

Recording: *Ponderings from the Perch* – Kristin Luck

Hello, and welcome to *Ponderings from the Perch*, the Little Bird Marketing Company podcast. I'm Priscilla McKinney, as always, but today I have one of my besties. Welcome to the show, Kristin.

Thanks. Thanks for having me back.

You know this is the third time, and I think at this point people are just simply writing me questions and saying, "Here's my question, could you ask Kristin this?"

Perfect. I'm here. Ask me anything.

Ask me anything. Well, I asked you to come on specifically for a reason that, to be honest, I have questions. So this is my show, so I get to do whatever I want.

Perfect.

So I was thinking back a couple of years ago to when you and I first met, we were both sharing a stage at an industry event. And it was my first industry event in market research, and you made a point to come connect with me and invite me to really chat about what I was doing, what you were doing. And shortly thereafter, you brought me into your passion project, which is Women in Research, WIRe. And that has absolutely changed my life. But today I want to talk about another moment that changed my life, and it involves you as well. So a couple of years ago at IIEE for GreenBook, you invited me to a luncheon for ESOMAR. And you really were encouraging me that doing the kinds of things you and I were both doing, which were trying to give back to the community that has really been so good to us, you invited me to that lunch, and I got to meet Joaquim Bretcha at the time, who was the president of ESOMAR. So when I heard that you're running for president for ESOMAR, I thought I've got to have you back on *Ponderings from the Perch* and I want to hear all about it. So give everybody a little bit of an idea of what you're doing right now with ESOMAR and then what you're looking to do and what the whole campaigning is all about.

Sure. So I'm kind of an ESOMAR brand enthusiast, brand evangelist. I've been a member for almost 11 years now. The association has probably been one of the most critical pieces in moving my career forward on a global basis. I'm based on the west coast of the States, and usually I'm spending about half the year in

Europe, although thanks to this pandemic, I've been grounded here in the States since last I think April now. But it's been really fundamental in helping me not only develop my network on a global basis and have access to researchers all over the world that I wouldn't have met otherwise, but it's also given me a better understanding of how people work globally, the different types of research that are conducted, and different ways of solving problems. For me, it's been such an instrumental part of my career that I ran for Council first six years ago. So I've been on Council for six years. In the last election I ran for Vice President, so I've served as Vice President for the last two years. And because it is such a passion project for me, I decided it was really time to throw my hat in ring for President.

So tell me a little bit about that lead-up to it. When you are on the Council, when you are the vice president, what are the kinds of things you're doing? What are the kinds of things you're advocating for?

ESOMAR as an association is really the advocate globally for data privacy and data ethics. So for anybody that hasn't been involved much with associations, what you probably don't realize, and this is also the case with the Insights Association here in the US and pretty much every local association around the world that's in-country, is that there is an incredible amount of lobbying and governmental affairs work that goes on to ensure that our industry continues to be able to do what it does, which is to collect data ethically and socially-responsible ways. But the association is also responsible for really looking at and validating new methods of research and most importantly I think it's also expanding and bringing in new ideas and new ways of doing things. And that's part of one of the three pillars of the platform that I'm running on. I think that there have been, particularly with the amount of private equity money and the number of new firms coming into this space, that there have been a lot of companies that are working with ancillary or third-party data that for a lot of researchers, we're not really sure how to work with that data, where do these players fit in our ecosystem, and how do we work with that data in ethically and responsible ways? And how do we make sure that those companies also adopt our privacy and data and ethics best practices. I think part of the goal of the association is to really take a holistic view at the entire industry on a global basis and make sure that we're taking the right steps to preserve the longevity of our industry.

Well, I want to come back to a couple of those ideas because you and talk an awful lot about how much money is flooding into the market research industry right now.

Yeah, and it's a ton.

We've had a lot of great conversations there but I want to come back to that thing you just said about it being global, because I'm going to tell you just a personal thing from my side. When I first was around all the different associations, I don't know where I got it from but it was just my feeling that ESOMAR was for like a European council. I didn't really see it as global. And I'm sure I probably just didn't hear it correctly. Why did I get that feeling, or is that something common that you've heard from people here in the States?

Well, historically, ESOMAR started out as a European association. But in the last 20 years we have evolved into a global association where we have representation and work with associations all around the world. So I think it's probably like legacy branding from when the 'E' in ESOMAR stood for European. That said, we've reworked our tagline, a lot of our positioning, so that we truly are a global association. But it is something that I feel like I spend a lot of time jumping into conversations that I hear on the side and say no, no, it's global. We're a global association. We work with folks all over the world. Yes. One of the reasons why I convinced you to join, Priscilla, I mean I also think that – and this is particularly if you're in a country like the US, which tends to be very insular or you work in a business where you're not traveling much and particularly internationally, I think the one great thing that ESOMAR provides for people is this access to people, presentations, content from all over the world so that you do have a more global perspective and you understand how people are fundamentally solving for problems in regions maybe you're not familiar with.

I love that, I love that. But what I've seen clearly is that you've been advocating for more people to join, because you constantly beat the drum of, if there's more people at the table, there's better ideas at the table.

Absolutely. I've been really fortunate though the last – well, the last six years; I've also served on the board of the ESOMAR Foundation. And I was really particularly passionate about that foundation, which is all about helping researchers in need, is that they do a lot of work with non-profits. Now some of the most interesting presentations that I've ever seen at ESOMAR Congress, and if you're a member of ESOMAR you can go back through ANA and look at all these presentations online and read the papers. But that track during ESOMAR Congress during our annual conference to me is some of the most interesting and innovative research you'll ever read or hear about, like how people are doing research in South Sudan or in these conflict markets around the world, where talking to people about societal issues is not only dangerous a lot of time for researchers, but it's dangerous for the respondents as well and trying to collect data that's actionable and interesting and relevant and getting people's perspectives where it's sometimes been the hardest places in the world to collect data and do measurement. That's my pitch for ESOMAR Foundation. If you've

never seen one of those sessions or tracks, go into ANA, which is our big data repository at ESOMAR and check some of them out because they're truly dazzling.

Well, we're really good friends so you won't mind me saying also that you leverage our relationship also to make me give to the ESOMAR Foundation, which I think is very awesome of you.

I do and I personally do it as well. So I don't ask you to do anything I don't do myself, Priscilla.

Fair enough. I love that. I say that jokingly, but it is our pleasure to do these kinds of things when we have received so much from the industry. But I think it takes people really advocating for it; otherwise, it just doesn't get pushed around. And kind of to that point, that luncheon that you invited me to, to talk about and be exposed to ESOMAR, I think it was me and forty of your other closest friends.

Yes. I'm very good at strong-arming people into coming to these events, because I think that you'll get a lot of value. You got to meet Joaquim Bretcha who's been our president the last two years. Joaquim and I have served on Council again for six years together. And I believe in the platform that he established. And there's still work to be done on it. I think our goal is to get as many people on the bus as possible so that we're all moving in the right direction, the same direction.

Right. I love that. So let me kind of tell my audience if they don't know you very well one other thing about you. Anybody who really knows you will know that you are there to not only mentor women but sponsor women into positions like this. And you are always out on the look for really advocating for diversity on panels, on stages, in associations, I mean across the board. So very exciting for me to have a woman running for president for ESOMAR. Tell me a little bit about what you see the future for ESOMAR, how we are going to go forward, whether you're president or not. How are we going to go forward with diversity and how are we going to bring more diverse voices to the table? Tell me about your take on that.

I'm really pleased that if you look at the candidate list for council this year, which is our board at ESOMAR, it's probably one of the most diverse groups of people that we've ever had run for council. We're seeing more candidates from Africa, more candidates from the Americas, more candidates from Asia-Pacific because I do believe that at least since I've been on Council, it's been pretty heavily weighted toward the UK and Europe. Of course, that's a tremendous amount of research spend that comes out of those associations, and then it's important to have representation there. But if you look at the Americas for instance, between

North and South America, 56% of the research spend comes out of there and yet we've had less than 10 percent representation on council in the past years. Likewise, we've not had a female President in over 12 years, and no one from the Americas as well or from any region outside of Europe. So I think diversity is a big part of it. I think that one of Joaquim's platforms that we've been working on the last few years has been this idea of building bridges. So how do we truly make a global association such that regardless of where you are in time zone or what language you speak, that you're able to access ESOMAR's platform and services in the same way that somebody in the Netherlands or in France is able to. And that's really important. I've got – you and I talked about this earlier, but I've had a couple people ask me, "Well, how are you going to serve as President of an association whose office is in the Netherlands when you're on the west coast of the States?" And my response to that is, "Hey, if we're a global association truly, then we absolutely have to be able to support that." Just as we would need to support a president in New Zealand or Australia or in Tokyo. I think that's fundamental to who we are as an association. The other two pillars of my campaign have really been around bringing younger researchers into ESOMAR. We've been talking about that for some time, and we're not doing a great job of bringing up the next generation of researchers. I think that there are a lot of tech and sort of non-traditional research companies that are coming into this space, because of the amount of private equity money flowing in. So they are tracking some of that younger talent, but I don't think a lot of the full-service research suppliers have been doing the greatest job at sort of bringing up that next generation, and we definitely want to promote that as an association.

I think that's super-important. It's not just a balance of gender or of race or ethnicity or just divergent voices, but there's also an age factor in here and what is the future of this industry. Yeah, I love that. So I'm going to take you back just a little bit, once upon a time when you started Women in Research.

Oh boy.

But now it's obviously a very large, global organization, which also we'll just give a quick plug. It's always free to join.

Yes, it is.

So no cost to women. But what's interesting and what I want to really ask you about, about your platform with ESOMAR is that you've always made a very clear statement that Women in Research is not just for women in research.

That's correct.

It's also for men who would support that. And you brought up Joaquim who actually has a platform who has tried to also recognize these issues, whether they're diversity in race or in voice or in culture or in gender, whatever it is. And so tell me a little bit about how you see ESOMAR, the organization where they are now supporting that and what work still needs to be done there.

We're fortunate at WIRe because we've had a very strong relationship with ESOMAR for years now. They're a strategic partner of ours. So we collaborate with them on content and programming. I think that diversity goes another step as well. We're looking at gender diversity, ethnic and racial diversity, but I think we also need to be looking at diversity in terms of skill-set. And one of the areas where I think as researchers we've been a little standoff-ish or kind of keeping at arm's length are data-as-a-service companies, and third-party data providers, data scientists, business intelligence, where it's like maybe they're not quite researchers or they're not doing standard primary research. So they've got all these scary data sets and we're not really sure what to do with them. I think in some cases there have been opinions or perspectives that we need to push back on that. From my perspective, we need to open our arms and bring those people into our community, so they understand the importance of data ethics, privacy, respondent satisfaction, and that we're bringing them into the fold versus excluding them. For me, I'm always trying to bring people together instead of exclude. I always think it's better to work together, and I also think that it really secures the future of our industry as we do start getting more and more familiar with different types of data and different service providers. And again, because of all the money coming into the industry from private equity and venture capital firms, I do think it's fundamentally kind of changing the face of research as we know it, but for the better.

It is interesting, because here I'm the CEO of a marketing agency, but when we're moving into an era where people are not just saying they want data-driven marketing messages and data-driven decisions, but maybe they might actually take the step for it, again, inviting more people into it for those of us who actually don't create the research but we use it, what are the ethics behind how we're going to use it? And I totally agree to that, and obviously you invited me into that. And I do think that I end up in very interesting conversations where it makes people say, "Oh, is that how our data is being used? That's interesting to me." And I'm, like, that's the kind of conversation I see happening.

Yeah.

But I want to end on this. I know I ask you all kind of questions and you and I – actually this conversation saved you and I a lot of thumb time texting this back and forth. But I’m super-excited that you’re running. But what did I not ask you? What should people know about what you want to do should you be president of ESOMAR? What’s something that you think that’s different than you bring to the table?

I’m a serial entrepreneur, which is –I’m going to give away my age now. I started my first company back in 1999. I’ve been in the industry a long time and I’ve worn a lot of different hats for everything from a researcher, to a strategist, to head of sales and marketing, to CEO. And I’ve been through tumultuous times like we’re going through now. I think this pandemic has really reset a lot of people’s expectations for their businesses in the last year. And it’s been a real struggle for some folks. And I think in some cases associations have struggled to give real business advice versus research advice. There are a lot of folks that suffered a lot this last year. I’m proud that my businesses survived the dot-com crash, survived the recession back in 2007 and 2009 and now a pandemic. So I think I’ve got a unique perspective on how to grow in turbulent times and ways that we can really modernize our associations and the membership services that we offer so that they’re relevant not only to researchers but also to business owners and, again, to these new types of companies that are coming into the industry.

I love that, I love that. So you mentioned a word that you use to describe yourself was that ‘inclusive’ kind of person. But I also would use, I think the first word that comes to mind is ‘generous’. And I think you’ve always been generous with your time, generous with your advice, and yes, of course you have paying clients as a strategist. But I have just been in so many conversations where you have just been generous to people, with just like really getting down to what is the issue that they have and trying to be genuinely helpful. So I appreciate that and I think you and I are completely sold on the idea that the more collaboration we have the better the industry is going to be, the better we are. We show up better when we work together. So I really appreciate that about you.

I appreciate that. Thank you. I think generosity of spirit is something that’s really important to me. I’ve had a couple people say like, “Gosh, you’re so busy and you’re on this board and that board and you’re advising this company. How will you ever have time to be ESOMAR President?” There’s this great saying, “If you want something done, give it to someone who’s busy.”

Exactly.

I'm very efficient. The thing is having been on Council for six years, I'm fortunate that I know the association inside and out now and I see the real opportunities for growth, and particularly in the markets where we haven't been as strong, South America, Africa, Asia-Pacific, enormous growth opportunities for us there. So I'm excited to have the opportunity to keep moving things forward.

I love it, and if you haven't [INAUDIBLE] ESOMAR and your listening, because you're actually somehow in the market research, then go check it out. That would be great. And obviously there's going to be a lot of great diverse voices for us all to choose from in voting this year. So, Kristin, thank you for always humoring me and coming on this show whenever I ask you.

Thanks for always having me, Priscilla.

You're a fan-favorite, so it's not really that hard.

I appreciate that.

Awesome. From all of us here at Little Bird Marketing, have a great day and happy marketing.