

Samra2017: Ensuring market research doesn't go the way of the dinosaur

 By Leigh Andrews

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Elna Pretorius, co-founder of Columinate, was behind the first 'punch presentation' of the annual Samra conference. Touching on the topics of memes and how to make marketing research sexy again, she got the audience thinking about how others perceive what we do for a living.

"When you are at a social event, how do you respond when people ask what you do for a living?" With these words, Pretorius set in motion one of the most interesting presentations I've attended in any industry. "Depending on your energy levels," she said, "you probably either go into great detail or just say 'I'm a market researcher'." You leave it at that until they ask, "Oh, what type of research?"



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Pretorius says the industry has a responsibility to be proud of what we do so that we don't end up extinct with the constantly evolving nature of technology, because humans are still involved in that research analysis. That's why we need to do what we can to attract and retain talent, ensure a constant influx of young blood and remaining relevant as an industry.



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Samra CEO Leonie Vorster interjected that this is definitely the case as market research is interpreted as being on the scarce skills list because while not implicitly listed as such, it's seen as part of generic 'research and development skills' in the field of sciences.

What other people think market researchers do

To reach her goal of making market research sexy again, Pretorius was guided by her personal passion for marketing research, as well as the power of qualitative research and a meme to guide her. It's the 'What my family thinks I do' meme, and while these are always a little tongue-in-cheek, they get the point across well. So the first step for Pretorius was to ask

her family what they think she does for a living. She filmed responses from her mom, brothers and father. On showing us the results she commented that you can see they do listen to her but they have definitely glamoured the profession, so much so that her mom thinks her office life is like that of Meryl Streep's character in *The Devil Wears Prada*: sipping tea and signing contracts in high heels, with a magic research machine taking care of the insights.



The meme Elna Pretorius, cofounder of Columinate, created.

Pretorius' next step was to broaden the scope by getting her colleagues to repeat the experiment, with video of their feedback. Most spoke of marketing research in terms of 'boring work in front of a computer' and endless meetings with data flying about and again that magical research process that just happens. To get some clarity on what society thinks of her role, Pretorius conducted two digital surveys - one with students and one with the general public. Through this she found that only 67% of students were aware of market research as a career - and this in a prompted survey - and that only 14% of them had considered it as a career as a result. Pretorius then coded their verbatim responses qualitatively.

Making marketing research sexy again

It seems even clients think the insights some of those research insights just come to the researchers by magic. So, does marketing research contribute to society? She responds with a resounding 'Yes'. Research can have a tangible effect if clients act fast on the insights received.

Pretorius says this is everyone's responsibility as ultimately it's down to word-of-mouth, how well you explain what you do for a living and how it ultimately affects the rest of society by being excited and proud of your career choice. This is crucial because if they don't understand or value what you're doing, how can they trust your insights?

Taking things further, Pretorius says next, there needs to be greater cooperation between market research companies, both as users and suppliers, and educating students about their career possibilities. This links to the need for graduate and

internship programmes. We need to do a better job as an industry of showing the power of data and how these insights change society for the better. Pretorius is confident that this will all work towards attracting and retaining better talent to the industry and buffering it from extinction.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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