

The ENERGY Bulletin

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SPECIAL EDITION - PROFILE INTERVIEW: Dr Liz Nelson OBE



The Market Research Industry was created through the energy of conversation. A gentleman named George Gallup used to survey his children over breakfast while later British kitchens were converted into telephone interview rooms. In this special edition we feature an interview with research pioneer and industry legend, Dr Liz Nelson, co-founder of global research giant, TNS and now Chairman of Fly Research and Council member of the Tavistock Institute.

DF: What are you most enjoying about your work these days?

LN: Learning about new media, social networking, the new use of language and the opportunities for engaging consumers.

DF: For those who do not know the story, please could you tell us how Taylor Nelson came into being in the mid-sixties?

LN: It now sounds so very trite. Most of the market research companies which had begun before 1965 were not selling solutions, but market research products. TNA had the idea that we should employ researchers who understood specific markets, such as healthcare, financial, food and drink; and we quickly learned that separate divisions with separate specialist researchers appealed to clients.

DF: What was your first research role?

LN: I was a research trainee at Mars in Slough. My supervisor, Prof Hans Eysenck placed all his graduate students in key positions so that he could spread his message - psychology is a science.

DF: You left the research industry for a while; what prompted your return?

LN: I left completely for ten years to pursue a government quango position, chair of the UK Ecolabelling Board. I became intrigued by the way government policy was developed and soon got involved in the NHS. I first joined the Doctors and Dentists Pay Review board and then became the chair of SW London Community Trust. Mind you, I said I left market research completely. That's not true insofar as I was constantly pushing the need for the public and charitable organisations to developing marketing strategies and to use market research. Our NHS trust was one of the first to do continuous customer satisfaction surveys among outpatients.

DF: Market Research still faces penetration issues in terms of online reach; what has the industry learned since the original challenge of x-directory numbers that prevented 100% penetration in telephone research?

LN: That's a great question. The answer is multi mode surveys. I genuinely believe that in the future respondents will be offered the choice of face-to-face, online via their pc, landline telephone or mobile internet.

DF: Last year Fly acquired Q Research – what does mobile phone research give us that other methodologies do not?

LN: Even quicker than online, often cheaper and always a better response rate. The mobile is a personal device and people can choose to answer surveys when they wish. I don't argue that the huge response rates will remain with us—certainly now as advertising aimed at mobiles increases in volume—but I believe there is a place for mobile to follow up other modes and to give responses in real time e.g. at events.

PROFILE INTERVIEW: Dr Liz Nelson OBE (cont)

DF: You studied clinical psychology – in what ways does Carl Jung inspire your approach in research?

LN: Eysenck, my supervisor, turned Jung's theories re extraversion/introversion, tough minded/tender minded into structured questionnaires. This gave rise to the host of psychographic studies which have followed e.g. Myers Briggs.

DF: How would you define Passive Research and what future does it have?

LN: Passive Research relates to that data collection which is done without respondents knowing that their behaviour is being collected e.g. media meters, till receipts data etc. I believe that it will grow exponentially.

DF: Tell us about your work at the Tavistock Institute.

LN: I am a council member, like a non-executive, concerned with the strategic development of this prestigious organization. In particular the development of marketing strategies. Just as psychoanalysis has had to reinvent itself (or should be reinventing itself) so the human relations research and evaluation which the Tavistock Institute does brilliantly must be brought into the high commercial marketing environment of consultancies.

DF: What sales & marketing advice would you give to MR research agencies?

LN: Learn what your niche is, learn to listen to clients, learn to engage clients' personnel beyond the Insight/Research depts.

DF: What would you like to see the Market Research Society do over the next few years?

LN: Be much more proactive in promoting the value of research conducted by professionals who are properly trained and abide by certain rules. Promote the value of real research over Survey Monkey and DIY practitioners. Co-creativity is great but MR can't be done by everyone.

DF: Thank you so much for your time today.

Next month the Energy bulletin evolves into **ENERGY News** which will look to feature more bite-size news articles. Please call 07521 991645 or write to the email address below with any feedback or enquiries.



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