

WorldOpinion Profile: M/A/R/C[®] Research

By Gloria Mellinger



Part One: The Company Today

M/A/R/C[®] Research – this year celebrating 40 years in marketing research – is being revitalized with the high energy motivation and support of new M/A/R/C President and CEO Merrill Dubrow, 43. Dubrow stepped in eight months ago when Sharon Munger stepped down as chairman and CEO after 32 years with the company.

Dubrow, formerly senior vice president of Client Development at Harris Interactive, has been a member of the research community for more than 20 years. He says he joined M/A/R/C for several reasons. “To lead one of the top 30 market research companies in the US is a terrific opportunity,” Dubrow explains. “To be owned by Omnicom and know that there is the untapped potential to work within the Omnicom sister agencies and to penetrate those accounts is huge. To be able to develop a strategy to bring the company back to the level of profitability that it once had is a welcome challenge.”

New strategies on the horizon

M/A/R/C Research’s primary product offering is its new product development and forecasting tool called Assessor[®]. To grow, the company must expand its product and service offerings, Dubrow states. Dubrow’s strategy for expansion is multi-faceted.

One aspect of expanding involves working with Omnicom’s portfolio of more than 160 companies, mostly advertising, marketing, and communications firms. “We are reintroducing ourselves to all of the Omnicom companies, and communicating our solutions that match their needs,” says Tony Amador, vice president in charge of this effort.”

Other facets include the development of Online Survey Solutions for current clients and other market research companies, and a deeper penetration of M/A/R/C’s current client base.

In addition, M/A/R/C is forming a new qualitative division with focus group moderators. Joan Treistman, executive vice president, is leading the qualitative efforts. “M/A/R/C has done qualitative work over the years, but hasn’t offered it to its clients as a continuous resource,” she explains. “We’re being responsive to what clients are looking for with qualitative techniques that incorporate face-to-face interviewing, such as focus groups,

one on one, mini groups, or online surveys at a qualitative level. We're also looking at developing the capacity to provide ethnographic resources to our clients."

Already, the results of the new strategy are positive. Dubrow cannot comment on sales revenues, but he says: "We're ahead of our goals. We're way ahead of where we were last year and we're making terrific progress."

Dubrow is making progress in another area as well – namely, improving employee morale. "Communication is critical," Dubrow stresses. Dubrow regularly surveys his staff, and notes that these surveys are possibly the most important studies M/A/R/C will complete this year.

Before Dubrow joined the company, morale was, on a scale of one to five, 2.91. "That was not good," he admits. "Within 90 days of my joining the company, I conducted an anonymous survey which had employees rate me on 10 different attributes – communication, strategy, things like that. I asked them, 'Do you feel better, worse, or the same about things than you did 90 days ago,' and 90% said they felt better with the remaining 10% feeling the same."

Another study had employees measure 2005 versus 2004 in 13 categories. "I am pleased to say that our overall scores went up for all 13 categories from 2004 and we can see how the DAS companies compare to us. We exceeded the DAS averages as well."

The surveys confirm that employees want to be talked to and they want to be respected, Dubrow points out. The research also identified some areas that warrant improvement. The entire senior team is currently reviewing the report and we will be meeting individually and as a team to discuss strategies for improvement.



Part Two: Company Culture

Success can hinge on the seemingly unimportant or, as some would say, it's all about the small things. And, at least in the first few months of his tenure, it's clear Dubrow fancies this position: one of his goals is to improve employee morale through lots of TLC. But improving morale, like most things, takes a financial commitment and Dubrow needed to secure the backing of parent-company Omnicom.

"What I described to Omnicom was that the company needed love and I was going to try very hard to provide that for them." In the short time since Dubrow set out to win over the hearts and minds of his staff, his strategy seems to be working.

"Since his joining, morale has improved greatly," says Kristy Hoover, marketing coordinator. "He's very energetic. He'll come by and say hi to everyone in the morning. Merrill is trying to get all the employees involved in the company. If you have a question or an idea, you can take it straight to him. He established an internal e-mail tool called Ideas@MarcResearch.com as an easy communication tool for the staff. These e-mails go

directly to Merrill and are discussed at the bi-weekly Operating Committee Meetings. There is a lot of employee recognition as well. Every month we have a corporate meeting with all employees. We discuss corporate strategy and industry news, and we have employee awards.”

Personal communication is essential

Dubrow says he works hard at communication. “It’s very easy these days to hide behind e-mail and not see people’s faces and reactions.” So Dubrow orchestrates several ways to meet face-to-face with staff members. These include having a quiet breakfast with a small group of employees, personally driving six people to the Byron Nelson golf tournament and buying them lunch, arranging a company softball game on a Friday afternoon, and inviting all staff members to a barbeque where he’s on the grill in 100° Texas heat!

In addition to the social events, Dubrow is big on training and education. “We have more training than we’ve ever had from our Marketing Science Group,” Dubrow points out. M/A/R/C offers tuition reimbursement as well as onsite training. Dubrow also believes in education unrelated to work but related to the individual, not only now but in the future. For example, he doesn’t want people to find themselves in difficult financial situations 20 years from now, he says, so he brought in a financial services provider to discuss retirement planning. “Most people need assistance in planning for the future.”

The company recently introduced M/A/R/C Client Solution Series (CSS). Clients come in and present a problem that was encountered, the research, the strategy implementation, and the outcome. “There is an exchange of information from both sides,” Dubrow notes.

“Company benefits are phenomenal,” Hoover adds. Full-time employees are offered medical and dental coverage; 401(k) with company matching, profit sharing, and employee stock purchase plan; and paid holidays, vacation and sick time, parental leave, and flexible work schedules.

All these things – some small, some not – are helping to improve morale and, thereby, productivity.

Association involvement critical element

Dubrow's belief in communication extends beyond employees. “Our strategy includes speaking at conferences and writing articles. Joan Treistman is the Committee Chair for the American Marketing Association's Annual Marketing Research Conference. Diane Stevio is on the national AMA committee. Susan Hurry recently spoke at two conferences. Alice Butler (who is responsible for execution of M/A/R/C projects) is on a committee at the MRA. Janet Savoie is on a committee. I’m on the national MRA board, CASRO University, and a few others.”

Dubrow is on three college advisory boards: the AC Nielsen Center board, the University of Georgia, and the UTA Arlington. There are several reasons it is important to be on

industry committees and college boards, Dubrow explains. There is the potential to gain business, or course, and the opportunity to meet people in the industry, but that's not the main reason the company has gotten involved.

Moreover, it is to give something back. "People have helped me along the way. Marketing research is a great industry for me and for my family. I'm frequently asked to speak at conferences and it's usually a yes from myself or from someone on my staff. People view you as somewhat of an expert if you're speaking. And, it makes you feel good to be able to share some tidbits of information with other people in an industry that you love. That's very exciting."

Dubrow was vice president of the Professional Chapters Council of the National AMA, past President of the AMA Boston Chapter and co-chair for the 1998 and 1999 AMA Leadership Summit. He earned his BA from Hofstra University. He hails from the Boston area.

Dubrow made the move from Boston to Texas with vigor and positivity, first commuting for two months – Monday through Friday – before moving his family. "It made it easier because I was able to spend time focusing on the company during the week and on my family during the weekends." Of the cultural and geographical differences, Dubrow simply says, "The people in Texas are nice; they eat a little earlier. The bugs are a little bigger, you can swim in the pool a lot longer. The restaurants are solid. Is it as fast-paced as the Northeast? No. There is very little traffic here, or what some call traffic I don't call traffic, so it's been good. I am enjoying being a Texan and, more importantly, my wife Patricia loves the area and never wants to live near snow again."

Senior executives provide varied backgrounds



Joan Treistman, executive vice president, joined M/A/R/C Research July 1, 2005. She is responsible for developing company strategy and new product development – specifically the development of a qualitative capability for M/A/R/C.

Treistman says there are two main reasons she joined the company – the first being Merrill Dubrow. "I've know Merrill for about 15 years. He is a person that has key characteristics of leadership: enthusiasm, sincerity, and quality. We worked together in the American Marketing Association. I was president of the New York Chapter of the AMA when he was president of the Boston Chapter."

"The second is that M/A/R/C can deliver to its clients what it promises. That is a very important aspect of my work and the credibility I have in the industry. I felt that M/A/R/C's philosophies and mine were very much in line."

Previously, Treistman was senior vice president/group head of the CPG Division at NOP World. Before that, she was president of Treistman & Stark Marketing, Inc. Treistman

has been co-director of the Starch Division of NOP World, and held senior positions with the Quaker Oats Company, as well as several leading marketing research companies. She has spoken at conferences and symposiums in the US, Canada, the UK, and Europe.

Treistman is active in industry associations. Presently, she is serving on the Market Research Council for the AMA on a national basis. She received her BA from the City College of New York, and earned her MBA from the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business.



Amy Barrentine, senior vice president and general manager, has over 25 years of experience in marketing research. Currently leading the Central Division, her most recent focus has been on Assessor forecasting work; however, she has significant experience in identifying opportunities for targeting and focus, optimization work (choice, conjoint), brand equity, tracking (focused on key predictive elements), and segmentation.

Susan Hurry is senior vice president and general manager. She joined M/A/R/C in 1983 and began building her expertise in bridging marketing objectives with creative research design and analysis. Her experience spans a wide range of industries, with an emphasis on marketing effectiveness tracking, segmentation, and customer loyalty assessments. She is a frequent speaker at MRA and AMA conferences. Susan received her BS from Southwest Texas State University.



Diane Stevio is senior vice president and general manager of M/A/R/C's Greensboro, North Carolina, office. She is responsible for maintaining strong client relationships by leading client service teams to design and deliver effective solutions. Stevio has 20 years of experience in marketing research. She holds a BS in Business Management with a marketing concentration from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where she graduated with honors. She is an active member of the American Marketing Association (AMA) where she is currently serving on the national programming committee.

Randall A. Wahl is senior vice president of Advanced Analytics. This group is responsible for the analysis and interpretation of consumer and marketing data in order to evaluate business opportunities. Wahl has over 16 years experience in new product/new venture evaluation and forecasting. He holds an MBA in Marketing, and undergraduate degrees in Finance and International Marketing from The University of Texas. He has also served as a guest lecturer in graduate and undergraduate business classes at the University of Texas.



Tony Amador, vice president, Client Development, is in charge of introducing M/A/R/C's services to other Omnicom/DAS agencies. With 15 years of experience in both qualitative and quantitative research, his experience comes from a variety of industries, including manufacturing, telecommunications, and utilities. Amador earned his BA in Management from West Texas A&M University.

"The staff and I are still getting to know each other," notes Dubrow. "The senior team works well together. With each and every day, we gain more experience. The best is yet to come."

Part Three: Products and Services

M/A/R/C Research is a brand development research and consulting firm. Headquarters are in Irving, Texas, and M/A/R/C has client-service locations in Dallas, Greensboro, St. Louis, Nashville, Los Angeles, and New York. With 82 full-time employees and 79 interviewers, the company serves clients primarily in pharmaceutical and healthcare; financial services (banking and insurance); consumer packaged goods; high-tech; retail; restaurants; travel and leisure; telecommunications; and energy and utilities.

To optimize the development and launch of a new product, M/A/R/C offers Assessor. Assessor forecasts sales volume potential for both new and established products/services across a wide range of categories/industries. A key strength of Assessor is its check-and-balance system that utilizes multiple models to generate sales estimates. Assessor's "self-calibrating" trial and repeat model broke the mold of earlier STMs by evaluating individual respondents, and looking for consistency on both attitudinal and behavioral measures, thus eliminating the adjustments that are needed when these measures are assessed independently.

The proprietary preference model, developed at MIT, evaluates the test product within a relevant competitive context. Results from this are used to provide insight on the test brand's share of buyer's volume (share of requirements, depth of preference), as well as comprehensive Sources of Business analysis. This multiple-model, self-calibrating approach makes Assessor applicable for all channels and categories.

Assessor's family of offerings include Assessor Concept Screen, Assessor Concept Test, Assessor Simulated Test Market, and Assessor Optimization.

MarketLinkSM Brand & Customer Development, M/A/R/C's family of brand and customer development offerings, enables brands to act preemptively to improve in-market performance. It leverages the core learning and metrics of Assessor — proven to deliver within +/-10% on over 90% of validated forecasts — to determine a brand's share of preference relative to competitive brands.

The measure of a brand's strength is its ability to be chosen over competing brands. Utilizing a proven model for brand preference which is predictive of shifts in market share, MarketLink reframes the linkage of brand performance metrics to market outcomes with precision and subsequent actionability.

MarketLink provides a robust approach to understanding the drivers of loyalty and competitive advantage. Solutions are designed to provide a framework for identifying brand development opportunities and deciding which are the best to invest in.

Custom portfolio aids in strategic planning

M/A/R/C's custom portfolio research solutions are designed to meet the diverse needs of clients. From segmentation research to event marketing evaluations to receiver reaction studies, M/A/R/C's custom portfolio provides marketers with insights for strategic planning or information to make key tactical decisions.

Design work begins with the client's business issue. Once the research solution is designed, the choice of data collection mode is made based upon the most appropriate means of reaching the target respondent group and gathering the needed data. M/A/R/C offers access to respondents via any one or combination of modes, whether the data needs to be gathered over the telephone, face-to-face, online, domestic or global, consumer, or B2B .

Part Four: Company History

M/A/R/C has a terrific heritage, according to Dubrow. "We were born out of Tracy Locke (a regional advertising firm) 40 years ago." The seeds of the company were planted in 1950, when Cecil "Bud" Phillips joined Tracy Locke.

In 1965, the research department under Phillips' leadership had expanded beyond the agency's client-base, and Phillips founded the national company known as Marketing and Research Counselors. Clients shortened the name to M/A/R/C.

In 1999, M/A/R/C merged with Omnicom Group Inc., a global marketing and corporate communications company. Omnicom's branded networks and numerous specialty firms provide advertising, strategic media planning and buying, direct and promotional marketing, public relations, and other specialty communications services to over 5,000 clients in more than 100 countries. Omnicom was founded in 1986 and in 2004 was named one of "America's Most Admired Companies" by Fortune Magazine. In 2004, Omnicom Group reported record results for the 18th consecutive year. Total revenues increased 13.1% to \$9.7 billion in 2004 from \$8.6 billion in 2003.

This year marks the firm's 40th anniversary. As part of the celebration festivities, both M/A/R/C staff and clients were invited to a luxury suite at Ameritrust Field on July 19th when the Texas Rangers took on the New York Yankees. In addition, as part of the anniversary celebration, M/A/R/C has established "40 great things that happened last month." Dubrow adds: "We have employee of the month and we'll do something a little bit different for employee of the year this year."

M/A/R/C – a large company that is owned by an even larger company – strives to maintain a small company feel. Dubrow and his team work to preserve the responsiveness and flexibility of a small company based on communication, motivation,

and respect. In a world of conglomerates where companies grow ever larger, M/A/R/C is a place where researchers still have their voices heard.

“When it comes to clients,” Treistman adds, “M/A/R/C meets and exceeds their expectations. When we survey our clients after our work has been done, they give us the highest scores. Repeat business is at the highest level. It is our level of service and commitment to our clients’ needs that makes us unique.”