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Taking consumers' pulse

Research data is key to marketing company's success



Hour Photo/JENNIFER MANNA

Robert Shulman, President of Markitecture, with partner Pat Moore, at desk.

By **RYAN FLINN**
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — From the look of the tall white house on New Street, a passerby couldn't tell it's the office of successful marketing company, Markitecture. "That's the point," said company founder and president Robert Shulman.

What he does want people to know is the quality of workers he employs. Most have MBAs from Ivy League schools.

"I put my money into people, not location," he said. The Brien McMahon Hall-of-Famer worked in marketing and advertising for several years before forming Markitecture.

Former CEO of the marketing firm Yankelovich Clancy Shulman, the published author co-founded another marketing firm, Copernicus, in Westport, in 1994. When Shulman founded Markitecture a year ago, there were only two employees in the office. Now, overcrowded and ready to move, 12 employees and three interns have filled out almost every room in the house, to the point where the President is working in the unfinished attic. Another company has expressed an interest in merging with Markitecture.

His experience, his work and his philosophy on the industry has helped Shulman secure such major clients as ESPN, Saks Fifth Avenue, Mastercard and HBO.

The key to Shulman's success is using constantly updated market evaluations and following through with the information.

"One of the problems I recognize is that companies do research, but they don't translate that information well to marketing," Shulman said.

Shulman believes that the process of targeting the right audience for a product or service, and then constantly monitoring that audience, will keep a company successful. Also, he said it is

important to realize that a company's current client list will probably change within five years, so companies must learn to "bridge" between keeping current customers happy and understanding the wants and needs of prospective customers.

He only works with companies in need of a turning point — meaning they have a new product or are trying to turn around a failing business. A creative group will build an advertising campaign for the companies that need turning around. That specialty is important now that the economy has slowed. Markitecture aims to be an outsourcing marketing department for those companies.

As for research, Markitecture goes further than just giving consumers a questionnaire to fill out. Instead, the company uses visual aids and in-depth questioning to find out how attached participants are to their products, and tries to draw conclusions from this information.

"It's like buying a car: How you approach it explains a lot," Shulman said. "Some people will go online and research until they know everything about the cars they want, while others will just buy a car in their price range."

Knowing what approach consumers take can help make a marketing campaign successful, he suggested.

The company is currently working on 15 to 20 projects, most with similar problems. Shulman said these include companies that need to find a target market, products that need strategic positioning, and products that need to be redesigned or updated.

Elyse Gammer, advisory director of the Connecticut-based Marketing Research Association, said that more and more, companies are turning to qualitative research instead of quantitative.

"It's less expensive in the short term," said Grammer; and the benefits include a good snapshot of the consumer mindset. "You can get the pulse of the consumer," she added. However, because the participants in qualitative research are often limited to small groups, the data gathered are not statistically accurate and may not apply to a broad set of consumers.

A common problem with marketing research is that there is too much information out there, said Andrew Greenfield, of Greenfield Consulting in Westport. His firm conducts qualitative focus-group research. While many companies have access to consumer information, they have trouble sorting out the important pieces.

"What we have heard our clients say is that they are drowning in information, but that they have very little knowledge," Greenfield said. Shulman's use of "Applied insight," is what separates Markitecture from other firms, he said.

Finding a marketing company that handles a variety of research and marketing tasks is not difficult, said Greenfield, what is difficult is finding a company that can do it successfully.

"Robert Shulman is one of the few people that is able to offer those services credibly," said Greenfield.

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