

Interrogators who never ask what you really want to tell them

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As Britain changes from being the Workshop Of The World to Home Of The Office Complex And Leisure Park the shift is faithfully reflected in Snorbens.

Along with Britain Plc's parallel growth of a vague occupation known as *Promotion and Marketing* is a subdivision called *Market Research*. When I did economics at school and was taught that "Free Enterprise" was the basis for democracy and indisputably "a good thing", I had to draw little supply and demand graphs showing how supply, demand and price were related.

Although we were taught that competition was desirable, that the Co-operative Movement was idealistic nonsense and that without capitalism there would be no jobs, we were never introduced to the term Market Research.

Now I've come to the conclusion that *all* market research is carried out outside Town Hall - appropriately on market days. On Saturdays but more particularly on Wednesdays it is impossible to walk along Market Place without getting accosted by a horde of women bearing clip-boards and ingratiating smiles. Don't construe that statement as hostile to women. It's just that MR has become women's business and I've never encountered a male market researcher.

Anyway, I'm sick of being asked:

- a) What brand of cigarettes do I smoke?
- b) What brand of lager do I drink?
- c) What make of car do I drive?
- d) How many hours of TV do I watch per week?
- e) Whether or not I've got central heating, double glazing, a second bathroom, a water-softener and foam-filling in my wall cavity?
- f) What kind of video have I got, am I contemplating buying a new one and if I was what kind and make would I choose?

I suppose that, apart from being work that is suitable for part-time employees, it is assumed that women will meet with less resistance from their *targets* than men, but that is a serious miscalculation in my case and I've done a bit of amateur MR myself on how to combat the clip-board menace.

You see, I've noticed that when I'm wheeling my bike I *rarely* get questioned, and when I'm wearing my bicycle shorts I *never* get questioned. In the old days my habitual unshaven look was a strong deterrent but since the arrival of trendy stubble it no longer works.

Badges like "Support the miners" and "No Cruise Missiles here" work like the sign of the cross against vampires but they've got to be big enough to deter the MR'r before she's irrevocably targeted you and can't withdraw for fear of losing face.

To a certain extent the product determines whether you're questioned or not but it may cut across sartorial and physical boundaries. For example, if you're built like a darts player you may get endlessly questioned about beer and fags and if you're wearing a designer suit and a Gucci-style briefcase you may get canvassed about car telephones.

As a puritan who has never smoked, rarely drinks and believes - wrongly apparently - that he is a fit and healthy advertisement for such abstinence it wounded me deeply that so many MR women automatically assumed that I was habitually fixed on alcohol and nicotine.

I used to answer quite politely on the move, but determined pursuit by the more tough-minded women led me to drawl "I don't like to answer questions like these" without slowing down.

They combatted this by having a second interrogator hidden around the corner of the Town Hall or up the alley who'd pounce on me when I'd lowered my guard again.

Finally I found the best method was to adopt a facial expression of such fixed hostility/bad temper/lunacy - you can vary to suit mood and situation - that no-one has dared to stop me for months now but I feel resentful that, nevertheless, I still have to run the gauntlet every Wednesday.

Once when an MR woman stopped me to ask me about my consumption of a particular product I asked her *why* she was asking me the questions. She was completely thrown and couldn't manage anything more precise than "we'd just to know who buys our product".

I persisted - "but why?". Then some kind of MR "controller" arrived and took over - "it's so we can improve the product" she crooned flaming her media smile. I didn't and don't believe this and insisted that it was so they could improve the efficiency of *selling* the product. Thereafter the relationship between controller and target noticeably chilled.

There are some things I'd like to be questioned about but they never get asked in Snorbens. Our council's public consultation exercises have usually asked the wrong questions and ignored the answers if they haven't liked them. It reminds me of those unwelcome resolutions passed at Labour Party conferences which somehow seem to get stifled when it comes to writing the manifesto.

It's strange that Gallup, Mori, NOP, etc aren't queuing up by the Town Hall railings to ask me which way I'm going to vote in the election. I've never been asked in my life and I've never met anyone who has either - can it be that they are complete fiction and the result of inspired MR fantasy.

In fact it's perfect MR territory since our political parties are obsessed with selling images rather than policies. But I wouldn't answer their nosey questions anyway - I'd just like to know if my collection of unpleasant faces works as well on galluppers as it does on the lager ladies

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SELLEMBETTA Market Research Agency			
Quotas for April 1st 1987			
Group	fags & beer questions	car phones question	election question
Yuppies & Dinkies	1	99	29
Normals	10	8	79
Loony Left Cyclists	10	1	1
Proles	49	1	10
Darts players	50	1	1