

# Future-proof your decision-making



By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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Samra is holding the 38th rendition of its two-day 2017 conference later this week, on 17 and 18 May at the Protea Hotel, Stellenbosch. I caught up with CEO Leonie Vorster for a few pre-event research insights into the importance of this year's theme: Future-proof decision-making, where research becomes breaking news - presenting tomorrow, today.

In addition to her role as CEO of Samra, the South African Market Research Association, Vorster is CEO of the newly formed African Market Research Association (Amra) and has been Esomar representative for South Africa from 2008 to date. She is passionate about decisive, socially and commercially valuable research, as well as professional, service excellence, quality, and ethical standards in the insights industry...



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African Market Research Association 8 Feb 2017



### What can attendees expect for the 2017 Samra conference?

The insights industry has evolved so fast and so much over the last few years that it is easy to forget to look at the bigger picture, to understand where we are and where we are going. This year's conference provides a snapshot of the latest developments in the insights industry.

The theme shines the spotlight on the competitive edge that research insights give for future-proof decision-making, whether you are selling something, making something, managing something or making a difference in the world.

The [guest speakers](#) were selected based on their credentials in terms of future-proof decision-making and to showcase the variety that is the insights industry. The line-up is a microcosm of the insights industry today.



Leonie Vorster, Samra CEO.

The research papers also cover a wide range of cutting edge topics: the future relevance of market research; several specifically local insights for improved marketing; the impact millennials have on business; measurement innovations in brand tracking using mobile, and in advertising using hashtag engagement and non-verbal responses from consumers; digital advances within and technological impacts on the insights industry, such as Artificial Intelligence and automation.



Samra annual conference 2017

Under the leadership of the current Samra chairman, Sheila Akinnusi, senior manager: Group market research at Nedbank, this year's event also has a different format: instead of only research paper presentations, we have added Present the Punch sessions. "We are very excited about this development, and look forward to increased audience engagement and industry participation as the new format takes off," says Akinnusi. These sessions are creative and innovative, covering anything that is new and unique in our industry, which could include audience interaction, toolbox-type how-to content, a panel or current affairs discussion, a debate, etc. – anything that will pack a punch. Most of the presenters use humour, in true South African style, to do some tongue-in-cheek introspection about the local insights industry.



Images from last year's Samra conference.

Networking has always been one of the main reasons for attendance at Samra events, and because more than 40% of the delegates are on client-side, it is an excellent opportunity for the insights industry on both sides of the fence to connect, build business and debate matters related to progress, growth, quality and service. The first evening's dinner is dedicated to networking and to ensuring that all delegates meet and get reacquainted. The awards dinner on the second evening also offers additional networking opportunities, and with the focus on awards for the best research paper, best presentation and best first time speaker, competition is fierce and the trophies coveted, thus the Awards' dinner celebrations usually continue long into the night and are a fitting, positive way to end the event insights industry event of the year.

❏ ***Wow, that's intense! Let us in on what goes into organising an annual two-day conference of this calibre, attended by the industry's top minds.***

The planning of each annual conference actually starts during the annual conference the previous year, with delegate and speaker feedback both informally during the event and formally during and immediately after the conference. This is our 38th annual conference, so it helps that there is history and experience. However, it requires a huge coordinated and concerted effort from everyone involved to remain fresh and engaging. Everyone pitches in: the Samra office staff, the Samra directors, and the broader industry that participate by sponsoring, presenting at and attending the event.

Once the delegate feedback has been analysed and inputs received from whoever else wants to, the planning process usually kicks off with team, date and then theme selection. Then the venue is selected and the project plan and budget is drawn up. The marketing plan follows, and once that is approved implementation starts in earnest. Branding is finalised, exhibitor and sponsor packages are agreed, technical guidelines for speakers, judges and facilitators are put in place, and the call for speakers goes out. Judges are appointed, guest speakers invited, facilitators selected, and the prospective speakers' submissions are evaluated for inclusion in the programme. Members of the media are selected and invited. The

marketing and advertising process is on-going from day one of implementation. Once the speakers are selected bookings open (we use an online system) and the conference page is developed, which works like an app. The devil is in the detail, and so we spend quite a bit of time deciding about the delegate packs and gifts, functions, food, and so on. The judging of the research papers and planning the awards dinner on the closing night of the event are also top priorities.



Last year's Samra award winners: Adhil Patel and Chris Davies

For the last five years we have run a Meet the Talent programme where students are sponsored to attend the event and assist with logistics. This is an excellent opportunity for industry and students to connect and most students who are selected for this have subsequently found work in the insights industry. Shirley Benney, a stalwart of the industry who was chief executive officer of Ipsos at the time that she retired a few years back, and who is also a Samra honorary member, manages the selection process and the students' involvement at the event for us.

In addition to the feedback survey being conducted after the conference, we have the floating trophies engraved, send mini trophies to the winners, and publish all the research papers through the state libraries: the final step to wrap up the event.

■ ***Sounds like a lot of hard work! Let us in on what you're personally looking forward to from the conference.***

After being in the industry for more than 20 years, I'm always eager to see all the familiar friends at the annual Samra conference, to catch up and reconnect. Equally, it is always very exciting to get to know the new faces in the industry, some of whom I only know by name and email until the annual conference. Another highlight for me is meeting the students – seeing their passion for research or their awe in the face of learning what research really is all about is inspiring and rejuvenating.

And of course, who doesn't want to be in Stellenbosch? It is part of a beautiful region of our country and, well, the wines... need I say more?

*We'll leave it at that! Look out for my event feedback and be sure to follow the [Samra Twitter handle](#) and the [MRX hashtag](#) for insights throughout the two-day conference.*

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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