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Book Reviews

Global Sourcebook of Address data Management: A Guide to Address Formats and Data in 194 Countries

Graham Rhind

Gower, UK; 1998; ISBN 0566081091; hardback; A4; 615 pp; £195

Computerised manipulation — normalising, matching, and de-duplication — of names and addresses started in the UK in 1964, in France in 1962, and in the USA a few years before that. Writing programs to perform these tasks, separately in each country, was the most intractable problem that the commercial computer industry had until then faced, and arguably it remains so to this day.

The underlying reason for this is that there are, and can be, no ‘correct’ rules for matching two datasets which may be two variants of the same name and address, or may represent two different persons and/or addresses: there is only a series of sub-optimal solutions which, in varying circumstances, will give varying numbers of under-matches (failing to identify duplicates where these exist) and over-matches (wrongly identifying duplicates where they do not exist).

Although perfection in this area will forever be beyond our reach (or at least until we, and our addresses, are known by unique check-digitised identity numbers instead of names) nevertheless considerable advances have been made in moving, inch by painful inch, nearer to that unattainable goal. The biggest single step in the UK was the Post Office’s introduction, in the 1970s, of postcodes — a step now mirrored in most countries of the world. As a result, anyone in possession of a copy of the postal address file (PAF) can now obtain a correct and unambiguous representation of (almost) any combination of street name, town name, and county in the country. (Almost, because the PAF itself is not completely up to date at any given moment, and, even allowing for that, has never yet reached a state of perfection.) That leaves, in the ambiguous realm, only house numbers (or house names in madly eccentric countries like the UK, where numbers are not universally employed) and personal names.

But correct and unambiguous is one thing; writing an address the way the recipient of your communication — your prospective customer — wants to read it may be altogether another. And in these days of customer-centred marketing, the customer is king. So, the practice of normalising addresses to render them postally correct, which in the 1960s through to the 1980s might have been standard practice, would today be unwelcome to a number of customers. Consider the case of a friend of mine who lives in a village in Buckinghamshire called Fulmer. To be postally correct, his address should end:

Fulmer
SLOUGH, SLX XXX
Bucks.

However, no one living in Fulmer wishes to be associated with Slough, so anyone desiring my friend's custom would be well advised to omit the offending term: the Royal Mail, God bless them, will deliver it anyway. And anyone to whom my friend gives his address (which will not mention Slough) would be particularly ill-advised to 'correct' it. Marketers who once thought they had solved addressing problems (so far as this was possible) are now having to 'go the extra mile': they may still have to correct customer mis-spellings, and eliminate ambiguities — but having done that, they had better let the customer decide how (s)he wishes to be addressed.

Now consider this problem on an international scale. International direct mail and mail order are in their infancy, but they will grow. Anyone engaged in this type of enterprise faces the same problems all over again, but multiplied many times: how to address a mailing piece for each country such that it is unambiguous, conforms to accepted local practice, and is acceptable to the recipient.

This monumental tome is a vital first step in answering this conundrum. Of course its virtue in giving worldwide comprehensive coverage is also a vice in creating overkill: not many direct marketers will be sending mail to Burkina Faso or Nauru (where's that?) this year. But that's a trivial complaint: almost every question you might want to ask about addressing in any country you might wish to mail to — and not a few questions you never thought to ask, but should have done — is answered here. Consider just one example: did you know that if you send mail to someone at a business address in Sweden, and the address is formatted:

a)	Personal name	or b)	Company name
	Company name		Dept name
	Dept name		Personal name

case (a) will be regarded as private and personal mail, to be opened by the addressee only, and case (b) as company mail?

The book opens with a list of the 194 countries covered, followed by the 91 different address formats used by them: where should the postcode be placed for country X; does the premises number precede or follow the street name in country Y; which address elements are mandatory, and which not, etc. (One word of reassurance for UK marketers: the UK has much the most complex set of address formats of anywhere, so those of you that have sweated blood over this problem in the UK should find most other countries a doddle.)

There follows a list of the correct way of writing 'PO Box' in each country, succeeded by a discussion of diacritical marks (accents to you) and the problems of representing accented letters in ASCII, followed in turn by a list of 29 languages, where, by whom and in what numbers each is spoken, how each is alphabetised (Roman script only, although equivalent letters in Greek script are also shown), and what accents are in use in each. Then comes a list of the most commonly used job titles in 12 European countries, and a list of the mail return codes in six European languages.

This takes us to page 85, after which comes a country-by-country section occupying the rest of the book. Name, size, population, capital, currency, language(s) and international telephone access code are given for each. Alternative place names are given (in Estonia some town names exist in Estonian or German; in parts of the UK Welsh or Gaelic may be preferred by some to English; whether you send your mail to Aix-la-Chapelle or to Aachen may represent a political statement — or seem to.) And very, very much else.

Of course there are imperfections: Gaelic is variously given as being spoken by 20,000 or by 88,000 people in Scotland; there is no such place as Kirkcudbrightshire despite the Post Office — the correct designation is the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. More importantly, the section on Japan seems suspiciously thin — just over one page compared with 22 pages for Italy, and not all subjects are covered for all countries (for example there is a useful list of personal titles, and their abbreviations, for the Netherlands, but not elsewhere).

What this book now needs to complement it is an authoritative publication on postal sortation and postal discounts in and for at least European countries. But we must not quibble: what we already have here is an essential work of reference for any company engaged in international postage. Buy it, and consult it frequently.

R. Fairlie

Direct Marketing — An Integrated Approach

William J. McDonald

McGraw-Hill International Editions, UK; 1998 ISBN 0071159517;
532pp; paperback; £24.99

A book to cover the whole gamut of direct marketing is a daunting undertaking. The IDM's own reference manual runs to some 1,200 pages and has contributions from over 40 contributors. From time to time all-embracing (and cheaper!) tomes appear on the market but even they probably still have to be measured against the 1964 classic *Direct Mail and Mail Order Handbook* brilliantly put together at that time by Richard S. Hodgson. His book ran to 1,102 pages and was as comprehensive — and usable — a handbook as you could wish. Dated now, and more than adequately replaced by the IDM's (considerably more expensive) guide, it could still shrug off this particular 532-page manual.

Not that this is a bad book. Aimed at the general manager or marketing student, and written by an author undescribed in the text but who must be a university professor, it explains the basic strategies and techniques of direct marketing, gives plenty of case studies and examples, and includes a disk-based computer program to help the beginner prepare a case analysis. The program, DMPAS, is supplied on four diskettes and is aimed specifically at the student (self-taught or on a course). It reprises ten case studies from the appendix of the book (including Avon, Fidelity, Franklin Mint, the Home Shopping Network) and begins revealingly, 'You

should select a case based on the assignment you receive from your instructor.' The exercises in that program are useful but are American based; calculating sales tax, for example, and returning a US postal sortation. Within the packages, the list of 'DM Tools' at one's disposal is not comprehensive, excluding, for example, door drops or free product enclosures. It nevertheless provides a useful exercise for the student to work through. (Don't discard the disks, incidentally — you have to reload disk 4 each time you play.)

The on-screen program is interactive, with all the virtues of involvement. That is useful, because the book itself is thorough but uninspirational. The publishers might argue that this is its strength — and a novice general reader, suspicious of the high promise and showmanship of such writers as Bird, McCorkle or Rapp and Collins, might take comfort from the measured, course tutor language within these pages. The book contains sections on segmentation and target marketing, database marketing, creative strategy and execution, as well as separate chapters on direct marketing via print, mail, TV, and radio. Business to business is given its own compartment, and there are worked examples on calculating profitability from different types of campaign.

Not only is it an American book, but it seems to have been put together over the whole of the last decade. Far too many of the statistics are out of date, and all the references are to American products and markets. Entertaining as it is for a British reader to discover that in PRIZM, an American geodemographic classification, there are such residential clusters as 'Furs and Station Wagons', 'Money and Brains', 'God's Country', 'Downtown Dixie Style' and 'Golden Ponds', it is a disappointment to find every list of suppliers or media so resolutely American. It is even more disappointing to discover that so many of these are out of date. Had you wanted a breakdown of American space advertising expenditure it is doubtful that you would have wanted it for 1994 versus 1993. Neither would you have wanted to compare list volumes for 1990 versus 1991 or to check the business-to-business market for 1990. You would have been surprised to find a worked example on list segmentation which targeted people who had purchased a car in 1984 or 1985. (The example is still valid, but couldn't it have been reset?) The statistics quoted in any book must, of necessity, be a little out of date, but even when we reach 'The Future of Direct Marketing' we are invited to 'imagine the following scenario: The time is September 1999 ...' That is not what the reviewer thinks of as the future. Numerous perfectly valid sections of this book have all too plainly been copied in from earlier articles elsewhere — and it makes you wonder about the prices quoted for the mailing list packages in chapter 6 — all American, naturally, but are they still so cheap? (We learn little, either, from the two pages about the Internet, since they quote volumes from 1994–95.)

The book is littered with this old data, none of which helps convince us it is up to date. Any reader, for example, who attended a recent IDM evening will have heard that 80 per cent of Hewlett Packard's current product range did not exist three years ago. To read a brand new book

rejoicing in statistics that are five, even ten years old is no longer acceptable. Of course, the author would argue, though things date quickly now the basics remain (largely) unchanged. Most of those basics are covered here, and for the most part they are explained clearly and without hype.

A niggle again: why does McDonald think an A/B split cannot test 'positioning, theme or visual content' (page 367) when those are among the very things it can test best? The book takes as long on this basic but important test technique as on Internet marketing (which is fair enough), but then goes immediately into a detailed analysis of the use of ANOVA by TV Guide which should glaze the most avid reader's eyes. Readers who do like to plough through dense tables might enjoy the worked calculation of lifetime value performed by American Express, or perhaps the time-chart of telephone legislation introduced across the US as of 1 December 1993. The book has useful take-aways (as well as the diskette program) but overall there are too few tools and techniques for the reader to put into immediate use, such as the formula for calculating a break-even point on page 388. Though there is much that is useful within these pages, the reviewer doubts that the busy marketer will have the patience to unearth the gems.

Russell Logan
Senior partner, Business Aid

Real Time: Preparing for the Age of the Never-Satisfied Customer

Regis McKenna

Harvard Business School Press, US; 1997; ISBN 0875847943 (hardback), 0875849342 (paperback); 204pp; \$19.95

This is a book to enjoy. It is a pacey, sometimes exciting, very readable account of how technology is changing, willy nilly, the behaviour of (American) business in the late 20th century — and will continue to change it in the next millennium — written by a well-respected author, lecturer and consultant in technology marketing.

The book begins with a breezy account of the new technology, and some of the possibilities it creates. Here, as elsewhere, the author makes no pretence at being comprehensive: his pages are packed with illuminating anecdotes and examples whose effect (no doubt intended) is to stimulate the reader into elaborating the thesis, and filling in the gaps.

Chapter 2 picks up on the book's subtitle — The Never-Satisfied Customer. (Right here. Right now. Tailored for me. Served up the way I like it.) This chapter deals with familiar concepts of customer service and customisation. It also has some interesting things to say about the tyranny of choice. Choice in the consumer society has become a burden of infinitely multiplying trivialities: can automation remove (some of) that burden by making appropriate choices for us, rendering choice (as McKenna puts it) 'transparent'?

Chapter 3 deals with the new media, and suggests ways in which they will transform business: 'the death knell for traditional "informational advertising".' It deals also with the rapprochement of information and entertainment, and with the love/hate relationship of society with the media. And, in all the excitement, a note of caution: virtual reality is *not* reality, and too much of the former can result in a numbing of emotional responses.

A chapter on 'A Brand New Brand' is followed by 'The Real Time Corporation', 'Continuous Discontinuous Change' and 'Preparing for the Eventuality of Anything' — which last seems to sum up an important part of the author's philosophy.

The reviewer has only one quarrel with this book — and that is its title. 'Real time' is a phrase originally coined to describe the operation of automatic closed-loop iterative systems, whose functions might be characterised thus:

- a) instantaneous acquisition of all data relevant to the operation of the system;
- b) automatic and immediate processing of that data;
- c) automatic and immediate adjustment of the system to ensure its continuing ability to meet pre-set goals, leading to changes in relevant data;
- d) return to (a)

The classic example is the in-flight guidance system of a missile — although a thermostatically controlled central heating system follows the same concept. For McKenna, however, a real-time system is just a very fast system: his 'first glimpse of the possibilities of real time' was seeing a dry-cleaning business offering 'one-hour shirt cleaning'. Some real-time systems indeed have to be ultra-fast. But not all. And their essence lies simply in completing a cycle of data acquisition, processing, adjustment and feedback in *sufficient* time to ensure the stability of the system. Does it matter? Well, umm, yes. Using precise terms imprecisely, and without redefinition, simply to raise the temperature and enhance excitement is a tabloid habit, and a bad one. McKenna is too good a writer, and his theme too exciting already, to need this sort of thing. But you should still read the book, and enjoy it: the reviewer did.

R. Fairlie

E-shock — The Electronic Shopping Revolution: Strategies for Retailers and Manufacturers

Michael de Kare-Silver

Macmillan Business, Basingstoke, UK; 1998; ISBN 0333730151; 288pp; £25.00

We are all talking about it, debating the merits, arguing over timing, believing it will conquer the world or dismissing it as hype. We are all

talking about it, but how many of us are actually taking the hard, practical steps to be ready for, indeed leaders in, the new world of e-commerce?

This recent book sets its stall out firmly in the area of practicality. It is not yet another flight into mind-bending technologies and weird and wonderful consumer visions so attractive to those who understand and love the science, but so counterproductive when put in front of CEOs.

The aims are stated clearly: 'to provide a practical guide to the future consumer retailing scene ... and suggest a framework to help retailers and manufacturer suppliers determine their optimum response'. The structure of the book then proceeds to support this aim directly. We are offered a comprehensive overview that takes in future growth trends, tests to assess if your business is ready for 'mass electronic shopping', and a range of strategy options and reviews of the technologies, marketing and organisational requirements that will fit your business to cope and succeed.

As if to ensure we really get the point of just what a practical book this is, the signposting is most explicit. Constant summaries, references to the other sections, the groupings and tabulations much favoured by consultants (the three-step test, ten strategic options), guide the reader's way through the book.

But this should not fool you into thinking this is a dry work. Mr de Kare-Silver is a man with a mission, and that mission is to 'shock'. To make it clear to retailers and manufacturers alike that there is 'no room for complacency and little time left for continued ambivalence'. To stand still will be to die.

On this level the book provides an absolute treasure trove of facts, figures and quotable quotes for those of us who delight in shocking our colleagues and frightening our bosses: 'It will only take a 10–20 percentage point shift in the retail market from the high street to home to eliminate most retailers' profit margin', 'The Internet will drive half of today's retailers out of business.'

Central to the book are the sections giving retailers and manufacturers the tools to evaluate whether they will be more or less affected by the trends and whether they are in a good position to respond. De Kare-Silver sets out a three-step test to perform on your product/service and marketplace; the product characteristics, familiarity and confidence required in the purchase and consumer attributes. As with the best of these types of approaches, the chapter reads like basic common sense. There is, however, a great value in capturing these elements in this way. The author is particularly strong here, as elsewhere in the book, in recognising the power of brands and the understanding of buyer behaviour. This highlights what many more simplistic analyses miss, that it is still the big retailers, if they grasp the opportunity fully, who can benefit most from this new world.

The strategy options outlined for retailers also provide a well-structured run through of the issues faced and the approaches which can be taken. Care is taken to show that alternatives outside e-commerce do exist — the need will be for those retailers to capture a fuller retailing

experience, be entertainers, in order to add a new dimension to their physical presence. The reviewer also particularly liked the 'mixed system' approach, combining flagship stores with on-line delivery, such as being developed by Tower Records. The mirror section on manufacturer options is less comprehensive. Not enough distinction is made between types of manufacturers and, in particular, the value of individual transactions, which surely must be one of the principal indicators.

There are occasions in the book when the desire to follow a road-map structure gets in the way of perhaps some truly radical analysis. For example, we are given a clear view on how 'knowledge' is replacing physical 'assets', but no further analysis on knowledge as an asset itself; how new business will be created through the technology to trade 'knowledge'. De Kare-Silver also opens up the debate of commoditisation through the Internet without really following through on the implications of this for retailers.

However, to pick on possible omissions would miss the point. Michael de Kare-Silver has set out to shock the retail world into a realisation that it must act and act quickly and has then set out, in an eminently enjoyable and readable fashion, the practical steps to take that action. The reviewer envisages a lot of business cases being written which are heavily reliant on this timely and valuable book.

Stephen Taylor
Director

First Call International and Loyalty Management UK