Book review

Practical International Data Management: A guide to working with global names and addresses

Graham Rhind

Gower, Hampshire, 2001; ISBN 0566084058; 200pp; hardback; £69.50

The expanding global footprint of the Internet and the resultant possibility of serving a global market brings with it daunting challenges. As indicated on the sleeve jacket of this book, 'New data collection methods (such as the Internet), the globalization of economies and improving computer hardware and software are allowing companies to collect information about their customers and prospects in ever greater numbers and from increasingly further afield. Managing this data brings with it a whole range of practical issues of which most companies are unaware and which, if ignored, are expensive and time-consuming to correct.'

Given the increasingly global nature of the marketplace, one of the strategic challenges to emerge is the facilitation of the interactivity between buyers and sellers. Several essential requirements emerge. First, is to be able to identify customers through any channel, transactions, and interactions over time. Secondly, is the need to differentiate customers by both their value to the organisation and what the customer wants from the organisation. Thirdly,

learning through every interaction, the organisation will be able to differentiate between customers. This leads on to the fourth requirement, which is the ability to provide an automated yet customised service, thereby enhancing customer loyalty.

Unsurprisingly then, beginning with the application of database technologies, interest in the concept of 'interactivity' has emerged in the field of marketing. Hence the proliferation of concepts such as CRM and one-to-one marketing, all of which attempt to enhance customer relationships, through personalisation and customisation, all the while maintaining an electronic dialogue. This dynamic and interactive dialogue is heavily dependent upon up-to-date databases that enable an organisation to contact an individual directly, to record and remember that individual's response, and to use that 'new' information next time the individual is contacted. This interactivity when played globally brings with it, however, its own problems surrounding language and cultural differences, norms and conventions, especially when dealing with global names and addresses.

Therefore, the appearance of this book by Graham Rhind is both timely and useful. As an acknowledged expert in the field of data management, Rhind writes with authority and careful thought about the many pitfalls a database administrator has to be aware of. It is essentially a 'how to' book which will no doubt become an addition to the arsenal that marketing professionals need to know of. Moreover, it can also be treated as an 'I told you so' book, especially when things go wrong with an inadequate and inflexible database of information designed to serve globally dispersed consumers. Furthermore, the author reminds us that the rapid movement of people across the globe leads to the erosion of the homogeneity of local markets, so that the resulting diversity of languages, cultures and conventions also need to be addressed at the local level. Through the use of examples the author addresses these issues most adequately with an easily digestible style.

This book is clearly aimed at the data management practitioner, yet would be required reading for the marketing professional, academics and students alike. Consisting of 12 chapters, the first four chapters (going global, the database and its structure, principles of data management and database structure for international data), form the foundations of the book. The next eight chapters essentially guide one through the practical aspects of building an international data management system and highlight the pitfalls. The chapters cover issues of standardisation, languages, personal names, details pertaining to organisations, address data, other international data such as dealing with

dates, times and numbers, de-duplication and data collection.

Written in an easy to understand, jargon-free manner using different presentation styles such as bullet points and text boxes along with the narration to present the information, this book provides for an easy read.

Although it covers well what it set out to do (ie to provide a guide to international data management), there is one glaring omission. There is nothing dealing with data protection and privacy issues. As there are laws enacted and a plethora of books and articles dealing with data protection issues, perhaps the author felt that he need not address the subject. As the author's stated objective, however, was to provide a basic knowledge of building an international database, a key section should have been one on data protection. Perhaps this could be rectified in the second edition. On the plus side, the glossary of terms is very useful.

The data protection omission apart, this is a well-presented book highlighting the absolute importance of paying special attention to international norms and conventions. As the author suggests 'when we manage international data, we need to understand that there are many more cultures than our own, and successful marketing requires that we treat each of these cultures with the same respect that we treat our own — or more.' In the Internet age success or failure depends on that.

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