



Headology for profit

bianca kramer

Market researcher **Mark Molenaar** is in the business of understanding people

Breaking through the noise to gain better insight into what drives us is more important than ever to companies looking to better their bottom line. Mark Molenaar's been doing just that for 15 years. As head of client services at TNS Research Surveys, he's faced with understanding society every day.

Tell us about yourself?

I grew up in Paarl and originally wanted to study something creative, like architecture. I ended up studying for a bachelor of business science at UCT with honours in marketing. It wasn't quite the creative direction that I had intended, but I thought something more commercially orientated might open more opportunities.

What is market research about?

It is about understanding the human condition. Most of the work we do for clients is in a commercial context, but a significant amount is also social research. Even in a commercial context, most of the work we do is to help clients understand people's needs better, so they can meet these needs and provide better products and services, profitably of course.

What do you do on a typical day at work?

It involves providing advice and assistance to teams; meeting and presenting to clients; providing strategic analysis on studies

we do; admin, internal meetings, chasing business, training, managing people, and interacting with our international network. It is quite a varied list of activities so no two days are typically the same.

What do you love about your job?

It's always interesting and challenging. I learn new things every day and get to understand more about the reasons why people do what they do.

What is going on in the industry right now?

The industry has just gone through a number of years of consolidation with a few large global players emerging. So we are not just dealing with research at a local level, but increasingly have to consider the global nature of our clients and competition. Web 2.0 and the incredible pace of technological change is also changing the research landscape with new ways of doing things, new ways of engaging with people and new competitive threats. Advances in areas such as neuroscience are also confirming many theories about how people process information and make decisions.

How can someone get into market research?

At a minimum, you need a university degree, but it doesn't matter in what field. In addition to that, good numeracy and language skills are important as we interpret data and need to communicate it in a clear, accurate and concise way. Beyond that, we look for an enquiring mind and a good attitude to working hard.

Eugene Yiga