

Keeping a finger on the pulse is the name of the game for brand and communications growth

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Alison Rice has been part of the South African research world since 1996, with an additional 13 years under her belt in the USA before that, where she spent time conducting strategic research for many of America's Fortune 500 companies. A particularly memorable time for her was consulting with McDonald's on menu and burger optimisation. Her roles at Research Surveys, which later became TNS, have included setting up and running a continuous tracking department - BrandVision - as well as working in The Consultancy to drive expertise and knowledge through the organisation. Throughout her lengthy experience, a large part of what has made Rice successful is the desire to keep her finger on the pulse in whichever space she is operating in - an asset both for her personally and for TNS and its clients.



Allison Rice

Now heading up the Brand and Communications practice area at TNS, Rice shares that her favourite growth tool that the research company uses is the ConversionModel, developed by Dr Jannie Hofmeyr and adopted by Research Surveys in 1989. The original model was developed out of a curiosity as to why some people switch religions easily and others do not, and based on four specific underlying dimensions. Founder of Research Surveys, Butch Rice, saw the commercial application of this model for brands, which saw it become the first brand equity model to make use of the word 'commitment' - the more committed one is to a religion or brand, the less likely one is to switch to another.

Rice believes that Hofmeyr's return to TNS, after a brief respite, signalled a turning point for the company when a real transformation began. This included steps toward shorter, smarter surveys, changes in methodology to include capturing in-the-moment data via mobile and the introduction of some of the newer sciences such as neuroscience and behavioural economics into the research game - all with the aim of producing more robust, accurate and valid results.

This transformation in approach has also seen the relaunch of the likes of ConversionModel in 2012, and another useful tool called NeedScope in early 2014. Rice explains that while ConversionModel sizes the risk and opportunity that a brand has in terms of its share, and provides precise recommendations to drive growth, NeedScope is about understanding need states that exist within a market and how brands are positioned in these markets.

Originally launched in SA in 2002, the underlying essence of NeedScope is emotion, which is seen as the driver of choice for making decisions. Over the years, TNS has worked with many of the world's leading brands and has identified what a marketer needs to do to create an 'irresistible brand'. Irresistible brands recognise that needs are far more than the functional requirements that sit on the surface. These are important but it's the deeper emotive needs that make a brand irresistible. Rice says that the best basis for building an irresistible brand strategy is a profound understanding of consumers' emotive needs, their relationship to more functional needs and how brands currently satisfy them.

Rice further explains that the renovation of two of TNS South Africa's most formidable tools is once again proof of alignment with the new thinking coming out of the sciences. In the brand and communication space, she says, it is essential to keep up and change with the times as we learn more about human beings. It is this type of thinking that keeps TNS current and the right choice for new and existing clients who share the vision of tapping into consumer mindsets effectively.

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