

On the cusp of DIY2.0, how can MR agencies add value?

With so many new ideas and technologies, how do you separate the wheat from the chaff? Ray Poynter and Matt Gibbs will attempt to do just that at this year's AMSRS Conference.

From behavioural economics to facial coding, from smartphone ethnography to big data analytics, the world of market research is awash with new technologies, new paradigms, and talk of disruption. But not everything that glitters is gold, so how can the busy insight professional navigate all the competing claims on their time, attention and money?

At this year's AMSRS Conference, Matt Gibbs and I will lead a session that will investigate new approaches and our panel will subject them to critical analysis. Two of the topics we'll be covering are Quantitative Semiotics and DIY 2.0.

Why semiotics, why quantitative semiotics? Market researchers and client organisations are finding themselves waist deep in data, surrounded by structured and unstructured information. However, the more we measure, the more the inner meaning can, perversely, elude us. For a generation, researchers have found semiotics of value in linking signs to meaning, through a process that requires experienced and skilled practitioners, time and money – but usually limited to small amounts of information. One of the newer trends we will be looking at is the utilisation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), pattern recognition and abundant processing power to create automated, quantitative semiotics.

Over the last 20 years the rise of DIY market research, for example SurveyMonkey, has changed the face of market research, reducing costs, shortening timelines, and facilitating people with no previous knowledge of market research to create surveys, online discussions and, more recently, solutions claiming to be ethnography via the utilisation of

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smartphone cameras. A positive aspect of DIY market research has been the widening of situations where market research is used. The key negative appears to be concerns about quality.

However, I think we are on the cusp of DIY 2.0 – something that will be much more disruptive than the first incarnation of DIY. DIY 2.0 will leverage automation, AI, and computing power to radically reform the options available to brand managers, consultants and (of course) market researchers. The essential difference between traditional DIY and the new generation focuses on making it easier to generate high quality, reliable research.

DIY 2.0 will include options such as:

- Pre-packaged research, enabling researchers to conduct options such as concept tests, net promoter score (NPS) trackers, and usage and attitudes (U&A) studies – designed by leading agencies, with a track record and benchmarks, but without the intervention of intermediaries.
- Survey platforms that leverage a variety of AI approaches (such as expert systems) to design the project, including questionnaire design, sample design (potentially buying the sample for you), starting the analysis, and helping with the reporting.
- Chatbots that will open up new qualitative routes, options that are not simply another form of focus group, but potentially quite new.
- Analysis tools that can work with large amounts of data (structured and unstructured) to create the first pass of a report.

Steering clear of snake oil and fool's gold

The key question that DIY 2.0 raises for market researchers agencies centres on how they are going to add value to these automated processes, focusing on understanding the client and delivering insight-based recommendations. For client-side researchers the key question is how to facilitate more people doing research, without it turning into the Wild West, where good research and bad research are treated with equal reverence or disdain?

Other topics we will cover in the session include advances in passive data collection and applying machine learning as the bridge between auto-coding text and a new generation of adaptive surveys.

Another thread to the session will be exploring how we can absorb new techniques, that at times might seem specialist and

out of reach, into our everyday practice. Topics will include the latest developments in passive data collection, and connecting the dots between machine learning, auto-coding text and the next generation of adaptive surveys.

Perhaps the key skill in the madness of the modern deluge of new market research is to be able to pick which runners to back in the race to the new pastures – and how to avoid the snake oil and fool's gold.

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Hear Ray and Matt present - *One Step beyond: The madness of MR choice in 2018* - at the afternoon plenary session on day 1 of the Conference.

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