



YOUR FEEDBACK

REMEMBER, REMEMBER...

As a marketing communications specialist with 25 years in b2b marketing, the last ten of which have been in research, I have learnt not to subscribe to the Katie Price or Mike Tyson school of PR – that any publicity is good publicity. Nor do I revel in the manipulation of information simply to get the attention of an increasingly brain-dead media. So I am unlikely to agree with Mark Hodson who thinks it is not only acceptable but a 'Very Good Thing' to twist data simply to get market research noticed (*Research-live.com*, 22 December 2009, bit.ly/hodson1209). He cites the coverage of the research done by charity Erskine into children's knowledge of World Wars I and

II which received extensive coverage around Remembrance Day last November.

First of all, researchers need 'the public'. If people are to continue to engage with the research process, fill out our surveys and attend our groups, then we do indeed need to get positive coverage for research

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and ensure research results are meaningful. But the last thing the Times reader is thinking about when they read the (totally incorrect) headline 'Quarter of children think Adolf Hitler was football coach, survey finds' is market research. Surely their reaction will be alarm about the state of education – which is precisely the knee-jerk response the charity who put out the release were seeking.

Secondly, the reporting of this story reflects the sorry state of our media, not the sorry state of our schoolchildren. The vast majority of children aged 9–15 (which includes three years of primary school children, and many who were not born in the UK or don't have English as a first language) answered the 'quiz' correctly, in spite of being presented with jokey options for each question, which would make many think the whole exercise was just a bit of fun.

I was actually impressed with the children's knowledge. I don't think my 10-year-old would know what date Remembrance Day falls on, or the specific cause of World War I. The really scary issue is that the story shows how any PR agency, providing a pre-packaged set of 'facts' can get them straight into a magazine or newspaper without a second glance by a journalist. The coverage of this story showed the journalists on some leading publications simply cannot do maths: in the survey, 6.88% (yes, note the two decimal points) of children thought Hitler was the German football coach, not a quarter as the Times reported. And there are many other examples from the coverage showing journalists on national newspapers getting their numbers muddled up.

Finally, there's the moral issue. The 'right thing' for researchers to do is to illuminate and clarify rather than obfuscate and mislead. So while I have no problem at all with research studies being used to gain coverage in the media (indeed, I have made a career out of it) the onus is on the researcher to ensure that the information is presented in a way that is honest and clear. I don't want to be alarmist, but wasn't feeding stories to a pressurised media, allowing them to manipulate data to create hysteria and fuel paranoia, some of the behaviour that

enabled the Nazis to gain advantage in the build up to WWII? It's really not OK.
LUCY DAVISON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, KEEN AS MUSTARD

IN A WORD

We asked some voices from the industry to pick one word that they believe will sum up market research in 2010. The responses appeared on Research Live. Words chosen included transformational, rewind, qualitative, listening and consolidation. Our readers had a few words of their own to add.

CONSUMER-CENTRIC was the first (compound) word that came to mind for me. Understanding today's consumers requires that we know them as people, not just numbers. The industry has long relied on quantitative, experimental and survey-driven methods. But becoming more consumer-centric means focusing on insight, meaning, discovery and a greater reliance on some of the new qualitative methods that have emerged in recent years. In fact, an online, humanistic, consumer-centric approach militates against some of the risks and challenges of conventional market research and uncovers relevant insights quickly in a way that is fun and authentic for real people. Private online communities and other secured forms of social media allow members to participate when, where and how they want (in a convenient, representative context). They generate insights quickly. Quality is strengthened because results are not out-of-date but are current and relevant. And in intimate circles of online friends or in private online communities, members are motivated, interested and authentically open with one another, which translates into high quality responses.

But then I thought about 'Generative' (as opposed to predictive). The whole quant/qual, directional vs projectable debate is meaningful only if we limit the role of market research to prediction,

but in 2010, for products and services to be relevant, market research must be as much about creation as 'Prediction Creating' (i.e. insights and co-innovation upstream in the development process) in an agile way (short time frames; focus on niche markets as they emerge) will be how we keep pace with customers and go where they go.
Julie Wittes Schlack, 13 January 2010

FRAGILE - As companies have cut back on research budgets and survived with less or found other ways to get their decision-making support, MR will find it even harder to prove value in 2010. Are researchers up to the challenge?
Mikey B, 15 January 2010

ACCOUNTABLE - While the emphasis on costs continues, clientside research teams will systematically collect and collate information from their internal clients that show how research is actually benefiting the business. Key findings across multiple projects will be used to create new insights, and to proactively identify knowledge gaps and untested assumptions. These knowledge gaps will be used as the basis to determine next year's projects and project

budgets. Internal clients will happily allocate funds to these projects because they can see the cumulative benefit to their brands from past research... and then I woke up
Chris Forbes, 17 January 2010

MADE FOOLISH - Yes, yes. Two words I know. But our profession is increasingly liable to suffer a few enormous 'Dewey Wins!' moments thanks to our collective bet on using social media (most of us don't understand its dynamics - so careful!) and our collective devaluation of the basics (sampling really matters - I'm with Jeffrey Henning on this one) and as the world itself becomes increasingly volatile. By the time we get those poll results/research reports/hot predictions published we're going to run increasing risks of being made to look foolish. It takes the occasional Dewey Wins imbroglgio to clean up our act perhaps.
Duncan Stewart, 18 January 2010

We're always eager to hear from readers. You can post comments and thoughts on research-live.com or email your comments to marcb@researchmagazine.co.uk

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