

A Career in Marketing Research That Almost Wasn't

By Tara M. Cantore

When Jim Bryson first became involved in the marketing research industry, he thought it was something that was going to be short-lived. He recalled taking a marketing research class while he was working on his MBA, and he didn't like it.

After graduating with an MBA in marketing, he took a position at a marketing research company, yet he never intended to stay in the industry.

"My first work experience was not a good one," said Jim. He was let go from his first job only after eight months, and then worked as a researcher for a temporary position.

While at the temporary position, Jim had a friend who worked as a brand manager who wanted to move back to Nashville, TN and open up a qualitative firm.

Jim decided to open up the qualitative research firm, and went to Burke Institute

to further his education in marketing research. In 1986 he founded 20/20 Research, Inc. in Nashville, TN. Since its opening, the firm has expanded to include offices in Charlotte, NC and Miami, FL. The company has also gone on to receive numerous awards for quality and growth. The company's qualitative facilities were named "Top Rated" by the Impulse Survey, the company has been named three times as a "Music City Future Fifty," as one of the fastest growing companies in Middle Tennessee, and most recently the firm was named to the "Hot 100" list of 100 hottest companies in Tennessee.

Since becoming part of the marketing research industry, Jim has been very active in the community. He has moderated over 2,000 focus groups and in-depth interviews, has served as president of QRCA for three terms and currently serves on MRA's Interactive Marketing Research Organization (IMRO) Board of Directors. He also presents at a variety of industry conferences.

Jim recalled that he originally became MRA member so his focus facility could list in MRA's Blue Book Marketing Research Services Directory. "We had a focus facility, so it was important for us to be in Blue Book," he said.

After joining MRA though, Jim soon realized the Association offered so much more than the opportunity for his company to advertise in the research services directory. "It is the key organization for us for education," he said. "Through MRA we get to know a lot of other members in the industry. MRA is also does a great job when it comes to protecting the industry through its government affairs efforts."

Another major aspect that he finds of value from his membership is the networking opportunities at MRA conferences. He said it is important to be able to network with research professionals all over the country and world. The MRA events allow him to meet new people and learn what they are doing with their businesses. This gives him the opportunity to learn and grown from their successes and mistakes. "At the conferences you meet people really from all over," he says. "You get to know them and become friends and you then get to meet their friends as well."

Jim's current passion when he isn't working is his involvement in the building of a secondary school for orphaned children in Haiti called The Joseph School.

Another interesting fact about Jim is he served four years as a Tennessee State Senator. He was also his party's nominee candidate for Governor of Tennessee in 2006. He said he always had an interest in politics. "My personality was more on the candidate side. In 2002 an opportunity came up to run and I jumped into it. It was a great experience," he said.

Jim currently lives in Franklin, TN with his wife Carol and their four children.

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