

ICONOGRAPHY

by Anne Marie Gabriel of MRIA, in conversation with Luke Sklar, CMRP

Is the industry sustainable, or is it evolving into something different?

I think the industry is thriving and will continue to thrive. Generating consumer insights to drive more precise decisions will never go out of style.

What impact does technology have on the evolution of MR worldwide?

I think like every business, technology is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has provided so many more tools to be able to reach respondents (the Internet has been a huge boon to that). On the other hand, technology allows everybody's brother to become a researcher. Therefore, we in the industry must work to ensure samples and findings are valid. Finally, technology makes our lives more complex. What the industry really needs is more clarity and simplification.

What advice would you give to new companies considering entering the market?

The exact same advice we give our clients. Find a seam in the market

where there is an unmet need or a significant pain point and differentiate relentlessly. When I think of the research industry, in my opinion there is too much jargon and too much black box methodology. There's a need for more clarity and actionability from research.

What is it that sets you apart from your competition? What makes you unique?

Certainly, there is nothing that makes me unique, but Sklar Wilton has been able to develop some fantastic frameworks for clear thinking over the years – in part because many of our people started from the marketing end and then learned the technical craft. However, the real thing that sets us apart is that we have fantastic clients. We have worked with some of Canada's smartest marketers, and they push us to be better all the time. It's fantastic that we have worked with the HJ Heinz Company since 1986 – it is an honor and an earned right, and it makes us part of their institutional memory. We're very proud of that. And we certainly never take it for granted.

I can appreciate your bias for the word smart. According to your bio, you are married to a very smart woman and have three smart daughters.

Yes, I know. Which is why I can never retire.

In your career planning, did you actually target marketing research, or did you evolve into it?

I started in marketing at General Foods but very quickly gravitated into the area of strategy and insights, which is my true love. I was never a particularly strong fit with corporate life, so being unemployable was very helpful in creating Sklar Wilton.

Highlight of your career?

Three highlights are finding my great partners – Charlie Wilton, Sarah Liverance and Jennifer Smith. They have enriched our company and my life endlessly.

What was the funniest moment of your career?

Luke Sklar, CMRP, partner and founder of Sklar Wilton and Associates Ltd.

Luke Sklar founded Sklar Wilton in Toronto in 1986 after starting his career in brand management at General Foods. Heinz was the first client in 1986 and continues as an SW+A client today. The SW+A team works collaboratively with clients by facilitating rather than directing their decisions. A fusion of marketing, marketing research, strategy and innovation is the way they do business. Luke is a dean's list graduate from the Ivey School of Business. He was born in Oshawa (but soon moved to Toronto), where he now lives with his very smart wife and three very smart daughters. Luke can be reached at lsklar@sklarwilton.com.

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I have a bad habit of gesturing aggressively to make a point; so much so that I once launched a hot cup of coffee onto a CEO's lap.

Did you get your point across?

Suffice it to say I got the room's attention ... and yes, I did.

What are your views on education, designations and awards?

I think our industry has to continue to elevate its position as a great career choice. Making the industry a great place to work rests on whom you hire, how you train, how you recognize, how you compensate, and the prestige associated with our craft. The MRIA designations and awards all fuel that, and we need to be doing more and more of this. I confess that, as a marketer coming out of the Ivey School of Business, I did not think of research as an upper echelon career choice.

Your legacy – how do you wish to be remembered?

Legacy, oh my! I emphatically wish to say ... that I am way too young to have a legacy, and I am hoping you will agree with me. I have no legacy at this point; we are just starting on our journey.

What advice would you give to someone just entering the industry or considering a career in marketing research?

This may be slightly controversial, but I do believe that the best marketing researchers I have seen actually started somewhere else first. They are grounded in some other application that is about the real business world. Without that, marketing research can just be a laboratory function. If people have a true passion for market research, I encourage them to get a breadth of experience before they jump in fully. Our people

have been very effective because of this broader experience.

What do you see as legislative hot spots that may be a challenge to the industry in the years ahead?

Declining response rates and the ultimate decline of landline telephones is a challenge to the industry. Researchers have to figure out how to earn their way to getting customer and consumer opinions while still delivering valid representative results. We need to get much better at that. Consider self-administered panels, popup surveys – everybody's brother has become a researcher. Qualified people need to be seen as the go-to source for market research. I see the industry in general as having been too kind and too nice – as gentle Canadians. We should speak up and declare what research quality is and be more constructively aggressive.