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Book Reviews

IMC — The Next Generation

Don Schultz and Heidi Schultz
McGraw-Hill, 2003; 408pp; £29.99
ISBN: 007 1416625

In *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière, the nouveau-riche hero Monsieur Jourdain is being taught the social skills that are appropriate to his new, more elevated, social status. He learns to wield a sword and to speak verse among other things, and he enquires of his tutors whether he will have to learn prose as well. They explain that prose is just speech. Jourdain is astounded and has a great line: ‘To think I’ve been talking prose all my life and never knew it.’

Is it new?

Marketing textbooks are getting a bit like that. I cannot fault the theory of integrated marketing communication at all, but then I think it simply restates the common sense that underpinned most marketing practice before we all went searching for new acronyms with which to dazzle each other.

IMC (there, I have joined in) has apparently a five-stage planning process. First, you identify customers and prospects. Second, you estimate the value of customers and prospects. Third, you plan communications messages and incentives. Fourth, you estimate the return on customer investment. And fifth, you analyse, evaluate and plan the next moves. Elevating these traditional simplicities to mantra status is a bit like producing a manual for cleaning your teeth. Mind you, someone is probably doing that as well.

From silo to integration

This new book by the Schulzes records the emergence of IMC in the early 1990s and the speed with which it replaced the top-down ‘silo’ approach to communication where a company’s departments had individual remits — product ranges, geographic areas, above the line, below the line. Three things served to ease the change towards integration. Digital technology made it possible to get close to customers. The new emphasis on branding made the future value of a successful brand more important — or at least as important — as the present income flow. And rapid globalisation meant that marketing lessons could be applied with unprecedented speed right across international markets. Later, of course, the emergence of the internet and e-commerce underpinned the surge towards integration.

From CRM to IMC

But where to now? The authors are more than bullish about IMC. For them it is no mere communications strategy — it is a full-fledged business strategy, one that combines all the company’s activities around its customers. At which point we should really bump into another acronym. Whatever happened to CRM? It gets a mention here on page 59. ‘This is where the IMC approach succeeds — and traditional marketing initiatives — even the much-touted CRM — fail.’ Don’t you just love the

sneer implicit in the words ‘much-touted’? It is fierce, this acronym business.

International examples

The five stages of the new business are reported in massive detail, especially the last evaluation stage. They are decked around with theory and relevant research and punctuated by appropriate case histories — Tesco makes an appearance, albeit a familiar one, as data collectors on customer behaviour. Indeed, it is worth recording that the authors have tried hard to include research material from outside the USA; the UK, Australia, New Zealand and even India help provide response to a survey among advertising agencies. But that is only fair when the authors are presenting IMC as an irresistible global phenomenon.

400 pages of common sense

For they are really proselytising IMC in these nigh-on 400 pages, nothing less. It can be implemented in any organisation, they say, any size, any location. Undoubtedly true, it seems to me. But then I would return to my original point — it has *always* been implemented in enterprises that ranged from dry-cleaning stores to newspaper empires. It was seen as common sense or opportunism or knowing your customer. Millions of proprietors did it intuitively, and made money accordingly.

Useful new material on ROI

Quite the best things here are the sections on evaluation — estimating the short-term and the long-term return on customer investment. Like the rest of the book they are encyclopaedic, but unlike the rest of the book the material is relatively novel. The average British marketer will not idly have bumped into these detailed formulae for assessing the true worth of a marketing programme. They should be interrogated and they should be tested. For they provoke thought in the same way as much of the book provokes torpor.

I should not be too rude. Part of an Englishman’s reaction to a tome like this is resistance to the language. ‘Focusing on the Total Customer Experience’ is a phrase to chill the blood, and this book has 12 of these per page. But there is enough here to make *IMC — The Next Generation* worth having, albeit as a book to be dipped into rather than read from cover to cover. If you learn that you have been talking prose all your life without knowing it, that is surely a confidence-builder in today’s competitive world.

George Smith F IDM

Beyond Branding

Edited by Nicholas Ind

Kogan Page, 2003; 236pp; hardback; £25; ISBN: 0749441151

Beyond Branding is an unashamed credo or manifesto, put together by a loose affiliation of marketing columnists, management theorists and branding consultants who commune annually in Medinge, a Swedish village two hours’ drive west of Stockholm. Their consulting CVs are impressive.

Critique of brand management

Their common cause is a critique of brands (one presumes large, international and consumer, though this is not made explicit) which they

believe are managed in a wholly dysfunctional manner, which, if allowed to continue unchecked by their prescriptions, will result in destructive outcomes not just for the brands themselves but for their stakeholders, ie employees, customers and distributors, as well as for society as a whole and the global environment.

Call to action

Having catalogued in a series of independently authored chapters a litany of ills of management omission and neglect, the book concludes with a call to action, complete with website contact details and numbered action plan, whereby brand managers can ‘come forward’, atone for past malpractices, take a ‘positive commitment’ to a ‘new vision’ based on adherence to a common list of ‘beliefs’ in, for example, the creation of mental models of how they operate with stakeholders (love thy neighbour) and means of becoming more responsive, through emotional openness, to changes in operating environments, promises to stakeholders of transparency, the creation of value through transparency, authenticity and so on.

Contrary to what one might suppose, this manifesto claims to be and genuinely is neutral in relation to brands, seeing them as intrinsic forces neither for good nor for evil.

Importance of stakeholders

Key arguments are that the values which attach to a brand increasingly arise from the investment of stakeholders, ie employees, customers and distributors, rather than from the actions of brand owners, whose role therefore should be to facilitate the organic evolution of brand values in response to evolving societal needs rather than to act as agents of control; that brand owners have become overly narcissistic, focusing too much on enhancements to the brand which could be engineered from the set of technologies they own or control and too little on enhancements which would meet the needs of brand users; that brand owners should commit resources to developing the competencies of owners of emerging brands in the third world, thereby enabling these brands to compete effectively and achieve premium prices in first-world markets; and that the systemic processes whereby brands are managed need to incorporate mechanisms which more actively involve stakeholders.

Businesses need to be more transparent in their dealings, particularly by giving appropriate weight in their accounts to non-financial sources of organisational value, and business culture should be loosened so as to encourage a more spontaneous, creative and authentic environment in which contacts with customers and other stakeholders are less formulaic (no more ‘have a good day’s). Inevitably transformations of this sort are not achievable without radically new styles of leadership which require enhanced levels of openness and sensitivity and an end to the isolation and lack of genuine teamwork which is said to characterise powerful corporations.

A theological tract?

As with any effective theological tract — and for that matter many successful marketing campaigns — these contributions achieve a fine balance between assuring the reader of damnation if he or she does not repent of his or her ways and the opportunity of redemption and salvation if new, unfamiliar interpretations of a familiar world are faithfully and uncompromisingly adhered to.

Moral choices versus value propositions

While there is no doubt that much of the content of these exhortatory admonitions is justified by well-known corporate excesses, Enron and Andersen being frequently cited as examples, management, as has often been said of Labour politics, is a matter of priorities as much as of values. In the business world I engage with, decisions regarding brand values are not stark moral choices, as between ‘transparency’ and ‘dishonesty’, but more subtle distinctions between values which characterise and differentiate major market segments, such as ‘quality of service’ as against ‘low price’ in the grocery store or between ‘tradition and comfort’ as against ‘innovative technology’ in the car showroom. These are not ethically ‘good’ and ‘bad’ brand value positions, only value propositions which are consistent with certain product propositions and with the interests of certain demographic and psychographic market segments. Hopefully companies will choose different value positions, ensuring a sufficient level of choice for consumers with increasingly individualised preferences.

A poor example of its promoted values

At an emotional rather than an intellectual level I for one found the manner in which these arguments were put across rather tedious. Much of the content sounded unexceptional when read at speed. But when examined in detail much seemed devoid of any meaningful content. More irritatingly the content came across as a poor exemplar of many of the values which, not unreasonably, were being advanced by the authors. I became increasingly suspicious that a hidden purpose of the book (in a critique extolling transparency as a business virtue) was to promote the consulting methodologies of the network; the claim on the cover, that the book contained ‘international case studies’ and ‘latest research’, is not honestly sustained by a text which makes just one single reference to a market research survey and which has no case studies of any depth. The passionate and in my view wholly justified advocacy of the importance of ‘context’ in analysis was undermined by the absence of even the most cursory explanation of what types of brand, whether commercial, charity or public sector, American or European, industrial or consumer, were the specific objects of the critique.

While this collection of essays may well enliven the theses of MBA and marketing students, my feeling on reaching the final page was not unlike that when seeing canvassers for the Jehovah’s Witnesses move on to our neighbour’s house — the arguments all make sense within their own logic but they fail to engage with the world as existentially experienced.

The theological analogy is not inappropriate in the context of much academic marketing work. By contrast with research in other disciplines these ‘truths’ can be neither supported nor disproved on the basis of empirical evidence or by experimentation. Marketing theories are essentially ‘beliefs’, articles of faith. Like other belief systems they do not end up being disproved, just being ignored. If truths based on faith rather than empirical observation are to change behaviour, it is when they are rooted in a recognition of the variety of the human condition, not its uniformity, and accept that forces for good and for evil are inextricably interwoven in the human condition — they cannot be ‘engineered’ out by changes in either organisational design or ideological position. The

religious insight that it is only by accepting and not being frustrated by the world as it is that we are given the redemptive grace and creativity to make it better through satisfying work is a paradox which seems not to have been appreciated in the Medinge reunions.

Richard Webber F IDM

Mobile Marketing

Matt Haig

Kogan Page, 2005; paperback; 226pp; £18.95

ISBN: 0749437987

Marketers have not been great at learning from the past; when it comes to using the range of new digital channels there seems to be a persistent ability to make the same mistakes every time a new distribution channel arrives. That is why texts that spread lessons, and do so in a bite-size digestible form like Haig's, should be high on anyone's Amazon.com wish-list.

Within a few years the mobile marketing industry has gone from being ghettoised as a texting tool for teenage socialites, through the depths of embarrassment that came with the over-hyped WAP, plunged itself into the confusion of 3G and afflicted our train carriages with a chorus of 'crazy-frog' ringtones. It is the youngest of industries, trying to find its feet. The jargon is as impenetrable as that of the early days of the web, many users are still frightened of exploring the technology in their pocket, the media industry readily leaps to the wrong assumptions (was mobile really just going to be about poster ads on tiny screens?); confusion reigns.

Enter Haig, and with him an eclectic shopping bag of case studies of real marketers doing real things that really worked. He has assembled a rich mix of examples that help show how these new platforms and new audiences can be harnessed. From business-to-business to business-to-consumer, from motoring to mothers, from the UK to across Europe — there are solid examples of how mobile phones can be embraced within the marketing mix to drive results.

One of the many reasons why training and education for marketers remain critical in digital media is that the risks of getting the tone wrong in such an intimate environment are high. Personal messages delivered into the customer's pocket need to go way beyond checking a compliance box for data protection regulations. More than any other marketing channel, they need to hit the right tone of voice and match the need of the customer to the relevancy of your message. Ignore this at your peril.

The text is low on academic theory and high on practical advice. There are worked examples and useful illustrations. The tips section at the end is particularly useful for all of us as practitioners, forcing us to see if our own campaigns are matching up to industry best practice. The sheer volume and diversity of these may appear daunting, but much of this is simply about applying good old-fashioned marketing principles to the

Rich mix of examples

Getting the tone right

High on practical value

newer media, and reminding us to do so at the very moment when the tendency to get caught up in the excitement of the new draws a veil over our wisdom and experience.

Haig's enthusiasm for mobile radiates from the pages, but as an industry we are still early on in the process of figuring out the models for mobile marketing, and, like the web before it, this will take quite some time. These devices are the very manifestation of 'convergence', and it would be foolish to assume that Haig's shopping bag is the complete store of what mobiles will do. I doubt Haig would disagree, but that does mean that beyond its pages lie vast green fields for marketers to develop other models that over time we will all come to use. For anyone wanting a crash course in getting up to speed in what is already out there, this jargon-free and practical guide is broad, accessible and a great place to start learning about mobile marketing.

A jargon-free start

*Danny Meadows-Klue
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