

“Who said surveys should be boring?” - Elna Pretorius of Columinate

 By Leigh Andrews

14 Jul 2017

If you thought market research was dry and bland, you've clearly not spoken to Elna Pretorius, cofounder of Columinate, who was responsible for the People's Choice Award paper at Samra 2017. Here's her view on the importance of digital market research in SA.

So far, 2017 has proven itself a stellar year for Columinate market research agency, and we're only halfway through. Not only did Multichoice award them their research contract for the next three years, which will see them [establish a multi-country digital research panel](#) for Multichoice, but Pretorius herself stood out at Samra for her thought-provoking, insightful and best of all, funny, presentation – certainly one of my favourites.



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On their current scope of work for Multichoice, Pretorius shares,

“ We're over the moon about winning this contract. It was a tough tender process that extended over a year with more than 10 companies bidding. Essentially, we will be building consumer panels for Multichoice across the African continent and here at home to centralise all insights. We are excited to work with the Multichoice team, they are very innovative and, like us, focused on modern insights. ”

That's important as Africa is increasingly seen as the 'mobile-first' continent, which means we need to be digitally minded in all aspects of business, particularly when it comes to market research. Here, Pretorius lets us in on her highlights of running the full service market research agency for almost a decade.

📌 Let us in on the highlights package of Columinate's history over the past ten years.

Henk Pretorius and I started Columinate back in 2008. We were young, brave, perhaps a little naïve, but we had a dream; we believed digital marketing research is possible in South Africa.

Although, internet penetration was fairly low at the time, with only 13% of the population boasting a broadband connection! It also happened to be the year of the recession, so forget any startup help – we were on our own. Nevertheless, with luck, perseverance, a growing internet population and a truly unique value proposition – which offered clients speed at a severe cost reduction from traditional methodologies, unheard of in those days – we managed to grow the business to what it is today: From two employees to over 40; from working from home to owning two beautiful office buildings; from just one client to over 110 today – it has been an amazing journey, where we've had many opportunities to work with wonderful clients on some interesting research projects.

We've also been fortunate enough to collect several awards along the way, thanks in part to a renewed way of doing things, but also thanks to clients who believe in our



Elna Pretorius, cofounder and director of Columinate.

vision.

■ ***Let us in on that vision. Market research tends to be seen as ‘stuffy’ and old. Share what makes Columinate a modern market research agency?***

From the outset we had a brand personality that was definitely neither stuffy nor old. We wanted to do things differently, not just by doing it faster, cheaper, better, and all online, but also by making research fun and engaging, both for our clients and our panelists who participate in research. Our philosophy is to take our work seriously, but not to take ourselves too seriously. We take great pride in our corporate identity and how we present our insights – we believe that no pie chart should be boring!

Ultimately, we believe in simplicity: Simplicity in process and simplicity in engaging with research. It seems simplicity is a scarce commodity in the research industry, as most research tends to be unnecessarily complicated. And we're modern! All our insights are collected digitally; we were born digital, and we will continue to pioneer in this space.

■ ***What can the industry in general do to better educate society on the importance of market research?***

We can market ourselves a bit better, and that starts simply: With market researchers taking pride in their career choice and explaining to people how our work impacts society directly.

Helping companies better their products and services has a direct impact on the consumer for the better, in most instances. Having access to more relevant products and better services, all informed by research, makes a huge difference in people's lives. Helping companies achieve this also contributes to the economy and job creation.



TeamColuminate.

We can also do our jobs better – who said surveys should be boring? Taking part in research is fun, and it feels like an untapped opportunity at the moment. It doesn't have to be a completely gamified experience, but adding a bit of personality into the process can go a long way. I also think we can do better to make marketing research a career of choice. It is a professional, scientific career and data sciences will continue to be in demand. Exposing students to their options in market research early on will ensure we attract more talent to the industry.

■ ***Clearly you're doing that right, having won the hotly-contested 'Best Presentation' at Samra recently. Why is it so important to participate in industry bodies and associations like this?***

I try to show my passion for my job and my career. It's important to me to share this interest and this passion with the rest of the industry, just as it is important to support your industry body. Leonie Vorster from Samra is a one-woman show, working exceedingly hard and making a huge difference.



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However, she can't do it alone and industries where people have neglected to engage with their professional body have seen the results of external regulation from parties that don't always understand the nuances of one's industry. I feel it is one's duty to not only contribute to the company you work for but also to the industry.

Wise words – it's up to each of us to make a difference. [Click here](#) to visit the Columinate press office, [here](#) for Pretorius' MyBiz profile, and [here](#) for a reminder of her Samra paper from earlier this year.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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