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Armchair Psychologist

Market Research Firm's Focus is to Listen

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With diverse professional and educational backgrounds, the staff of Dialogue Resource, Inc. at 1506 Post Road comes together to provide detailed market research and business strategies for their clients.

Established 15 years ago, DRI's central technique in achieving its customers' needs is active listening skills. Quoted on its website is a Cuban Proverb: "Listen-ing looks easy, but it's not simple. Every head is a world."

"Sometimes our clients articulate what they want and other times they are more timid; we pick up on non-verbal communication, tone of voice — we dig a bit deeper," said Senior Vice President Jeffrey F. Shannon, Ph.D., who has conducted neurobiological studies and organizational behavior research at Yale University's Schools of Management and Medicine.

President Nino DeNicola, who has taught psychology at the college level, has been a research assistant at the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic of New York Hospital in Manhattan, and an examiner at the Neuropsychology Lab of Community Hospital in Indianapolis, said DRI's background in behavior and biological science and psychology distinguishes his company from other consulting firms.

"We often play armchair psychologist," he said.

As explained on the Web site, qualitative and online research, idea generation and special expertise are the four elements that embody the strategy of DRI. Methodologies for qualitative data gathering include focus groups, mini-groups, telephone interviews, and online research via e-groups and e-panels.

"The advantage of qualitative research is that it gets to the why of people's decision making," said Shannon. "Why does someone like Coke better than Pepsi, for example?"

DeNicola added, "We actively listen to a client's needs. They will tell us what they want to do, but we figure out why they want to do it; we read between the lines.

In most cases, DeNicola said, DRI's online research compliments traditional face-to-face research. "We don't try to fit everything into the Internet."

"The Internet allows us to obtain a lot of data from a lot of people quickly, but just because we have a lot of data, it doesn't mean that our analysis is going to be good," he said. "We use online and traditional research together for our projects."

DeNicola explained that traditional research is "high touch," which allows DRI to actively listen and brainstorm and deeply explore the client's needs, while online research enables the company to generate a lot of ideas and then cull the best ones. With "high tech" idea generation, the top 25 ideas are posted on an electronic bulletin board, where client company representatives who did not attend the session could review and tweak ideas and offer new ones.

"The Internet is an optimal way to get a lot of information, but online research is not appropriate for all research," said Senior Research Associate Samantha A. Kennedy. Her experience with AT&T Business Services and her degree from the Leonard N. Stern School of Business at New York University gives DRI more of an understanding of the internal workings of a business and puts the company a leg up in technological understanding," she said.

Kennedy specialized in moderating focus groups as well as executive level one-on-ones and telephone interviews with DRI.

Since its inception in 1986, DRI has accumulated project experience with a broad range of clients, including Merrill Lynch, General Electric Co., Coca-Cola Co., American Express and Avon Products, Inc.

Before joining DRI, Shannon was involved in managing content development for an Internet e-commerce start-up, and development of business-to-consumer marketing initiatives for Fortune 500 clients. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in biopsychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and has both master and doctorate degrees in biology from Yale University. He is a member of the American Marketing Association.

DeNicola received his Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Drew University in New Jersey. He has a Master of Arts degree in clinical psychology and was awarded advanced standing toward a doctorate at the New School for Social Research. He has given seminars and guest lectures at business and educational organizations, and has authored articles for business and professional publications. He is also a member of the American Marketing Association. In his off time, he said, he enjoys reading fiction and dabbling in creative writing. ■