Book Reviews

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Geodemographics, GIS and Neighbourhood Targeting

Richard Harris, Peter Sleight, Richard Webber
John Wiley, 2005; softback; 328pp; £29.95
ISBN 978-0-470-86414-2

An academic book

Make no mistake — this is an academic book, a very academic book. It culls examples of geographic information systems from all over the world and the reporting is in the hands of professors. No marketing shorthand here, no rhetoric, no breezy anecdotes. It's dutiful, informative and dominated by boring old reason.

As such it's just about unreadable. But, if it goes unread in marketing departments, it would be a pity. For it tells a story about the development of geographically referenced information and reports just how central such techniques now are to all our lives. Government and the public sector have effectively been using geodemographics since their computers allowed them to in the 1970s.

And the origins of the technique go way back to the 19th century when Charles Booth published his Map of London Poverty in 1889 — which you can still view online. When and if you do, you will find that the whiskered Victorian was applying techniques very familiar to the ACORN generation.

So there is a lot of history here. And lots of maths. And lots of acronyms. GRASS anyone? PRIZM? PSYTE? And some sentences that are beyond parody. My favourite is on p. 107. 'A raster' it tells us 'can be understood as a grid with associated attribute values'. So that's all right then

Puts both sides of the argument

But it is almost certainly unfair to look for demotic English in such a book. Where it scores is in its ability to question the efficacy of the techniques it is describing. There is actually a 'Case for the Prosecution' chapter that pours scorn on the science and then a 'Case for the Defence' that justifies it. Professors they may be but they are trying to be even-handed; they are certainly not selling you anything but knowledge.

Scepticism?

I guess most of us retain a degree of scepticism about GIS. When I lived in London, my post code indicated poverty, unemployment, single parent families and all sorts of ills. In fact, I was just about the only bloke on the street who didn't appear regularly on television. Do we really cluster as much as the GIS-wallahs insist? Do we really emulate our neighbours, adopt similar social values, buy the same things? Are we really birds of a feather flocking together?

A distribution system

The revealed fact surely is that these techniques simply offer a distribution system and not a Great Truth. Add the timeless phrase

‘A very special offer to residents in Highgate’ and at least you’ll catch a few eyes and get your copy better read. But, if you just apply the science without incremental creativity, you’ll be committing the same thoughtlessness as those whose brains are already imprisoned by satellite navigation devices. ‘The computer said you were miles up the road’ reported the last van driver who delivered here. He said it with a distinct sense of accusation, too.

Authoritative

Do not sit down and try to read through this book. Dip into it, allow it to provoke you. It is comprehensive, it is honest and, if it is low on direct marketing examples, then it is fertile with other applications, many of them surprising. The word ‘authoritative’ cannot be avoided.

George Smith F IDM

Guerrilla Marketing Research

Robert J. Kaden

Kogan Page, 2006; hardback; 229pp; £16.99

ISBN 0-7494-4574-2

Definition by Levinson

My first reaction to this book was to look for an answer to the question: ‘what exactly is *guerrilla* marketing, and what does this mean in the context of marketing research?’ Kaden helpfully provides the answer in his Introduction, quoting the guru on this topic, Jay Conrad Levinson: ‘*achieving conventional goals, such as profits and joy, with unconventional methods, such as investing energy instead of money*’. That’s a good start, but I thought it might be interesting to see a bit more of what was in the mind of Levinson when he introduced the term ‘Guerrilla Marketing’ to the world in the 1980s, and whether there were other any messages relevant to interpreting this latest text on the ‘guerrilla’ theme. In *The Guerrilla Marketing Handbook*, written with Seth Goodin in 1994, the authors state that:

‘In order to sell a product or a service, a company must establish a relationship with the customer. It must build trust and rapport. *It must understand the customer’s needs, and it must provide a product that delivers the promised benefits*’.

Understanding the consumer is therefore seen as of paramount importance. The italics are mine. Guerrilla marketing was also originally a concept to help smaller companies develop creative and low cost marketing strategies that would help them improve *profits* (not sales, or turnover) by getting closer to the customer and more agile than their larger competitors. However, the principles and techniques advocated by Levinson for small companies based on investments in time, energy and imagination (rather than money!), have also been successfully adopted by the big guys.... Finally, a key premise is that guerrilla marketing should be underpinned by a strong understanding of human psychology, rather than simply using ‘experience, judgment and guesswork’, so often the decision-making process for the smaller enterprise.

Emphasises the need for professional research

So, if understanding consumers and their needs is a key principle within the vision laid down by the founder (?) of guerrilla marketing, and increased profits are the goal, the question is whether Kaden's book lives up to expectations — does it do what it says on the tin? One further interesting point is that the author has also written 'numerous articles on market research applications for direct marketers'. Therefore, a second key question — does this mean that this book is particularly relevant to readers of JoDDDM?

My initial concern was that, following on from reading about the principles of guerrilla marketing, this would be a DIY guide to creatively conducting marketing research at minimal cost. Kaden firmly nails his colours to the mast in the introduction — the book is *not* about getting research for free, it's about doing it professionally. A sigh of relief there then! And the author points out later on in the book that poor quality research won't help you make better decisions, it will simply be a dangerous waste of scarce resources. Why dangerous? Because the future survival of your business could be at stake if poor research leads to flawed decisions. And doing no research at all could lead to the same outcome. Kaden presents powerful arguments for investing in research and why understanding consumers is so important. For example, as a response to one common reason for not undertaking research, 'respondents lie', Kaden neatly replies: *'They don't really know how to lie about your business because they haven't a clue what you want to hear'*! I'm really warming to this guy!

Practical advice and common sense; 'market' not 'marketing' research.....

Firstly, the good news. There is no doubt that this book contains a wealth of practical advice and a common sense approach to commissioning research, but it's 'market', rather than 'marketing', research he's talking about. This may seem like splitting hairs, but Kaden's text is focussed on market research projects and methodologies, not the wider informational needs of marketing. Throughout the book, it is obvious that the author is extremely well versed in this sector and someone who really understands what matters from a market research client perspective.

... leading to more cost-effective decisions

What I see in this book is a clearly written textbook about market research. As such I think it beats many other books on the market, especially with its research buyer/user perspective. In particular, the author underlines the point several times that the main reason for commissioning market research is to ensure that the results lead to making better and more cost-effective decisions — in other words, research projects need to be firmly linked to business goals. The author, for example, recommends that those attending presentations of research projects should be sent a copy of the report in advance plus a simple single sheet to fill in and return to recommend ideas for action against each of the key findings. A nil return from any participant leads to a cancelled presentation! As an ex client-side research manager, this sounds to me like excellent advice.

Need for planning of research

I also particularly liked the section on the research plan, especially how to derive the objectives for a research project from the business

issue. The author clearly describes how this step is essential in identifying the type of research project that is most appropriate, the target population for sampling purposes and the research methodology. As anyone working in a research agency would tell you, many clients fail to spend sufficient quality time on planning research projects — and thereby end up with findings that don't address the real issues, leading to yet another report left to gather dust on the office shelves.

If you only read the chapters on Asking the right questions, The research plan and Putting the results into action, I guarantee that your market research projects will be more effective and improve the added value of your investment, leading to improved decision making — and hopefully increased profitability of your business.

On the bad news front, after reading the book I'm not sure to what extent Kaden's aim is in fact to tempt readers to do a bit of DIY, rather than primarily giving them the necessary insights to become confident and knowledgeable market research buyers. If the key goal of guerrilla marketing is to increase profits, then I see a high opportunity cost if small companies undertake DIY market research — a potential misdirection of scarce resources. Better to use this resource to more effectively commission research experts and learn to use the results wisely in gaining profitable competitive advantage. For example, I don't believe that readers should contemplate facilitating a focus group based on simply reading Kaden's advice. His words may help you get more out of qualitative research, but leave the de-coding of human behaviour to the experts! If you want professional research, then surely it is better to use the professionals.

However, the main problem with this book, especially for UK-based readers, is the heavy bias towards conducting research in the USA marketplace. For example, the potentially extremely useful information about research costs is undermined by all the examples being in \$. This is not simply an exchange rate issue — real costs differ on either side of the North Atlantic. A further 'americanism' is that field interviewing as we know it in the UK is barely covered at all, simply because this is now virtually nonexistent in the USA. Finally, the recommended sources for finding research suppliers are again biased to the North American market. These are, in my view, major constraints on the value of the book in the UK. I hope this is something that the publishers might consider in a second edition.

So, while I think that this book should come with a bit of a health warning, on balance I found that it contained a lot of good, practical advice for those wanting to commission better quality research projects, and understand how to gain the maximum added value from investing in market research. And ignore the 'guerrilla' in the title — this text provides value to any research buyer, whatever size of company you work for. Research agency executives will also learn about what clients really need, and how to deliver it. But don't expect the creativity that you might expect based on Levinson's principles of guerrilla marketing. It doesn't quite do what it says on the tin — this is a no-nonsense guide to the well-established principles for commissioning market

Facilitating DIY research??

US bias

A no-nonsense guide to established principles

research projects, and all the better for it. It will bring you much closer to understanding your customers and what really matters to them.

I teach the Market Research module on the IDM Diploma programme and I'm certainly going to add this to the reading list for students.

But, and it's a big but, pity about the American viewpoint, and, please don't be tempted to do a spot of DIY.

Finally, don't expect Kaden's direct marketing experience to show through. It's a general market research book aimed at all marketers.

Peter Mouncey F IDM