Book review

Exploring Direct & Customer Relationship Marketing (second edition)

Martin Evans, Lisa O'Malley and Maurice Patterson

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This book makes an important contribution to the rapidly developing domains of direct and customer relationship marketing. The authors provide the reader with an extensive overview of customer relationship marketing. They also discuss the manner in which direct marketing can support putting the relatively theoretical customer relationship marketing propositions into operation. They go beyond the limitations of most previous work in the discipline, which has often been highly theoretical, ignoring basic issues concerning application of customer relationship marketing or, alternatively, too focused on technology, lacking consideration of strategic issues.

In this book the authors lead the reader from the somewhat abstract issues of customer relationship marketing in Part 1 of the book, to the role that the customer data and information, derived from such data can play in customer relationship marketing in Part 2. A main argument is that data on what the customer has purchased, when and how often, as well as information on other

customer characteristics, does not compensate for a true understanding of one's customers. This observation is not new, but the solution the authors offer (in Parts 3 and 4) is. Here the authors discuss how data may be used, in combination with important substantive insight, for customer relationship marketing. Part 3 discusses the type of customer relationship marketing that a theoretically inspired data driven direct marketing approach may lead to. Here the authors find an appropriate balance between the more strategic relationship marketing concepts and the manner in which data and technology can support customer relationship marketing. Part 4 is pitched at a more operational level, addressing how media and messages directed at individuals can support relational interaction. The discussion of the use of behavioural science theory for the enhancement of communication through various channels is particularly lucid. Finally, Part 5 addresses the position and impact of customer relationship marketing in society. In this part of the book, the firm's social

responsibility, privacy issues and customer reactions to relationship marketing are the topic of interest.

In their discussion, from the more theoretical issues of customer relationship marketing through its implementation to its the impact on society, the authors provide illustrative examples derived from business practice. These examples display how the propositions made can be implemented and the consequences of their implementation. This not only enhances reading enjoyment, but also plays an important role in translating the theoretical propositions into marketing practice.

Another strong point of the book is the observation that direct marketing has a distributional origin. The authors show how the distributional background of direct marketing is still relevant in the era of customer relationship marketing and has major consequences for contemporary business.

The only notable limitation of the book concerns the discussion of background theory. There are, what the authors term, 'theoretical boxes' throughout the book, but these are somewhat brief. However, much theory is available on direct marketing and on customer relationship marketing and a

more extensive discussion would probably lead to a book which is too lengthy.

Summing up, the authors present an important book in which the theory of customer relationship marketing is translated into direct marketing practice. The primary goal is to provide undergraduate and graduate students of marketing and related disciplines with a suitable textbook. I believe they have succeeded in this, but think the relevance of the book goes beyond academics. The book is also interesting reading for practitioners commencing a career in the fields of direct marketing and customer relationship marketing. Furthermore, the book is of relevance to more experienced practitioners looking for a translation of theoretical customer relationship marketing issues into direct marketing practice, supported by real-life examples, and optimised by making the link with distributional aspects of business practice.

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