



Celebrating Who We Are

For those of you who listened to my remarks at MRA's Annual Conference in New York, this past June, it's no surprise that I may be one of our association's and our profession's biggest cheerleaders. But my declarations are not without provocation. I vividly remember one of the first national board meetings that I attended, while chair of our professional development council. I was still relatively new to MRA, and during one discussion, was caught somewhat off guard by what struck me as almost a defeatist attitude.


It irks me to see passive and subservient approach that many of us bring to our roles. If the old adage that knowledge is power still rings true, it makes no sense that a profession which oversees the direct dialogue with customers, doesn't have a larger voice in decision making, and often lacks that proverbial seat at the table. We need to leverage that position we enjoy at the epicenter of turning critical business information into strategy to better our careers and our ability to make a difference in what we do everyday.

I don't believe that this perspective is delusional or arrogant. Rather, I feel that as one who has observed marketing research as both practitioner and End User, we often find ourselves so immersed in the nuance of our craft that we fail to use that craft in ways that make us more indispensable to our clients, whether they are internal or external. Let's face it, most sales and marketing people and many senior management folks are often petrified by numbers and secretly intimidated by research. These colleagues gritted their teeth through the obligatory statistics classes in school, and they probably shudder just as much at the "soft" sciences like social anthropology and consumer behavior. They are immersed in the creative flair of their advertising or their promotional plans. When a "researcher" walks in the door, there's often a hesitancy and fear that they will be overwhelmed with all of that "nerdy stuff."

I can make these assertions, because in many ways,

I've lived it. In my first marketing job, I embraced the opportunity to also take on the research role, because I saw that no one else wanted to deal with it. Yet, the more I learned about research, the more I saw its strength as a means to support and to tell a marketing story, and more importantly as a way in which I could engage my senior management in a thoughtful dialogue that actually taught them something they didn't know about their business or the competitive environment. It begat a seat at the table, because for those who wanted to seem in control of those numbers, but still didn't have the time or inclination to be immersed in it, I became an important ally that provided a consultative look at reality, and then simultaneously stripped out the intimidating parts so research could be understandable and have utility as a "story telling" tool to help them look good. This led to increased reliance on research as both strategic and marketing tools, and before long others embraced the power of marketing research and our perspective was invited into the mainstream of business management discussions.

I still don't hear enough stories like this, and it puzzles me. What we do on a daily basis as marketing researchers isn't really rocket science, but for many outside our world, it appears to be. And that, I maintain can continue to be a way in which we can gain a more powerful role with those that we work for. I'm not suggesting we do this just for power's sake, but because I truly believe that what we uncover, when we do our work well, and allow ourselves to move away from the Greek notation and put our learnings into succinct and actionable conclusions, marketing research really does drive business decision making...and frankly, it should!

This is my perspective, if you would like to comment, please visit my blog on the MRA Web site. 

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