Editorial

Three broad areas occupy our attention in this issue: channels and attitudes towards them by both customers and companies; ethnic targeting; and the consumption of beer. Lest the reader be tempted to cut to the chase to the paper on the latter at the back of the issue, let me say straight away that there are no free samples. The collection of papers in this issue, however, contains some refreshing insights into a hitherto tangled assortment of issues.

Not least among these preoccupations is that of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of call and contact centre operations. The contact centre channel has become well established: 1.2 per cent of the European workforce was employed in such centres in 2002. Whether this shows a net increase over the next few years will be a result of the many decisions now being made on the geographical dimensions of the outsourcing opportunity. But whether in Bangalore or Barrow, effective performance measurement is becoming a key differentiator for operators. Peter Holland's paper, outlining a need for a 'step change' in call centre performance, provides a concrete set of steps for a measurement-based approach to improving such performance. 'What gets measured gets done', he concludes.

More effective measurement has also been a prerequisite for the e-commerce channel. While many 'solutions businesses' are offering channel-specific tools and techniques, it is important not to throw out the baby with the bath water. Just because the channels are new,

does not mean that we need an entirely new tool kit. Noam Tractinsky and Oded Lowengart from Ben-Gurion University suggest, for example, that retailers considering their positioning in relation to competitors in the e-commerce space should consider perceptual mapping and gap analysis as two useful traditional techniques for understanding why consumers might select one retailer over another. Using the book and computer hardware markets as examples, the authors use these techniques to demonstrate significant insights into the underlying dimensions of consumer evaluations of internet retailing and the different competitive intensity of these markets.

Technology of course mediates many of the marketing channels available to the practitioner. However, while we have some insights into consumer and employee attitudes towards particular manifestations of technology (such as websites, marketing information systems and call centre technologies), we know little of the changing attitudes to the increase in the level of general technology that pervades our home and working lives. Drawing together multidisciplinary research in this area, Steve Edison and Gary Geissler focus on the role of personal factors in attitude formation towards technology. Knowing a person's attitude towards technology is critical for example, to understanding behaviours as varied as voting behaviour and career choices. For marketers, such insight is critical in identifying lead adopters for new products, understanding

rates of innovation diffusion and in developing appropriate promotional strategies.

Two papers in this issue comprise a second broad theme — targeting in the context of ethnic markets and organisations, an aspect of market targeting receiving increasing attention both as emerging markets attract the interest of marketers and as ethnic minority businesses have become a successful feature of domestic markets. Ian Phau and Kor-Weai Chan of Australia's Curtin University of Technology build on the national identity 'NATID' framework developed by Keillor and Hult to demonstrate the uneven state of the Asian market. They examine the sense of national identity in South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore, contrasting Thailand and Singapore in particular, and suggest that the NATID scale may provide a practical tool for segmenting national markets.

Of course, we do not have to look far from 'home' to find markets — differentiated in terms of culture — organisational culture. Domestic markets in Europe and North America are characterised by thriving organisations with some profound differences in internal culture. This affects the ways in which they behave in relation to other organisations, how they themselves undertake targeting and how, in turn, they themselves might be receptive to targeting. Len Tiu Wright and her team review the business practices and

characteristics of small ethnic minority businesses in the UK and report the results of exploratory qualitative research. They conclude that 'owners had key cultural perspectives in running their businesses that both aid and perhaps hinder their success'. While on the one hand, the reliance on Asian community links provides more immediate stability, marketing opportunities outside the community might be missed.

Finally if, after reading this issue, consuming a cool beer — even under laboratory conditions — seems like an attractive proposition, then Roy Cabaniss' paper provides a refreshingly cautionary endnote. Evaluating customer opinions of a product would always seem to risk biased evaluation if existing consumption patterns are probed first. Cabaniss' research on attitudes to beer brand choice demonstrates not only that the positioning of a question on 'normal consumption' within a survey instrument is critical, but that in order to achieve an unbiased evaluation such a question must be differentially distributed throughout a questionnaire. The bias, argues Cabaniss, comes from consequent changes in information processing by the respondent and, indeed, even the slightest reference to normal usage can trigger such changes. Cheers!

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Editor
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