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From neuropathology to marketing

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Written by Raina Ng

Thursday, 16 June 2011 12:44

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TEFD: You were trained as a scientist and worked as a research scientist at Royal Children's Hospital Neuropathology Laboratory in Melbourne, Australia. Tell us a bit about that experience.

Woolley: All the way through secondary school I wanted to be a doctor. I was very good at mathematics and science, but humanities was not a strong point. In fact my English teacher told me not to take a career that relied on my writing ability. The problem was that under-performance was also what stopped me entering medicine, so I chose a career in research. The terrific thing about medical research and science is that there is a recognised process — the scientific method. It ensures a rigorous approach but within it has opportunity for creativity and innovation. In fact the process itself is an innovation process that drives scientific learning forward.

You went on to start your own business, a recycling company called Resolve. What motivated this decision?

While working in the pathology laboratory, a colleague of mine, Craig Jackson, noticed that there were no sustainable disposal methods for the volumes of toxic organic solvents we used such as toluene, xylene and acetone. This was the 1980s in the early days of the environmental movement. We researched the options and found that the analytical grade solvents could be recycled so we set up a company to collect the waste solvents from the laboratories, purify them and sell back the recycled solvent to the laboratories. It gave me an understanding and enjoyment for sales and marketing, which is why I then went into advertising.

You then moved on to start a career in marketing and advertising. It must have been a big change. What drove that change?

Yes. Out of Resolve I went into advertising as a copywriter because it was a career that paid well, required no qualifications and I appeared to have an aptitude. This is why I tell people I chose science but fell into advertising. For 15 years I worked as an agency creative and was involved with the Advertising and Design Club, but as 2000 approached I became aware of the growing gap between marketers and their agencies. I saw an opportunity to provide a third party, independent advisory service on how to get greater alignment, collaboration, transparency and accountability between marketers and their agencies.

What are the main differences between the three jobs, and what valuable experiences have you managed to draw from them?

Science and research taught me the importance of process and methodology. By having a defined process you are able to quickly identify those experimental results that are successful and those that are not. It also taught me that even what looks like a negative outcome provides lessons. As my boss from those days, Dr Xenia Dennett, often said: "Every negative result is one step closer to finding the answer". (I think she was inspired by Thomas Edison) Resolve was a startup and I learnt very quickly the important commercial lessons such as capitalisation, cash flow, cost control and margins. Resolve was a two-year experience that while it ultimately folded, was invaluable in broadening my horizons. My time in advertising was more about strategy and creativity, but the important lesson was that in a commercial environment, ideas are worthless until they are implemented and achieve their objectives. Because of my experience with Resolve, I was always aware of the responsibility for cost control and results delivery. But all three were equally important when I established TrinityP3.

How did your marketing consultancy, Trinity P3, come about?

I was creative director with JWT and doing a lot of work in business development because of my interest and awareness of the commercial realities of the agency. Meeting with marketers I found that many felt that their agencies were not listening. At the same time, as president of the Advertising and Design Club, the creative and production members were complaining that their clients did not understand the role of creativity. Clearly this misalignment provided an opportunity. TrinityP3 was established to assist marketers; advertisers and procurement develop and implement creative solutions to address increasingly complex issues around delivering greater effectiveness and efficiency to their marketing investment.

What in your definition is marketing, specifically efficient marketing?

The purpose of marketing is to get more people to purchase more often at a higher margin for a longer period of time. As Peter Drucker said: "The default purpose of marketing is not to increase sales, it is to increase profit". So efficient marketing is one where the return on investment is inversely proportional to the investment. You see it is impossible to separate efficiency and effectiveness. W Edwards Deeming said: "Cutting costs without improvement in quality is futile". In marketing the only measure of quality is the result it produces and this must be assessed against the level of investment.

Has that definition changed since you started out? What are the main differences between marketing then and marketing now?

Ten years ago, the focus was on cost management. Most companies and brands wanted to benchmark their costs against the market. It was simply to ensure that they were not paying too much for the marketing. This coincided with the rise of procurement in the marketing category, which saw a major focus on cost management and reduction. It is important to manage costs and look for opportunities for increased efficiencies, but not at the cost of the top line results.

How has the industry evolved?

Many organisations are still looking at ways to reduce their advertising and marketing spend. But in the absence of data on the effectiveness of the marketing and advertising activity, the danger is it can easily been seen as a cost of business to simply be reduced. This has had a huge impact on the agencies, as often cost reduction is simply about squeezing their margins in a highly competitive market. This has lead to agencies having increasing difficulty recruiting and maintaining talent. The big change is that the smarter and more sophisticated companies have realised that focusing on the top line growth and cost management is the best efficiency strategy to increase bottom-line performance.

Is there a general underlying rule or principle for efficient marketing?

Test, measure and learn. Gone are the days where marketers could set and forget their marketing strategy. The dynamics and complexity of the market means that to drive effectiveness marketers need to innovate. Marketing is becoming increasingly more complex. There is increasing entropy in marketing — more channels, more segments, more fragmented audiences, more markets, more competitors — leads to greater randomness and greater complexity. The old marketing models are not as effective as they once were and so marketers need to be more diligent in managing their budgets to continue to drive results using traditional strategies while testing and learning the new strategies for their brand and market. Efficient marketing is about understanding the results on your investment, rather than simply managing costs.

What marketing trends do you foresee in the future?

The big trend is the increase in data availability. Technology and market research methodologies mean that marketers have access to more data than ever before. This is idea and it provides greater insight into the increasingly complex segments marketers are dealing with. Data and the ability to analyse it and the increased fragmentation in media channels provides the opportunity for mass-customisation. This is the ability to reach mass audiences with customised messages and interactions specifically tailored to their interests increasing the level of engagement between the brand and the audience. It also provides the ability to be able to measure and track the performance of channels, messages and ultimately effectiveness of the marketing mix.

Finally, can you encapsulate your life philosophy in a quote?

My favourite quote is from Albert Einstein, who defined insanity as "Doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different outcome". It is this that drives innovation and drives me personally to find better solutions to the problems we face as an industry and in life.

