Editorial

In the five years since this journal was launched we have published no fewer than 28 papers whose primary focus has been on customer relationship management (CRM) — or should it be customer relationship marketing? Nobody seems quite sure — including Janet Winston, whose paper in this issue is an exploration of the extent to which CRM (she takes the two alternative readings to be effectively synonymous) has/has not met the expectations of its champions in UK financial services institutions.

During these five years we have also carried, in our Article Abstracts section, notices of a further 29 papers on this same subject, published in contemporary journals. And we have reviewed five books devoted to this theme. (That is far from the end of the matter: we try to restrict our abstracting service and our book reviews to material that our readers may find useful; there is a lot of the other kind out there as well.)

So there can be no surprise in finding that the first three authors in this current issue are concerned — explicitly in the first two cases and implicitly in the last — with this inescapable subject. If we accept the description quoted by Winston, CRM is the new paradigm for marketing, replacing the marketing mix as the be-all and end-all of marketing wisdom.

Winston's research is based on a small survey of financial services companies in the south of England, conducted through a self-completed questionnaire. She finds that measured effects of CRM 'consistently and significantly fall short of the objectives set'. However, she does not despair: perhaps the initial expectations were unrealistically high; perhaps more time is required for benefits to work their way through to the bottom line. And although difficulties are being encountered with CRM implementation, these are not as severe as is implied elsewhere in the literature, nor at a level that would render implementation too difficult to achieve in practice.

Tony Coad's take on the subject is quite different. Where Winston wants to see (and suggests how best we can achieve) improvements in the often-flawed implementation of CRM, Coad holds that the whole pilgrimage of the industry along the CRM trail has simply led it up a blind alley. CRM is the 'most bizarre' of the false starts on which the industry has embarked in its attempts to cope with a rapidly changing marketplace.

Coad has two pet hates over the current deployment of CRM: first, its take-over by technology, and secondly (itself an aspect of the first), its abandonment of customer service for customer *self*-service. He looks ahead instead to the arrival of 'real-time marketing', where real people have real conversations with customers, which he describes as 'the antithesis of CRM'. This arrival, he believes, is hastened by the current decline in all forms of mass advertising, including direct mail, for which he quotes figures that should be disturbing for some. (An article in *The Times* for 9 February might seem to lend him support by reporting that ITV is proposing to shorten its commercial breaks.)

For Alan Mitchell, both advertising and CRM (at least as interpreted to date) are as obsolete as the dinosaurs. Advertising in its present form can have no place in a buyer-centric economy where business is about supplying those products which consumers and their agents tell you they require; CRM is a futile concept in a world where the customers do the managing. Mitchell's theme continues the ideas in his latest book *The New Bottom Line* (reviewed by Neil Morris in this issue); some of the developments predicted in his earlier book *Right Side Up* can already be detected in real life.

Real life is what, inevitably, we return to with two case studies. Jenkinson and Sain take a look at integrated marketing in Seeboard Energy, while Robin Fairlie writes about Tesco.com, which the UK's largest grocer has turned into the UK's favourite home-shopping site — second only to Amazon. Both of these are heavy with echoes of the CRM debate: customer-centricity is meaningless without integration of marketing and marketing channels, while Tesco's determination to concentrate on customer retention and increasing share-of-customer is the springboard (derived from Reichheld's research in the 1990s) from which CRM theory takes off.

So there we have it: CRM, real-time marketing, integrated marketing, one-to-one marketing — what are we to make of them all? We seem to have learned over recent years that the one-size-fits-all approach to customers no longer works as well as it did for Henry Ford I and his immediate successors. But are we perhaps in danger of failing to recognise that the one-size-fits-all approach to marketing problems is likely to be equally flawed? The marketing problems faced by Vauxhall are very different from those confronting Waitrose, as are the assets each has in dealing with these problems. (Indeed the differences are very much greater than those between any two consumers.) Certainly it is likely that there will be a few underlying principles to which all marketers should pay attention; perhaps in the 21st century the principle of the centrality of the consumer's needs, wishes and demands is one of them (but was it not always?)? Surely the one thing marketers do not need is to be fitted up for some Procrustean bed ideally designed for a particular size and shape of marketing problem, but varying from the uncomfortable to the excruciating for everyone else.

In our book reviews, Danny Meadows-Klue deals with yet another book by Philip Kotler, whose new motto is 'think laterally'. Is this just another one-size-fits-all gimmick, or is it advice worth taking?

Robin Fairlie and Derek Holder