

The challenges of research



The 2005 Southern African Marketing Research Association (SAMRA) Convention was held at Spier Wine Estate in Stellenbosch last week, and provided interesting insight into the challenges for local research houses in becoming credible business partners to industry, while meeting the unique needs of local research in South Africa.

 By [Terry Levin](#) 16 May 2005



Gordon Hooper and Hendrik van Vuuren

Citing SAMRA'S key objectives as needing to improve the image of Research in the marketplace and its standards of usefulness in the industry, current Chairman, Gordon Hooper stressed the need to stem negative perceptions regarding research and the necessity to promote the role of research practitioners as being able to 'go beyond the numbers' and into the realms of project management as business partners and problem solvers. To this end one of the initiatives they have implemented is the appointment of a Board of Cognoscenti which includes industry doyens, prominent academics and even luminaries such as Credo Mutwa and Desmond Tutu, in order to give the industry 'teeth'.



Left to right: Patience Muyambo, Hendrik van Vuuren, Maggie Ilere

The annual South African Market Research Association (SAMRA) conference was cryptically titled - Fact, Fantasy and Fiction. Topics ranged from current techniques used in the extraction of standard demographic and consumer behaviour information, to the validity of the various hard core research methodologies through which these findings are processed. Not for the faint hearted.

My personal favourite paper of the conference addressed the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility. First speaker on the first day, Aleksandra Jablonska's paper was entitled 'To give or not to give is not the question anymore'. Squarely facing up to the imbalance between the corporate environment and the levels of unemployment and poverty, her talk included the real value that could be achieved by analysis of the market with regard to ethical consumerism and the purchasing power of the consumer to bring about social change. There could not be a more relevant application for the investigation of the behaviour of different consumer groups than this and her talk was the only one to highlight the ability of research to embrace opportunities for meaningful change.

In his paper on 'Understanding Demographics', previous SAMRA chairman Sifiso Falala, presented

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comprehensive information on the nuances of the rural areas and the importance of this knowledge in our ability to meet the challenges of nation building, transformation and empowerment, especially with regard to agricultural and ecological resources. This all makes good sense as South Africa is a unique environment and can no longer afford to implement unsustainable cut-and-paste strategies from overseas.

Her research on 'Dispelling the myth of the Emerging black market', secured expat Zimbabwean, Patience Muyambo, the award for the most popular paper and best first time speaker. Concentrating mainly on the 'Buppie' or upwardly mobile, predominantly Jo'burg based black, as avid consumers of aspirational goods and outlining, in a highly entertaining presentation, some of the challenges involved in speaking to this 'mythical' market sector.

One thing that research as a whole needs to guard against, was outlined by stalwart researchers Jean and Michael Green in their presentation on qualitative recruitment. Are there dubious means involved in pitching the right questions to the right respondents and getting the 'right' answers? This, coupled with the multiple means of processing the information gathered, is perhaps a researcher's biggest stumbling block.

Market driver analysis is a fancy way of identifying what brands people buy and Vincent Shahim from the Marketing Science Centre in JHB, showed a way to capture brand attribute statements from respondents through the means of a multivariate model which clearly separates the functional attributes from the emotional and this type of info is valuable in a consumer environment where consumers are increasingly driven by the emotional and sensory aspects of a brand.

But despite talk of a decline in research usage, it seems there are opportunities aplenty for local companies to supply their quality demographic information, analysis and processing to heavy offshore users in the US and UK, (although India are currently world leaders in out-sourced consumer research). Maggie Irere of Research Surveys in Kenya offered a fascinating account of the political, social and economic challenges gathering research data in Africa. This earned her the Eddie Schultze trophy presented annually by Unilever for the best paper on research in Africa.

The conference concluded on Friday evening with the award ceremony and gala dinner hosted by Joanne Strauss of Pasella and Top Billing fame. The SAMRA Trophy for the best paper of Convention, went to Hendrik van Vuuren for his paper entitled The Visual Wizardry that makes Advertising Great.

[Click here to see the full SAMRA gallery](#)

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