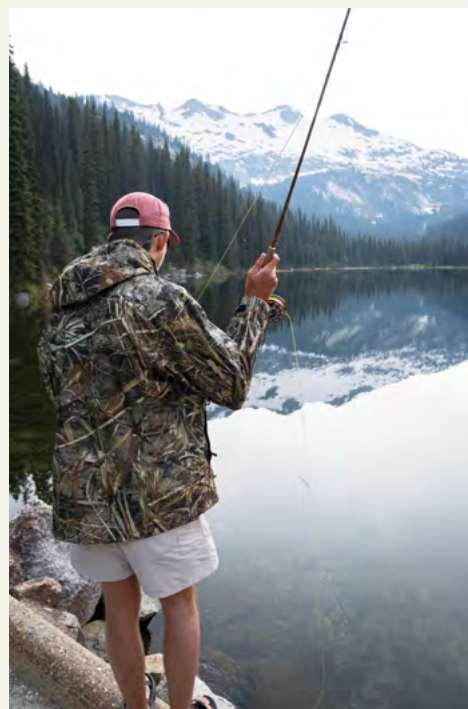
trust live bait most when success matters.

43%

trust live bait more than artificials.

12%

believe artificials can work just as well as live bait.



NORTHEAST

Proof must be earned

50%

trust live bait more than artificials.

36%

say live bait is what they're used to.

29%

believe artificials work if you know how to use them.

27%

rely most on recommendations from people they trust.

SOUTHEAST ATLANTIC

Results over loyalty

54%

regularly use both live and artificial bait.

20%

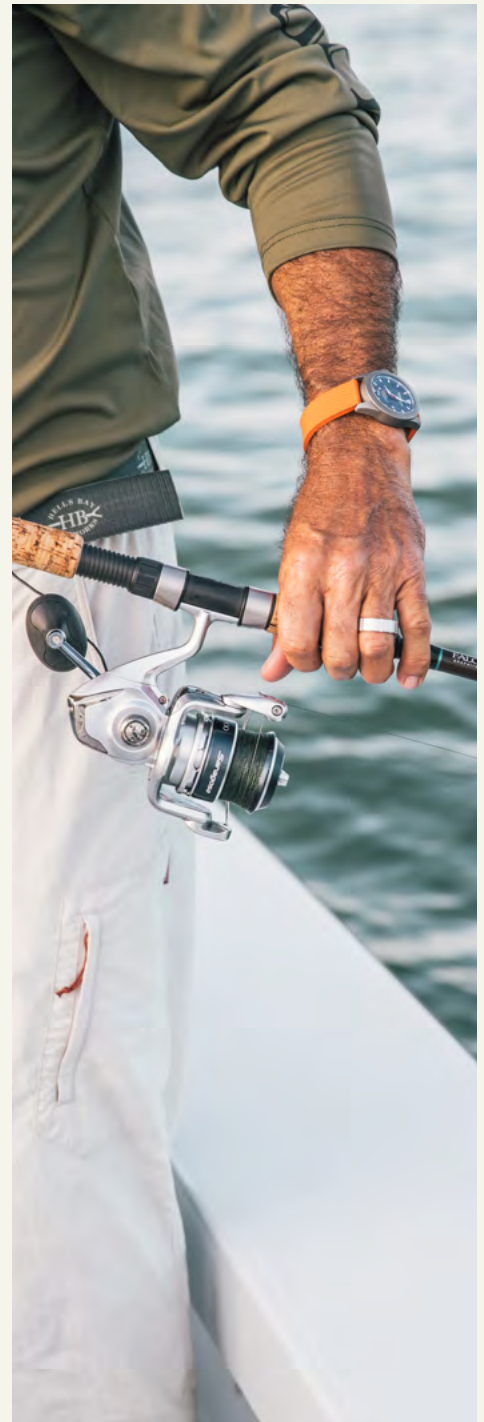
mostly rely on live bait.

31%

say nothing really holds them back from artificials.

27%

are not skeptical at all that artificials can work as well as live bait.



BRAND IMPLICATIONS

Regional fishing habits may vary, but the path to artificial bait adoption is surprisingly consistent. Brands should tailor messaging to each region's primary barrier: building trust in the Northeast, overcoming habit in the Midwest, simplifying choice in the Southeast, and teaching technique on the West Coast. At the same time, they should maintain a consistent focus on proof, confidence, and performance.



FINAL TAKEAWAYS

FOR BAIT BRANDS

- ✓ **TEACH THE TECHNIQUE**
Show anglers how to choose, present, and retrieve artificial bait successfully.
- ✓ **FOCUS ON HYBRID USERS**
Growth will come from anglers who already use both live and artificial bait.
- ✓ **PROVE IT UNDER PRESSURE**
Show artificial bait working when confidence matters most.
- ✓ **MAKE SUCCESS EASIER**
Anglers value ease of use as much as catch success. Winning products reduce effort, complexity, and uncertainty while still delivering results.
- ✓ **LET ANGLERS BUILD TRUST**
Friends (46%), local tackle shops (36%), and peer recommendations matter more than brand messaging. Brands should create proof that anglers can share with one another.



READY TO HOOK MORE CUSTOMERS?

LET'S TALK STRATEGY. CONTACT US TODAY!

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