Editorial

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Recent news that marketing budgets are growing is encouraging after half a decade of constraint. As more money flows towards activities that will increase sales and market share, some aspects of the last 5 years are likely to stay in place, principally the need to demonstrate a return on investment and prove why a particular activity is worth spending on.

While higher budgets are good news, the bad news is that marketing has not particularly improved its ability to make the ROI case during the recession. It might have seemed like the ideal time to work hard on metrics, since every pound was so hard to come by. But a number of factors have worked against marketers. First, there is the rate of change and expansion of digital channels, each of which has its own challenges around measurement (and often has a proprietary data model that makes it hard to integrate the information).

Even the most deep-pocketed brands are unable to be present — or even to experiment — in all of the channels on offer, which makes the argument for multi-member research and knowledge exchange all the stronger. Professor Robert Shaw has spent the last few decades working on marketing effectiveness and cause-and-effect models. The latest iteration of this work may help brands — confronted with the dizzying multi-channel world — to gain a better grasp on where they should be deploying their newly refreshed budgets (see pp. 260–261).

The second difficulty for marketers is the rapid change in consumer behaviour. With each new way to discover products and services via social, mobile and digital channels, consumers have not only taken a lot of control away from marketers, but they are increasingly behaving in far more random ways than were ever assumed. The visibility of these patterns, which is enabled by big data, should be worrying digital marketers since it shows that the funnel model usually assumed to drive a prospect towards purchase and then retention is no longer reliable.

Worse, consumers can be seen to be jumping back and forth across channels and the stages that marketers assumed they would follow. Some individuals repeatedly research and specify a product without ever appearing to buy. Others jump straight to purchase but only as a one-off. Yet, more engage with what their peers are saying on social media rather than what marketers have to say before they make up their minds.

While many of these touchpoints can be identified, the paths between them have to be drawn in dotted lines, since it is not clear what else customers have been doing. Out of this apparent randomness new models are emerging that might help marketers to predict where their prospects and customers will be.

You can learn how academic research is starting to sketch out the new consumer framework in this special issue, put together by Julia Wolny, chair of the e-Marketing SIG of the Academy of Marketing. Its contents provide a great illustration of how the academic world is responding to the needs of marketing practitioners by exploring the new territorial interface between brands and their consumers.

Consumers have gone digital and marketers have no choice but to adapt. As with every development in targeted, responsive marketing, the *IDM Journal* is following suit by making sure it brings you the best possible insight to help improve your own chances of a sustainable recovery.

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