

Finding and keeping talent

Tomorrow's leaders



School for business stars
Attracting high fliers

Top marketing trends
The buzzwords for 2008

Creating sticky ideas
We talk to author Dan Heath

Anyone for coffee?

Luis Arnal draws his inspiration from the people he meets and his energy from coffee – he has more than 100 espresso makers. He talks to Jo Bowman.



Luis Arnal

You have a Masters in design planning, so how did you get into research?

My undergraduate degree is in industrial design, and to design any product you need research, and that's how I got pulled by this discipline. After I did my Masters in Chicago, I started working at a couple of firms who pioneered the use of anthropological methods for marketing and new product development, Doblin Group (now part of Monitor Group) and E-Lab LLC (now part of Sapient). There, I worked with a team of social scientists, consulting with big corporations on how to understand people and envisioning innovations for them. Suddenly, I understood the value that research can bring to organisations.

What do you wish you'd known before getting into the business?

I wasn't aware that what I was doing was called market research, and that made all the difference because it allowed me to question most rules and preconceptions the industry had.

What's been the best day so far in your career?

Every day I am blessed with learning opportunities from clients, research subjects – people, that is – colleagues and students, and this allows me to grow. A note of praise from clients, a thank-you from a colleague, a smile from a participant, a sign of authentic interest from students, gives a sense of accomplishment. But failure, problems and frustrations are also part of my day; I don't think I would enjoy the successes so much if not for occasional failures.

What gives you such a positive outlook?

I don't think I am overtly optimistic, I am just focused on what needs to happen and usually wish for good things. The people I interact with on a daily basis keep me positive. Clients, colleagues and friends energise me. One needs to hire smart, forward-looking and intellectually curious people for positive things to happen.

Who have been your biggest influences?

Authors you read, professors, clients, colleagues, there are hundreds of people who influence what I think and do every day. I've learned so much about life, for example, from participants in research, or skills from clients, or even ways to question the world from students. I meet about five to ten new people per day; at least half of them leave a mark on you. It's an everyday learning experience.

How do you think your work will be different, say, five years from now?

More eclectic. I think we are being forced to manage multiple disciplines throughout our professional career. I believe there is an important consolidation in the marketing and management consulting business that will affect most professional services firms. But we always imagine the future as very different from what we have now, and I don't think five years is enough to say there is going to be such a radical difference.

If you couldn't be in research, what do you think you'd be doing?

I guess I would be a full-time professor. Sharing knowledge with students (corporate or academic) and interacting with varied minds is an intellectually stimulating experience.

What are you reading now?

I love to read 'boring things' (according to my wife) like *The Myths of Innovation*, or conference proceedings, but right now I have in front of me a photo book I bought yesterday called *Graffiti World*, a visual encyclopaedia of graffiti art from around the world.

I have very eclectic taste, sometimes I read about research, sometimes about psychology, sometimes architecture or business. That's one of the things market researchers should do more – read more of a variety of things so they're exposed to more ideas. That's what designers do – they borrow from lots of sources and are very open to new ideas.

And, why so many coffee makers?

Since my early design days I've always cherished the Italian espresso maker, it's a design icon. The mechanism is fantastic, and is an analogy for any product out there. Espresso makers can be made from so many different materials, shapes and prices, they can be used to impress someone (emotional value) or just to prepare coffee (functional value) – but the essence of all is the same. ■

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