




The theme of this month's issue of *Alert!* is "entertainment research." While I recognize the focus is on the application of our craft in the entertainment industry, I'm going to go out on a limb and suggest we all might be better off if we thought of our research presentations as a form of entertainment. Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to minimize or trivialize the magnitude of what we do as marketing researchers. I've used this space before to admonish some in the profession for defeatist attitudes that minimize the impact of what we do and its potential impact in shaping the strategic direction of an enterprise. I'm also quick to call out those who cut corners in conducting research or compromise the quality of a project by not thinking them through. But I do feel part of the negative stigma we receive as researchers is fueled by an often accurate preconception by clients or management that our work is dull and boring – just a bunch of numbers, charts and graphs.

As a frustrated former lead singer in my share of high school garage bands, I view my research presentations and speaking engagements as the only opportunity I get today to be up on stage and in front of a crowd. I've yet to meet a microphone that I don't like. Yes, I often throw obscure audio sound bytes from 1980s "hair metal bands" into my presentations. I've used video clips from movies like "Airplane," "Glengarry Glen Ross" and "Fast Times at Ridgemoor High" to try to illustrate a point or draw a metaphor in a presentation. I often channel the comedic genius of Don Novello as Father Guido Sarducci, as a set-up for my executive summaries (take a listen to his "Five Minute University" routine, and you'll get where I'm coming from). But I do this because I'm a firm believer that entertaining presentations are typically better received than a straight regurgitation of findings. I've written before about how so many that we present to can often enter one of our presentations with a mix of anticipated boredom and insecurity that they will not understand all of the statistical mumbo jumbo. So why not use that context in your favor when you are presenting? Shock the audience into a more comfortable state by adding those little wrinkles that are magnified in the marketing research world, because so few on the receiving end of a presentation expect it to have high production or entertainment value. I can literally see people's body language go from a pensive hesitance for having to endure a mind numbing barrage of facts and figures,

to a much more relaxed and receptive openness when I sprinkle these surprises into my decks.

And if you are looking for further proof, consider the proliferation of ethnography into today's qualitative tool kit. This fall, Judy Langer and I presented the findings of our latest research on research. We looked at client side researcher attitudes and utilization of observational methodologies. One of the more significant findings cited by our End User respondents, was the compelling nature of ethnography to enable clients and researchers alike to literally see their customers in a natural environment rather than just listen to them speak to their behaviors and use of our products and services. "Reality research" in this day of shorter attention spans, voyeuristic tendencies to be in the "inner circle" and sound byte society, has a definite place to at best provide real insights, and at minimum to support and enhance more projectable and substantive quantitative findings. People like to be a fly on the wall. We wouldn't still be watching "Survivor" or the endless array of reality shows if this weren't true.

This won't be the first or last time that I acknowledge perception can become reality in our business. That's consistent with my conviction that the ultimate value of our profession will be predicated by our ability to transform our reputations from being merely disseminators of data and information, to become true strategists and management consultants, driven to our recommendations and conclusions by our ability to transform data into something of greater utility. A significant step towards that ultimate end is in our ability to build demand for what we present and to build a following and reputation for providing research presentations that entertain, inform and inspire. We can all think of some of the best presentations we've seen at a conference, and chances are they've each met these criteria. They are a welcome breath of fresh air in a business world that has become so commoditized and generic. Done well, they become yet another way in which we can differentiate ourselves. The greatest compliment I can receive after delivering a presentation is from the person in the audience who comes up and thanks me for making research both "fun and informative." We should all strive for this reaction every time. 

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