

MARKETING

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[MARKET RESEARCHERS LOOK TO THE FUTURE AT MRIA CONFERENCE]

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Canada is changing as a nation, and therefore, marketing in Canada must change too.

This was the main idea for the opening session of the 50th annual Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) Conference in Toronto, Monday.

To celebrate half a century, MRIA has labelled the conference as a "futurespective," looking at how Canada has changed over the last 50 years and hypothesizing about what's in store for the future.

Ipsos CEO **Darrell Bricker** shared the stage with **Environics** president **Michael Adams**, and **Allan Gregg**, chairman of **Harris/Decima**, in a presentation dubbed "Canada 1960-2010 and beyond: are we getting it right?" The three shared their insights on the changes brought upon Canada over the last 50 years, in a discussion moderated by *Maclean's* editor and publisher **Ken Whyte**.

All three noted that Canada has become more diverse, urban, individualist and self-expressive since 1960, explaining that Canadian businesses must keep up with the nation's rampant multiculturalism and progressive ideals in the 21st century.

"We are a microcosm of the planet and are getting along quite beautifully," said Adams, who, along with Bricker, said diversity and tolerance is becoming more visible across the country, especially in urban centres.

But Gregg, familiar to regular viewers of the *The National* as a member of the "At Issue" panel, was less optimistic regarding the cultural harmony, explaining that new migrants are falling behind and are not accurately represented.

"We are a society in transition," Gregg said. "It is stunning how little we know about this new population. Our industry has been slowed to recognize and understand it."

But all were in agreement with one idea: as citizens become more inclined toward personal expression, marketing should become more individually focused as well. This theme was carried over into the next panel discussion, which included **Satjiv Chahil**, a senior vice-president, global marketing for **Hewlett-Packard Company**; **Bill McCollam**, VP of digital strategy for **Sun Life Financial**; and **Greg Taylor**, co-founder of **Steam Whistle Brewing**.

"We have not come close to tapping [social media's] potential," explained McCollam.

In the session focused on the "Value of Research in Marketing" and moderated by *Marketing's* executive publisher and editor-in-chief **Christopher Loudon**, McCollam pointed out that social media has helped his company develop more direct connections with customers. Sun Life Financial created a microsite for customers to match their attributes with the company's financial advisors, helping them find one that was right for them.

Still, he does not deny the importance of traditional market research.

"Marketing without research is like shooting an arrow in the air and then looking for the target," McCollam said.

Chahil agreed with the simultaneous use of traditional market research and new social media.

Even though HP began to thrive in the electronics industry through "taking the pulse of consumers"—connecting with youths and females to sell computers—Chahil said that it is necessary to be "working in tandem with

traditional forms."

"There is no substitute for market research," McCollam said, concluding that partnering old methods with new media will help marketers reach the widest audience of consumers.

The 50th annual MRIA Conference runs through Wednesday.

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