**<u>I'm a Researcher: Get me outta here!</u> (2)**

*Turning over a new leaf*

For many of us, our lives have changed dramatically in the last two months. For some, such as those newly unemployed, those changes were forced on us and have not been pleasant – and we can only hope that a reversal of fortune will soon be forthcoming for those affected. But where many are concerned, changes have occurred as a result of new living and working circumstances and have been for the good. Work patterns have changed, more people are gardening, biking, and hiking. We have rediscovered the importance of family and the joys of simpler things in life. Some have even broken old bad habits.

The same can happen to corporations as well. What if we could rid ourselves of our old bad habits in the worlds of business and research? Here are six that I would like permanently consigned to the trash/garbage/rubbish bin (depending on where you live and what form of English you use):

1. *Non-competes.* I don't want to see all non-competes trashed – they are, after all, necessary to prevent some of your best people who control major accounts or hold the keys to your secret sauce from taking them elsewhere. But I would like to see non-competes disappear when people are laid off for no fault of their own – "downsized" in euphemistic business-speak. This amounts to a restraint on people's ability to secure an income and provide for their families. So, unless you pay those you lay off their full salaries for the period of the non-compete, don't do it!
2. *Ridiculous payment terms.* The degree to which major corporations are using their suppliers as a piggy bank is, well, just piggy. Some suppliers are very small and cashflow for them is king. Opting to pay them 120, 150 or even 180 days after receipt of invoice is morally wrong. Some large companies, such as Mars, have taken the decision, as a result of the crisis, to pay their smaller suppliers promptly. May more join them – and stick to that policy long after the current crisis has disappeared into the rearview mirror.
3. *Loading acquisitions up with debt.* In recent years, even after the shock of the last recession, the temptation has been overwhelming for some of those who have acquired various of our larger players in the insights

industry (you know who you are) to do so with copious amounts of debt and then to load that debt onto the acquired companies' balance sheets. This not only places a strain on how those firms are managed post-acquisition (especially now, during a downturn) but also means that, very often, key decisions are taken for all the wrong reasons. Inevitably, customers and employees take second and third place to managing the debt and increasing the firm's valuation. Time to reconsider what's really important.

4. *Questionable research methods.* The ubiquitous – and nauseous – cliché "cheaper, faster, better" has led, in many cases, to the "better" part being forgotten. Recently, I heard of a case in which a large DIY platform miraculously obtained 200 CEOs for a B2B survey in a very short period of time. When the client dug into the sample, they found that a large majority had supposedly been sourced from San Francisco and their interviews all had the same date stamp – 4 a.m. This has always been unacceptable and should be eradicated as we go forward. Technology is a wonderful thing, but let's stop using it to pull the wool over our clients' eyes. And to buyers of research: realize that if you want quality research, it costs.
5. *Questionnaire length.* How long have we known that long questionnaires simply don't work? When did Pete Cape first report that data quality dramatically suffered beyond seventeen minutes? And still questionnaire lengths continue to go up. If your data is crap after 17 minutes, your survey is crap! So, let's get some backbone and refuse to field those 35- or 45-minute surveys! We all know there are ways in which to overcome the problem, so let's use them!
6. *Sugging, frugging and activeugging.* In the US, we are in the middle of (an interminable) election season. Every morning, my inbox is stuffed with "surveys" that have only one objective: to get a political donation out of me. Let's all take an oath to delete anything that uses research to sell or raise money. Yes, this is an age-old problem but if we can't turn over this leaf now, when can we? But there is a new angle to it which should concern us all: "activeugging". This is the use of research to achieve 'activation', another piece of horrible business-speak which means that respondents to seemingly innocent surveys are then directly targeted for marketing purposes. A large proportion of new technology entrants into the insights

> space are really ‘adtech’ or ‘martech’ (ugh!) outfits who are engaged in what we used to term ‘direct marketing’. Worse, some of the more established firms in our sector are eyeing this as an opportunity to ‘leverage their data assets’ (double ugh!). No! The bright line between bona-fide research and marketing is there for a reason. Let us not be seduced by the siren song of ‘everyone’s doing it’, and let us not be afraid of saying “No”!

As we all reassess our own personal lives, let’s also reassess the mores by which we do business. Now is a great time to throw out these old bad habits and recommit ourselves to taking the ethical high road that has always been our domain.