Editorial

This is going to be an unusual editorial. Unusual, first, because this issue should be breaking new ground — and to a degree it is doing. But unusual, too, in that at the time of writing I am not quite as sure as I would ordinarily be about what will be in the *Journal*.

I will explain.

In the last issue, it was hinted that the *Journal of Database Marketing* was aiming at including greater coverage of practice; that it would seek to include papers from ‘the client side’ where a particularly interesting achievement was illustrated, where a new best practice was unveiled or, in general, where a key learning point could be gleaned from what went on.

As always, we are interested in the views of our readers about changes to approach — and any feedback on the above would be welcome. The bottom line, however, is that there will be much more material in the *Journal* that relates directly to success (and possibly failure) in the implementation of customer strategy.

This issue pulls together a series of practice papers in the area of marketing resource management (MRM). This is a fast-growing area of new marketing technology. Already, MRM — in common with its sound-alike cousin, CRM — is beginning to draw both plaudits and brickbats in almost equal measure.

Plaudits, because it offers a solution to certain areas of marketing governance that have hitherto been beyond the reach of most marketing managers. Much as it

might upset marketers to hear this, a large part of marketing is essentially repetitive. The same, or similar, media attacked by the same sorts of communication to broadly the same targets, time and time again.

Repetitive — but not carbon copy. So it is not possible to manage marketing activity with the same rigour with which one would manage supply chain decisions — or more formal financial areas. And yet ... if only one could standardise some of the recording of activity, some of the measurement, there are so many lessons that could be extracted from everyday marketing activity that ought to help increase the overall effectiveness of the area.

So, one benefit of MRM is that it provides companies with the means to standardise the recording of activity. This standardisation goes far deeper than simple agreed definitions of the units of trade — what constitutes a campaign, a sale, etc. The best MRM systems allow marketing to mesh completely with financial systems, so, in future, the world view created by the marketing departments will reflect the broader world view created for the company directors.

This, in itself, is very important, as it makes it far more likely that marketing will be taken seriously when it makes claims for the value of its activities. From personal experience, I am well aware of how much work sometimes needs to go into aligning marketing activity with the finance department’s world view. A lot of work and little guarantee that, at the end

of the day, the view created will be believed.

Thus, MRM standardises; it brings marketing in from the cold. It also provides a means for managing copy, brand properties, creative solutions and the like. It pulls marketing activity together in a way that has not happened previously.

So, where are the brickbats? As for CRM, many of the solutions being provided are technology led. We have a new area of interest and we have many, many companies starting to think about 'getting involved'. We have potentially six or seven figure investment budgets about to be unleashed in many areas.

And, in many companies, we probably have no clear idea (beyond the sales hype) of what MRM can achieve. What benefits it can bring about and what the quantifiable value of those benefits is likely to be.

Does that sound familiar? As with CRM, the chief danger is likely not to be the 'failure' of MRM *per se*, but its failure to live up to exaggerated expectation. Instead of expecting MRM to bring about a few clearly defined and quantified improvements to the way a business trades, decision makers will first be wooed with tales of how MRM can do EVERYTHING ... and then surprised and disappointed when it delivers only a small proportion of what was promised.

As for CRM — and every other solution that can get lost in the technology maze — the imperative is for clear benefits, realisable goals and technology that is driven by those from the outset, rather than a wild technological ramble with no clear end in sight.

So much for the polemic. This issue contains a fairly extensive special section devoted to MRM. It includes insight and input from individuals and

companies renowned for their contribution to managing this field — Professor Malcolm MacDonald, Gartner Consulting and Michael Moon. It also includes some real experience based on real case studies, such as those by Schriever and Kerpisci. Insight also from Graham Jarvis, who set out to answer the question; 'Where can companies find support for implementing MRM?' — and found that there were very few good formal answers. No books, no established literature base. Almost nothing!

This issue also includes a number of non-MRM related papers drawn from the same academic base as previously. If you are looking for insight and learning into how to take MRM forward in your company, I believe that this issue could be very helpful indeed. And it should set the tone for future special issues — which should enable us to look, from time to time, at specific issues that need to be tackled as a whole, rather than piecemeal.

The unusual aspect to this issue is that we are taking greater input from the client side. My experience is that this always creates some difficulties, because clients like to keep their secrets to themselves. More often than not, they are right to do so. If an organisation has learnt, over the years, the secret of marketing success, it would be foolhardy in the extreme if it let it all out into the public arena.

So, pulling together client material is a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, looking for insights that will be of interest to others; on the other, finding insights that are interesting without imperilling the commercial success of the organisation doing the revealing.

That makes my own life more difficult. First, because submissions often take longer; when I am dealing with academic research, I am concerned first

with the quality of the paper, second with the value of the insight and finally with the ability of the author to deliver a legally unencumbered paper to a deadline. One person, usually, one paper.

With organisations, one may still be dealing with one author, but, behind the scenes, many inputs need to be consulted. The author wishes to make a series of bold points as clearly as possible. The manager of another department is concerned that boldness might reveal too much. So a cut is mooted; whereupon the owner of a third point of view feels they now need to change their own input. Meanwhile, the PR inclination is to highlight the good news and play down the bad. And so it goes on. There is nothing especially surprising (or wrong) in this approach. Managers in a large organisation carry a much heavier load of responsibilities to others than does the lone academic. But it does make my own life that much harder!

Which is why, as we go to press, I am still in discussion over one or two additional articles: will they come in, or are they not yet at a point where I feel

they should be included? It is a nail-biting experience.

Enough, almost, to make me turn away from a practise-centred approach — but not quite. I believe that this is where the value lies and I also believe very strongly in what I learned when first I worked for a commercial organisation. Ideas are interesting, but most businesses spend their time generating ten times more ideas than they could ever put into practice. So, at the end of the day, sharing of good practice is nothing to be feared. It creates a pool of experience — and feedback — that ends up by being mutually beneficial to all the organisations concerned.

There is a time and a place for industrial secrets — but far fewer things need to remain commercially confidential than is commonly assumed.

It would make my own life easier: more importantly, it would make the life of all managers easier.

JOHN OZIMEK
Managing Editor