American special issue — Editorial

For a largely European readership, as is the case for *Interactive Marketing*, an American special issue may prove to be intriguing or conversely off-putting. For some readers, news and opinions from the USA offer innovation and cutting-edge practice. For others, they could be a study in irrelevance or perhaps bombast.

So allow this bipolar editor (29 years on and off in Europe, 29 years on and off in the USA) to frame this issue.

What it is not!

It is not an American claim to pre-eminence or special insight and knowledge. It is not 'this is how the world of interactive marketing is or will be, and you had better pay attention'.

What it is!

It is a sharing of opinion and practice from a couple of professionals who have spent their working lives in the trenches of direct and/or (there is no difference) interactive marketing for many years. They are sharing their convictions, and they happen to be based in the USA.

Further, we have papers from business people who are deeply involved in two technologies which demand our attention, broadband and mobile, and they too are US residents.

You will also find a fascinating case study on Web mining (aka database mining), as well as some excellent reportage on current legal issues. Again, the authors are domiciled on the left-hand side of the pond.

Finally, the abstracts and book reviews reflect both American and European work and readers will rediscover the clarity, perhaps pithiness, of our reviewers and editors.

Returning at greater length to the first two points above, the first opinion piece is submitted by George Wiedemann, familiar to many of you. Mr Wiedemann's argument is simple yet powerful: that the Internet provides an opportunity for compelling two-way real-time customer dialogue. This must resonate with direct marketers who have discovered that the most value-added direct and interactive marketing businesses are those that nourish and nurture the customer relationship, irrespective of the media deployed. Mr Wiedemann suggests that the Internet, when appropriately used, is particularly suited to this dialogue.

The second opinion piece comes from Jerry Shereshevsky, who works at Yahoo, the fount of 'permission marketing'. He too has more years than he will choose to acknowledge in direct marketing, many of them with the Wunderman agency. His distinction between 'permissive' and 'permission' marketing is clear, well argued and very readable. His comments on scalability and prospect relationship marketing are noteworthy.

The arguments of these two opinion pieces are complementary and impassioned.

Now to broadband. On my forays to Europe, I find this technology to be a hot subject. Discussion centres upon availability, opportunities, application and of course cost. Jeff Allen is the CEO of IntelliSpace, a company devoted to the provision of broad-bandwidth capability. He correctly notes that broadband facilitates the use of just about all the proven elements of marketing developed in the last 50 years. He too addresses the subject of scalability and the advantages of being able to 'dial-up' or 'dial-down' bandwidth capabilities in accordance with need. His overview of applications, customer connection, streaming media, content management, CRM, virtual private networks and others will be of interest to all marketers. The applications and possibilities for distance learning will certainly whet the appetite of this journal's sponsor — the IDM.

A scholarly dissertation on 'Visitor patterns of a profitable website' has been submitted by Richard Colombo of Fordham University. He tackles the blessings and curses of the plethora of data available from Web log files. If you are not to drown in this information, you must understand the nature and

purpose of sites, employ models and metrics that can be tested for relevance via simple visualisation tools. In other words, test for whether the data are worth mining.

Another technology very much in the limelight is mobile phones. The two authors of our New Technology Briefing, Henry Elkington and Tomas Linden, are clearly experts on the subject. They predicate that the sale of hundreds of millions of mobile phones will dramatically impact on consumer behaviour and therefore marketing. Again, bandwidth availability is a key factor, but the cost barriers of 3G, they submit, offer opportunities. The notion that owners of consumer franchises could be very powerful mobile virtual network operators is fascinating. The potential changes in consumer information gathering and purchase behaviour are remarkable. Already in Finland, and to a degree in Sweden, mobile phones are used daily as banking transactors and bill payers as well as communication devices and information suppliers. Banks are transformed, credit cards are an irrelevance, and personal computers suffer from their inherent lack of portability versus the phone. Conversely, it is interesting to note that WAP technology has not been adopted as swiftly where usage of PCs is already high.

So, enjoy this issue and please share your feedback and opinions.

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