Editorial

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As we enter a period of significant financial uncertainty, pressures on all organisations to demonstrate greater accountability in the use of their resources will naturally increase. The ‘phony war’ (involving those complex financial instruments in a galaxy far, far away) is over. The real war for the real economy has begun. Marketers are in many ways in the front line, not least because cost effectiveness is less transparent within the marketing function because of the complex nature of consumers’ and customers’ decision-making processes. Decision-making processes are likely to become even less predictable as the months pass. What kinds of trends are we likely to see? Well, as many organisations become more risk averse: budgets will shrink; firms will focus their attention on leading brands rather than secondary or tertiary; more will seek out less costly and more productive marketing communications tools (it is not accidental that just about the only growing sector of the promotional budget is for online). Measurement and analysis will be reinforced as the watchwords of prudent marketing management, whether we like it or not.

An eclectic selection of papers this quarter recognises both the wide-ranging nature of marketing topics within the ambit of the *Journal* and the healthy and diverse geographical origins of authors interested in market targeting and analysis issues. Tsuen-Ho Hsu and his colleagues examine the issues surrounding small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as they seek to market themselves internationally. Even before the present economic difficulty, such firms were turning to internet-based mechanisms to reach their customer base. Such channels are even more critical today. For example the article identifies the most successful firms as having an ‘e-commerce capability’, which comprises an enhanced ability to acquire relevant information, a ‘corporate memory’ with which to transmit the benefits of

those insights and a ‘can-do’ attitude towards perceived barriers to the use of e-commerce. The study is as interesting for the ‘popular’ hypotheses that it disproves about SMEs, as those for which it finds evidence.

Oyvind Helgesen provides a further opportunity to explore a complementary, and topical, approach to targeting businesses using business-unit-based customer metrics, such as customer profitability figures and international credit agency rating codes, rather than conventional demography and usage rates. When applied to the Norwegian fishing industry, Helgesen demonstrates useful results, showing that none of the four export companies had previously worked out customer profitability accounts in a systematic way, but also pointing out some discrepancies that arise from the differential ratings accorded to firms by different credit agencies.

The business-to-business focus is continued in what one of the *Journal*’s referees described as an ‘excellent and long overdue piece of research’ by Jos Schijns and his colleagues into the impact of loyalty programmes in a business-to-business context. This area is substantially under-researched and it is refreshing to read a genuine before-and-after study (unusual in the literature, which has struggled to find generalisable evidence for loyalty scheme effectiveness from one-off studies), which finds that a scheme has a significant and positive effect on both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty among customers. Indeed, it also reaches useful conclusions on the role of so-called ‘selection effects’ by loyalty schemes — the tendency they have to recruit ‘more loyal’ members. Then, a Greek team led by Professor George Siomkos of the Athens University of Economics and Business once again demonstrates the key role of a well-founded marketing information system in achieving effective market orientation. In this study, the authors seek to

identify the particular dimensions of market orientation that appear to be closely linked to MkIS and distinguish between factors internal and external to the firm.

External factors are also of interest to Henry and Shanti Greene, who address segmentation issues from a methodological point of view. The authors seek to show that generic segmentation systems can benefit from augmentation with additional data dimensions by employing so-called exographic variables (data descriptors that represent environmental phenomena beyond the immediate personal or social set of variables). Working in this way, they suggest, further demonstrates the value to the practising manager in acquiring an 'off the shelf' segmentation system and incorporating data items that represent alternative data dimensions that are logically appropriate for the consumer behaviour that is of interest and with which segments are statistically correlated.

The final paper in this issue comes from Mario Miranda and tackles a popular target of consumer groups: product availability at checkouts. Specifically, it shows that we should not be overhasty in attributing buyer behaviour in this area to undesirable 'impulse purchasing'. Instead, he argues, we should consider that the motivations for consumers in such contexts are complex and in some cases the activities of retailers are welcome in causing consumers to re-evaluate their product needs in store. His research shows that shoppers 'are inclined to make their selections from checkouts as a rear guard action for their forgetfulness ... rather than indulge in unreflective purchase'. The editor has some sympathy with this view! Measures should reflect this re-interpretation of the evidence.

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Editor