
Editorial

A new, emerging profession

We suggest you read the lead article in this issue once, re-read it and read it again. Only then will you, as we did, grasp the full significance of the impact on marketing as we know it today of Alan Mitchell's paper, 'In one-to-one marketing which "one" comes first?'

As direct marketers, we may have thought we had finally achieved true and overdue marketing status when one-to-one marketing became vogue in the 1990s. Our ability to add to the richness of customer data through individual customer behavioural analysis seemed to fill the yawning information hole about customers which has dogged conventional marketing practice in the past.

As Alan Mitchell has commented, 'in the past, brands have been a surrogate for a relationship between human beings, advertising a surrogate for a dialogue and market research a surrogate for the learning that takes place with such a dialogue'. Direct and database marketing, with their multiplicity of scientific tools, started to fill that hole, but as Mitchell says, these techniques were only deployed to make the old, one-way, stimulus-response marketing model (where the sellers direct and control the message) work better.

However, with the advent of the Internet, information now flows upwards and sideways as well as downwards from the seller. In today's Internet marketing model the customer can control the buying process for the first time, creating even more entries for the marketing lexicon, such as permission marketing. It also creates a myriad of new marketplaces such as buying clubs, online auctions and online communities.

The paper also highlights a much abused word — trust. Whom do customers trust? Is it the sellers (product/brand managers, traditional physical retailers) or will it be an emerging new breed of buying agents, who have set up as specialists in a sector or indeed may span across industry domains to buy on your behalf? The analogy Mitchell uses for buying agents is that of your solicitor or doctor, who act on your behalf in the legal and medical worlds. Yahoo and Quicken could change from being pure 'navigators' (glorified phone directories) into buying agents across industry sectors. The question for most companies is: do your customers *really* trust you or would they prefer to employ a buying agent to find the best deal on their behalf?

When you review the effects the new electronic economy is having on your personal and professional life, you may conclude, as we do, that the advent of the Internet and its graphical interface, the World Wide Web, constitutes the first fundamental change in marketing since its inception.

The change is spawning a new type of marketer. Online, e-commerce, digital, Internet, Web marketing managers are emerging, not forgetting the traditionally titled marketers who are responsible for e-commerce. But these new marketers still need to embrace the skills-set accumulated by direct marketing over the past 20 years in order to fulfil the true promise of e-commerce. It is a straightforward process to create an e-customer, but managing that customer relationship, building lifetime values and creating a dialogue is where direct marketing can add value with its heritage.

Direct marketers have always been the first to embrace new technology (the first computer letter in the UK was produced in 1964 by the Reader's Digest), unlike many marketing generalists who only awoke to the true potential of IT and direct and database marketing in the 1990s.

Profiling, segmentation, analysing data and modelling, targeting and precisely measuring the ROI of marketing investments are the staple diet of a proficient direct marketer. With the direct marketing supply chain come mailing and fulfilment houses, computer businesses, analytical companies and call centres — the boom area of the late 1990s.

Many direct marketing businesses have been in an advantageous position to capitalise on the move to e-commerce. Catalogue companies already have fulfilment systems in place for remote delivery and are versed in sophisticated data-mining techniques. It is not unsurprising that in the USA companies like Land's End and Victoria's Secrets have successfully made the transition to e-commerce. One problem many businesses will face in the future is a fulfilment meltdown as volumes escalate — again an area where direct marketers can contribute.

Equally, direct marketers are fascinated by the potential of e-commerce — the ultimate one-to-one medium — and are very keen to enter the game. If you could combine the accumulated knowledge of direct marketing with the emerging knowledge-base of e-commerce, you would have a new kind of marketer with a skills-set covering the *whole* process of customer creation and management.

At the IDM, we believe there will be a new kind of marketer in the near future — the technology-literate marketer, who can span direct and e-commerce as one entity. Fundamentally, an e-commerce marketer will not be complete without direct marketing skills, knowledge and experience and the converse is becoming equally true.

This leads to our final conclusion: as marketing, branding and the marketing mix enter a period of turmoil, what will emerge is a new profession within marketing. Whatever new titles win through this period — digital or interactive marketing, for example — this new breed of technology-literate marketers will want to be part of a structured profession with a body to represent them which helps elevate their individual status and career prospects.

By structured profession, we mean one which possesses specialised skills, requires intellectual and practical training in a defined area of study and operates ethically and with integrity. It needs a professional body which will provide structured career paths, opportunities for continual professional development, a structure for academic and vocational qualifications and opportunities for members to share ideas, network and update their individual skills, while creating an e-commerce climate in which their businesses can grow and flourish.

This journal is the first attempt to bridge the gap between 'd' (direct) and 'e' (electronic) marketers. Perhaps it is the first step in a much longer, inevitable movement to create this new profession.

Finally, we were asked to mention the Sixth IDM/Royal Mail Symposium on 23 May entitled 'e-Commerce Direct'. Another step, perhaps, in bringing e-commerce and direct marketing together. Visit the IDM website, www.theidm.com/symposium, for more information.

Derek Holder and Robin Fairlie
February 2000

Interactive Marketing
is available online at
www.ingenta.com/journals/browse/idm/im