

## Response to the Great Recession's Urgency for Added Manufacturer Info

For the most recent half of Bob Tomei's 28-year CPG information-delivery career, he's been the go-to guy for three major research suppliers in their deadly serious attempt to elevate the quality, reliability and usefulness of their respective proprietary databases. His sterling reputation began at ACNielsen, where from 1994-2007 he was instrumental in building the Homescan consumer panel into the world's largest and fortifying its reputation as the gold standard. He buttressed his industry reputation at TNS between 2007-2008, focused on its worldwide access panels. At both companies, Tomei proved himself adroit and savvy in upgrading internal consumer and shopper information databases and leading the charge in connecting and integrating them with proprietary retailer information sources.

In hiring Tomei as President-Consumer & Shopper Insights in July 2008, Information Resources, Inc. (now SymphonyIRI) issued a clear signal that it would revolutionize the aggregation, manipulation and usefulness of its database holdings. Attesting to that perception, Tomei told **RBR**, "I told [President] John Freeland that I was not coming here to manage or address the consumer panel's perceived holes—in other words, not to be a caretaker."

Almost two years after his hiring, surfacing technologies have broadened Tomei's vision and, more important, his ability to integrate disparate data sources outside the reach of his imagination a few short years ago. The goal: to unearth novel business-enhancing insights by clustering and aligning autonomous external data sources with those of SymphonyIRI. "Even with our great consumer database, my three-year strategy goes well beyond providing clients with

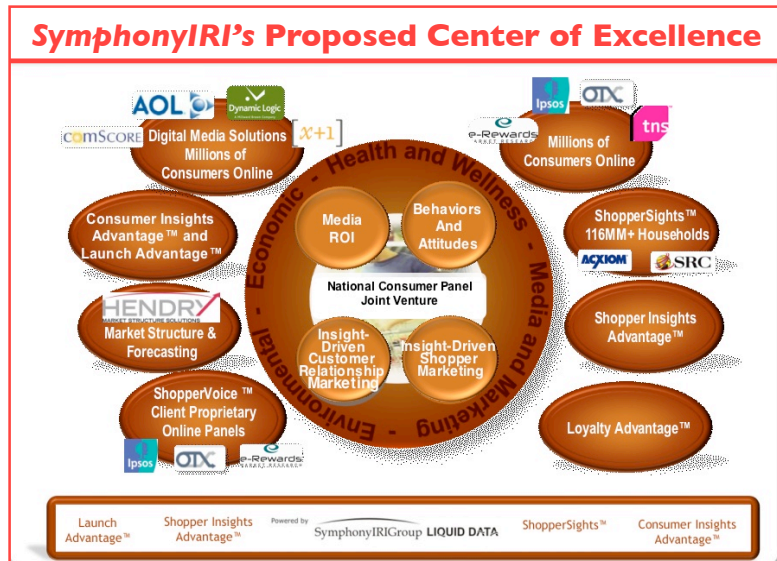
a better understanding of consumers and shoppers," he shared with **RBR**. Pulling out what he called a "pretty bubble chart," (see graphic, above) Tomei explained, "It presents a proposed new SymphonyIRI Center of Excellence, notably the areas where I thought we need to expand our consumer insights practice

through outside databases. This strategy—outside of our Liquid Data platform—takes the best of what's available in the marketplace and integrates it as a solution for our clients." (The research companies that can furnish valued external info are highlighted in outside ovals.)

"The idea is simple: to connect clients with millions of consumers and shoppers at home, online or in the store," he continued. "Our work with other com-

panies ties into attitudinal, perception and equity segmentation expertise. It's about understanding online segments through all digital media platforms, and lining up manufacturer consumer segments against retail shopper segments. There is an all-encompassing segmentation focus, something I've never seen in my career," Tomei said in utter amazement. "When I was at TNS, our environmental study linked to IRI's consumer panel. When the economy appeared to be falling though the floor early last year, so many barometers that manufacturers and retailers had relied on to gauge their relative health became so disrupted. People's patterns in every socio and economic strata fundamentally changed. It was a wakeup call for manufacturers to investigate influences on consumers' behavior more closely and differently."

Elaborating on outside sources collaborating with SymphonyIRI, Tomei remarked, "The middle bubble was in



External MR sources (shown in outside ovals) are to be integrated with SymphonyIRI data

place and functional at IRI. We have consumer networks, analytics and some shopper insights. The sections around it represent related information opportunities. We need to do a better job on attitudinal and behavior analysis. We need to tap into retail databases around shopper marketing, loyalty marketing. We need to work with clients, particularly in the CPG space, with respect to communities and online programs. We need to help clients identify opportunities they had about new products.

We need to expand our consumer and shopper capabilities and traditional analyses. Then, of course, there is the entire digital space, which two years ago—when I drafted this diagram—was not the hot topic that it is now.”

A decade ago, Tomei and ACNielsen faced methodological and technical obstacles that hindered data integration efforts. “The situation is far different today,” he observed. “Technology platforms, in particular what we have at SymphonyIRI, allow us to pull in and efficiently integrate large transactional databases. Just as important is the exponentially greater sophistication of retailers and CPG manufacturers.

“Frequent shopper programs were retailers’ traditional price reduction vehicle to build loyalty, but that has evolved into a means of communicating with shoppers who are not spending what might be anticipated in selected categories. The CPG marketplace’s understanding of direct-to-consumer and direct-to-shopper marketing has radically transformed the successful operation of digital media programs and online marketing and advertising. John and I believe we should be aggressive in enabling direct-to-consumer/shopper marketing programs, delivered to the home, online or in-store.”

Pivoting to the external data sources, Tomei stated, “Core content from our national consumer panel can help identify high-potential consumers for individual CPG categories or segments of consumers/shoppers online, and they are able to go to their clients to reach certain key segments that they want to advertise to. We have standardized our ROI analyses for AOL or x+I programs, which has allowed us to begin building a normative database



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*Bob Tomei  
President-Consumer and  
Shopping Insights  
SymphonyIRI*

around those that are most effective. Dynamic Logic evaluates online campaigns in traditional qualitative metrics, to which we’ve embedded our quantifiable ROI metrics, including the campaign’s possible contribution to sales. The same is true of comScore.

“The upshot of all that is our ability to advise our clients about their digital media programs—direct-to-consumer online marketing—and sales impact. Our ShopperSights capability, working with Acxiom and SRC, is first and foremost a segmentation tool—and that happens to be the CPG industry’s single hottest area because clients want to understand their franchise and how it lines up with retail shopper segmentation. ShopperSights is also a direct-to-consumer marketing program that identifies individual households in trading areas around individual stores.”

Documenting SymphonyIRI’s high-level technology, Tomei disclosed that the digital media and segmentation partnership rollouts “went very smoothly. It’s been a longer discussion process with some of the traditional research houses; it wasn’t difficult, but it didn’t happen as quickly. Multiple companies working together is never completely straightforward, but our partners have worked with us effectively,” he explained.

Asked by **RBR** how prepared SymphonyIRI clients are to take advantage of these enhanced data capabilities, Tomei responded: “Each of these solutions was designed around what clients said they needed. For instance, market structure is about growth and innovation. Our Hendry market structure business is integrated into our traditional market structure approach so that clients would have a best-of-breed evaluator of new product

opportunities. In 2009, as the economy limped along, many clients were not worried about top-line growth and innovation. In 2010, the reverse is true.

“On top of that, the level of economic turmoil and issues related to political, social and health & wellness corroded so much so rapidly that many marketers and retailers became uncertain about their traditional segmentations. We couldn’t know how bad the economy would weaken, but the winner in marketing was going to be companies that understood their changing consumer base and how to reach them with the correct message and tactics that maintained brand relationships. So, our strategy and its segmentation concentration line up exactly where our clients are focused.”

Tomei claims that “the vast majority” of top SymphonyIRI manufacturer and retail clients are tapping into the new information sources. “We don’t believe in a self-service model; we’re there to assist clients in adopting the solutions. These solutions have equal applicability and impact for both manufacturers and retailers. Our larger strategic customers are tending to use almost all of them. Some mid-tier and smaller clients are taking advantage of select options. But they are all interested in doing a better job of understanding customers and driving direct-to-consumer and direct-to-shopper activity. There is a lot of interest across the board. A number will be used day-to-day, like the ShopperSights application. The digital media programs require advance-planning, perhaps six months.”

He described the ROI on the new capabilities as “paying for itself and then some. We are planning on clients reallocating their funds.” Not meaning to tip his hand about the future, he nonetheless foresees “additional strong partnerships aligned around attitudinal segmentation. We will expand our digital partnerships and a new syndicated database that will enable substantial activity at a level never seen in the industry.” **RBR**

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