Detractors of market research have long tried to pin a "pseudo" science label on our methods. And whilst we might strongly contest such a tag, how convincingly can we argue that we actively embrace science?

Perhaps some readers watched the comedian Dave Gorman lampooning market research in an hour-long TV episode of *Modern Life is Good-ish* recently, quite legitimately having a good laugh at the grossly unscientific output of some established research providers.

If you missed that, then you will surely have noticed that in recent years we’ve been challenged by an extraordinarily relevant array of scientific discoveries, such as:

- From **neuroscience** we have received a cascade of proofs on how our brains process the world, and make emotion-led decisions.

- From the **behavioural sciences** we have behavioural economics, and a spelling out of the power and influence of networks and social norms.

- From **computing and statistics**, we have the emergence of data science
How much does the average Research Exec (or Director for that matter) really know about all these science-y things? How likely are we to incorporate their findings into our next proposal?

And there is much to be learned from an hour or two flirting with the output of academic scientists. Yes, their papers can be a daunting read, but punch a few keywords into the JSTOR website (or similar), and discover an immodest wealth of knowledge just waiting to pep up a proposal or add extra quality to a questionnaire. I might be wrong, but I sense that we lack enthusiasm for engaging with academia, and I worry that old-fashioned desk research might be falling by the wayside as we scramble around under ever more aggressive time and cost pressures.

On maths and probability, how many researchers know statistics beyond t-tests and the descriptive basics, or how to calculate the optimal sample size for their target population? Adopting a more science-led approach here would help us do a better job of communicating uncertainty and significance to our clients.

In communicating our findings are we in danger of sacrificing authenticity on the altar of storytelling? I don’t doubt that an effective story is the best way to get a message across but stories can so easily distort or mislead. So much is dependent on how the listener interprets. PR people need to know how to construct persuasive and engaging stories, but I'm not so sure about us. We have a professional obligation to convey the facts, even if they ruin a good story. I’m not suggesting that boring the pants off people is the way forward, but if we need help constructing an authentic narrative where better to look than to the skills of science journalism?

Many medical market researchers have a science, and/or maths based higher education behind them, and – not being amongst them – I’m a bit baffled as to why more of a scientific culture doesn’t permeate medical market research. I suspect it may have something to do with the fact that ultimately we all have to serve a Marketing agenda. Maybe science just isn’t sexy enough to win the business?

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