

CASRO Transformation Series: 20/20 Is Writing the Lyrics of Qualitative Transformation

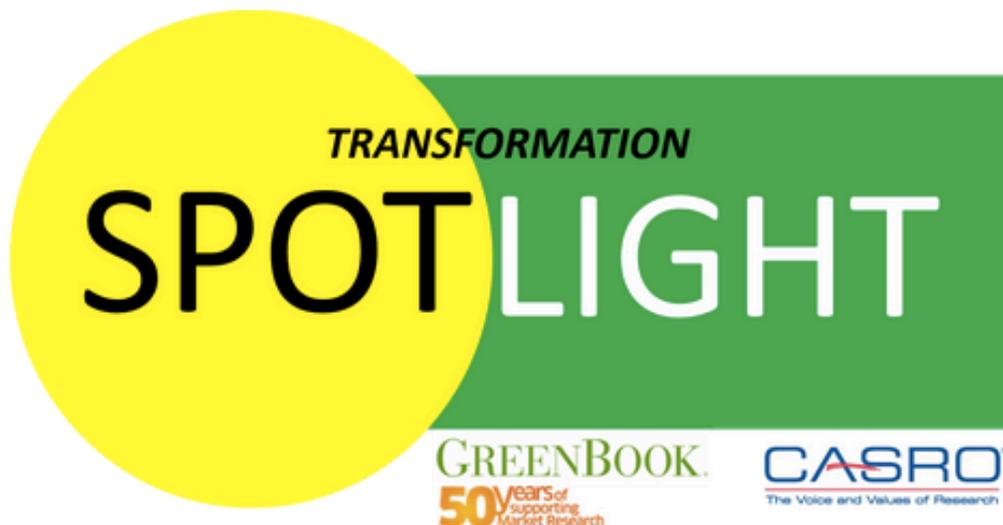
Posted by Jeff Resnick

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By Jeff Resnick of Stakeholder Advisory Services

This month's Transform Blog takes us to Nashville, Tennessee – home of the Grand Ole Opry and the Country Music Hall of Fame. It is also the home of 20|20 Research and its CEO, Jim Bryson. By many accounts, qualitative research will continue to flourish as an integral element of a researcher's tool kit. However, like so many aspects of our industry, the discipline of qualitative research has undergone significant change with more dramatic change to come in the future. Jim and his team have been at the forefront of this evolution, having grown from a 1986 start-up in a 10 x 10 room with two filing cabinets to a company that now services clients from over 100 countries. Jim shared his thoughts about transformation based on more than 25 years of learning to perfect it.

Transform ahead of the crowd. Jim's view is that innovation today has a lot to do with structural trends. The ability to transform ahead of the crowd is dependent on being able to see a vision for the

application of technology before it becomes obvious to everyone else. This doesn't diminish the value of client input but reflects the reality that clients do not always know what they need until they see it. For example, 20|20 invested heavily in online bulletin board technology back in the early 2000's – far ahead of when the technology became used in mainstream research. Recently, 20|20 began to discuss its upcoming virtual reality. Jim firmly believes virtual reality will be the next "big thing" in qualitative research.

Pivot without losing control. Pivoting is all about moving to where your skills meet market needs. As Jim said "You have to pivot in a way that doesn't put your company into a spin or create a lot of disruption". Often this results from taking a realistic look at your company strengths and realigning them with existing or emerging market needs. Radical departures from the historic core of a business are rarely a good idea.

Stay true to who you are. One of the most important decisions made by Jim Bryson was NOT to become a software company. 20|20's roots and strengths are in the area of qualitative research, not software development. This led to a strategy of providing innovation coupled with a very strong service offering rather than a company focusing on selling software.

Know the strengths and weaknesses of your target audience. Transformation needs to recognize potential limitations of your clients. 20|20's focus is the development of technology-based services to support qualitative research. However, many qualitative researchers are not technologists. 20|20's staff provides training for researchers in new methodologies plus a full complement of project support services to ensure a positive experience. While the development and introduction of technology-based qualitative research products is the transformation, service and support are critical enablers to the adoption of the technology.

Find ways to ensure the old co-exists with the new. Melding the new and the old is a difficult task but it has to be done effectively. It is often the traditional business that is funding the development of the new business. It is an imperative to find ways to bridge the skills of employees working on the new side of the business with those from the traditional side of the business. For example, proactively finding ways to bring new technology into the management of the traditional side of the business can be an effective way of introducing new skill sets across the organization and making certain everyone feels part of the transformation.

Expect surprises. Every day. It is simply part of the business of transformation.

Do good. Social responsibility is a core value of 20|20. They refer to it as simply "doing good." While not part of transformation per se, it is a strong statement about the core culture and value of the company – an important stabilizing element during transformation. It is something that everyone can be proud of and reminds all that they are not only part of the business success but can also bring change to areas that are, perhaps, even more important.

20|20 has been transforming since the 1990's. While Jim Bryson and his team do not claim perfection in this area, they do understand the "art" of business transformation. It has clearly driven 20|20 to be one of the leaders in the evolution of qualitative research. It has been a true team effort that could not have been accomplished without the dedication and commitment of 20|20 employees. I have no doubt the spirit and action of business transformation will continue to be a trademark of 20|20.

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