
Andy Romano

Research Director
Joined Zeldis Team: 2010



How long have you been with Zeldis Research?

I joined Zeldis in April, 2010. While I was at Rutgers majoring in psychology, I interned with a research firm that was later acquired by GfK. After graduation, I joined a boutique research shop that specialized in communities and panels. Ironically, those are catching fire now, so my career has come full circle.

What brought you to Zeldis?

I really gravitated to Zeldis' holistic philosophy and practice of integrating qualitative and quantitative in each team member's practice. I also liked the size of the company, and that it was nimble. I knew that I wanted to work with a firm smaller than the largest research companies, because at Zeldis, you are not just a cog; you're able to make a difference in every project.

When I joined, we were half our current size. Along the way, we've figured out how to keep doing great work for clients even as we've grown, simultaneously keeping our core values intact.

Was your experience primarily in qual or quant?

In college, my courses and internship were mainly quantitative-focused. But I learned to do qual at my first job, and all of us at Zeldis continue to do both.

What is the balance of these approaches in your work now and what are the advantages of combining them?

The benefits for clients in a combined qual/quant approach overlap in a few ways.

Ken Zeldis once said that being a moderator is a great way to learn the client's business, because you not only immerse yourself in the industry but also gain full knowledge of the brand. The researcher gains a better understanding of the client's needs by being involved in every phase of the study, not just handing it over to a researcher solely focused on the numbers or a moderator who's focused solely on a limited portion of the research. The client gains a researcher with a holistic view of the study objectives and an integrated analysis of the findings.

Additionally, combining qual and quant initiatives in one researcher or team has other benefits to the client: they receive greater efficiencies which can result in lower costs and improved convenience.

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Can you cite a recent or current example of how this blend has benefited a client?

More often than not, clients have a pretty good handle on their hypothesis. But qual studies, when run in advance of a quantitative initiative, can serve as a gut check. They get to throw stuff at the wall and see what sticks. Recently, we tested a client's concept that we thought would be well received by end users, but the concept didn't have much traction with them. So we were able to refine the concepts based off of the qualitative feedback, and drive toward areas the audience felt were of greater value.

And going from qual to quant, you are able to hear from and speak with a specialized audience, so that in the quantitative phase, you ensure you're communicating with the right language.

Describe your growth – professional as well as personal – while you have been at Zeldis. How has the company contributed to this growth?

I would say my career at Zeldis parallels the company's growth. As an example, our visual reporting has grown by leaps and bounds and I've been able to contribute to this as I've become more proficient.

On a larger scale, we're more focused on growth, while keeping what makes our company great to work with and for. At our quarterly company meetings, we discuss our core values. We're challenged to describe our own goals, as well as how our day-to-day responsibilities are actively contributing to our company values. What makes us a strong company is the recognition that everyone has different strengths to contribute, and these are leveraged for the benefit of our clients and for both personal and company growth. All three are connected and dependent upon one another for optimal success.

You have been involved in the use of newer technologies such as video in market research. How do you see these benefiting the industry?

Video is becoming more common and it will only grow as the technology continues to get cheaper, better and more user-friendly. It adds to the value of the research: Looking at the numbers in a report is one thing, but watching a respondent talk about it can be more powerful in terms of making a visceral connection to an audience's experience. Video adds flavor, illustrating and drawing clients into the data in a more emotional way. Many of our clients find that video helps their stakeholders -- who aren't as research-focused -- connect with the data on a deeper level.

But while technology is getting better and making it easier to share big data files, for example, everything is not yet seamless. We've evaluated methodologies that integrate video and text on a screen, but there's a lot of nuance preventing this from working well without human involvement at this time. This technology, despite recent advancements, is still just a tool. There is still no replacement for a knowledgeable researcher who can weave quotes and video and audio clips into results to tell a coherent and compelling story.

Is there a philosophy – either personal or professional or both – that guides your work?

Taking a step back to reflect, to look at the bigger picture, is so important, especially when your day-to-day life is so busy. It's important to always be looking for opportunities to improve and grow in every situation, whether with colleagues or friends.