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Reviews

E-business — A Jargon-free Practical Guide

J. A. Matthewson

Butterworth Heinemann; 2001; 191pp; softback; ISBN 0750652934;
£17.99

**Simple, clear, easy-
to-use**

I am pretty cynical about e-business texts. There are many weighty analyses of the essence of e-business, most enough to swamp readers if not turn them off entirely by the middle of the first chapter. There are also now a good few overviews of e-business cluttering up the business bookshelves, but this one stood out.

It stands out because of its simplicity, clarity and ease of use, and what makes *E-business — A Jargon-free Practical Guide* unique is its author's background as a marketer, e-business practitioner and teacher.

It is the teaching aspect that shines through. Every chapter comes with learning objectives, exercises, questions, supporting case studies and website links. There is even some online support courtesy of the publishers — a development we should be demanding with all business texts. Collectively these transform the material into something that really teaches and tests the reader. Those readers familiar with the structure of course notes from the IDM's Certificate in E-marketing will readily see the parallels, and I would urge other business writers to follow the formula. The challenge for business writers is how to develop something that can be readily applied, and this format has been proven to work.

The result is that it delivers many weighty concepts in the style of a light read. The text is in bite-size chunks and a wealth of graphics and screen-shots illustrate points by providing the reader with tangible examples. The structure also helps for quick referencing, which as an office companion book I have always found to be the acid test.

Educational

Entry-level text

While this is only an entry-level text and should not be expected to deliver more, for a light read it does succeed in providing a healthy breadth of coverage across the discipline, including how to develop an e-business plan, e-CRM, permission marketing, e-advertising and e-marketing. Experienced e-marketers will readily see how the new digital tools and principles fit into traditional marketing structures.

The book provides learners with a solid framework for approaching the sector and will probably help focus them on the specific areas that they want to understand more. A wealth of more weighty volumes may drill down into the ten areas that Matthewson covers, but rarely is the topic brought together so simply at the top level.

A reader will take away from this book useful tools to approach business issues and an understanding of the key terms and concepts and their relationship. Matthewson is also not shy of providing a healthy dose of scepticism, analysing case studies of Internet failures like Beenz and Boo.com as well as success stories like Amazon.

The breadth of examples refreshingly goes beyond the confines of the over-quoted companies you will hear about on the conference circuit. The

Excellent use of examples

examples also illustrate the breadth of what marketers can do with the new channels. While websites can simply be a sales channel for retail marketers to reach their customers with a 24/7 shopping outlet, online has the potential to complement just about every aspect of the promotional mix and Matthewson's examples provide an implicit reality check on a company's own strategy. From the first magazine publishers like *Dotmusic* to some of the latest viral marketing campaigns from the *FT*, from wireless check-ins from airlines to simple rules for repurposing websites for wireless access, *E-business* provides simple examples of different approaches and suggests top-line rules for readers to take with their own projects. The book also does not confine itself to consumer marketing but explores both business-to-business relationships and internal company support through intranets.

So who should read this? If you are on the fringe of e-business already, if your company is starting to use the new channels and you need a guide, if you are an experienced marketer but have so far avoided the digital world — in this text you will get a friendly, helpful companion to take you there. For marketing students it will prove particularly useful, and for other marketers it may serve to remind us that learning should indeed be lifelong and that we too may benefit from marketing training that takes us deeper into the disciplines of e-business.

Danny Meadows-Klue

*Chief Executive of Digital Strategy Consulting
and Chairman of the Interactive Advertising Bureau.*

2001 Survey on Direct and Interactive Marketing Activities in Europe

Federation of European Direct Marketing (FEDMA)

World Advertising Research Center, 2002; softback; 87pp; £155 or \$235

Yes, I know, you think we are laggard in reviewing a 2001 survey in autumn 2002. Well, actually its introduction is dated April 2002, which makes the dating of its title more honest than that of most annuals (it is in fact the seventh edition of this survey).

This is a valuable source book for any actual or prospective pan-European direct marketer. It contains data on direct marketing in 18 European countries, covering, where available, volume and expenditure on direct mail, and expenditure on teleservices and total direct marketing for each of the years from 1991 to 2000, in euros and (where different) in local currency. Then there is a section on employment by country, which deals with agent positions in call centres, one on mail order turnover, and sections on the Internet and e-commerce, with an appendix on economic and advertising expenditure data.

The quality of the data is variable: in particular not all countries have figures for all years. (The main UK figures are taken from the DMA's annual survey.)

But the most pressing deficiency is over employment. The introduction

European source-book**Variable quality**

Short-sighted DMAs

Where is the employment data?

to this section lays this on the line: ‘... FEDMA still observes a certain lack of desire within the industry to obtain data on employment ... partly due to the fact that this information is difficult, time-consuming and expensive to collect, and also is not necessarily essential for business growth ...’

This suggests a deplorably short-sighted attitude by national DMAs. If FEDMA is to fight its corner in Brussels on behalf of all of us, it needs to be able to impress on would-be legislators the importance to the European economy of direct marketing. Figures on turnover certainly help, but there is nothing to impress a politician like hard data on employment. Numbers of agent positions in call centres are a start — but only scratching the surface.

We need to know not just how many people work in direct marketing itself, but how many other workers are indirectly supported by the industry: printers, and makers of printing equipment; paper, ink and packaging manufacturers; forestry workers; computer manufacturers, software houses and chip designers; telecoms companies and *their* suppliers — and on and on. FEDMA represents a major industry whose growth (or decline) has repercussions throughout the European economy, and in order to be able to punch our weight in Brussels (and Whitehall), where this is still not well understood, we require this information.

When the DMA was formed in the UK — ten years ago this year — one of its major objectives was the collection of just this kind of ammunition. Sadly, this task has not yet been carried out: it is overdue. Meanwhile, this survey is a whole lot better than nothing — I recommend it.

Robin Fairlie, F IDM

Customer Relationship Management: How to Turn a Good Business Into a Great One!

Graham Roberts-Phelps

Hawksmere, 2001; 230pp; hardback; ISBN 1854181149; £14.99 (£11.99 from Amazon)

Poor editing

This book read as if it had been dictated by a busy and not very intelligent or literate management trainer (there were very many literals), and been copy edited at the same level (eg ‘Do not allow any one customer to contribute more than 30 per cent of you sales in any given quarter.’). It is full of platitudes, restatements of the apparently obvious which turn out not to hold true, a hotchpotch of commonplace ideas about what customers want, over-simplified checklists and the like. If it is all so simple and recipe-driven, why are so many companies having difficulties here, while those that manage their customers better and make a profit do it by a carefully balanced programme of improvement covering systems, people, processes and so forth?

If this book were to fall into the hands of an unthinking senior manager, it might do enormous damage to hard-working marketing, sales and service people who are trying to improve how their company

Not all bad

manages its relationships with customers. I wondered whether the publisher was trying to jump on to the CRM bandwagon.

Of course, it is not all bad, as it does restate some important principles of CRM in the areas of sales and customer service, so the book might be useful to smaller companies considering the first principles of CRM and how to get started. But this applies to very few readers of *Interactive Marketing*.

Finally, I am always suspicious of an 'about the author' which says '... is an experienced and professional business trainer and consultant, sharing his ideas and insights with thousands of people and organisations every year'. Lucky them!

Professor Merlin Stone M IDM

The Future of Marketing: Practical Strategies for Marketers in the Post-Internet Age

Cor Molenaar; foreword by Don Peppers

FT/Prentice Hall, 2002; hardback; 235pp; ISBN 0273654977; £26.10 (£22 from Amazon)

Big promises

Like many before it, the title of this book creates an expectation of new marketing adventures — of new insights, new foresight and at least some new strategies to add to your marketing arsenal. But does it deliver? Does the author lay a yellow brick road to your marketing's future?

A glance at the contents does little to quicken the pulse. Chapter 7 is entitled 'Not everyone is equal on the Internet'. Sound familiar? And Chapter 8's battle-cry hardly stirs the synaptic junctions with its sequitur, 'Strategic choices: Winning or losing'.

Somewhat unfortunately, the foreword begins, 'If you picked up *The Future of Marketing* thinking it would be a thrilling read ... you guessed wrong'; at which point, this title was very nearly in the snail mail back to the editors of your esteemed journal, 600 words short of a review!

CRM summary

'... CRM is a strategy, not a suite of technology solutions,' continues Don Peppers, who does not miss the opportunity to promote the one-to-one mantra. And while his foreword provides a rounded summary of all that has been wrong with 'the CRM experience' to date, the author's introduction canters through familiar territory such as basic desires for social and organisational change being enabled and fuelled by technological advances.

Throwaway observations

Early into the text, Molenaar offers a throwaway observation that 'concentration of industry created scope for specialization'. This insignificant statement betrays a significant paradox: while the dissolving of global frontiers gives remote access to diverse, distant markets, the basic efforts of development and production require — or at least are enhanced by — geographic proximity. The observation is not developed, and this rather sets the tone for a series of observations that would be significant if only they were expanded upon.

For example, a rather dutiful chronology plots the use of computers in business through to the rise of the Internet — from a sparse, linear data

exchange network to an omnipresent, application-rich platform on which every aspect of our daily lives might come to depend. But for the marketer, omnipresence is not the same as omnipotence. Molenaar asserts that traditional marketing lacks a reference frame to support decision making in the Internet era. Marketing competency based around product, price, place and promotion is no longer enough. As the customer becomes more and more central to strategy, so the infrastructure and technical instruments of marketing become the limiting factors in successfully employing the Internet. Rather than building your marketing strategy around the 4Ps, you should build it around your market orientation. Eight possible orientations are described, but the implications of each and the dependent marketing actions that should be taken are sparsely argued.

A useful retrospective

In a nutshell, if you have not read any books (Mitchell, Peppers, Evans and Wurster, Negroponce *et al.*) for the past five years, then this is a useful retrospective, summarising the Internet's inexorable creep into our marketing and consumer lives — albeit in an enjoyably readable, plain-English style. You might 'discover' an evolved marketing geared to (mass) customisation requiring customised communications; that to make the most of the Internet you should treat it as the catalyst for wholesale organisational change, not just as a tactical medium; that marketing focus is moving from product excellence to (customer) relationship excellence; that the imperative dynamic of marketing is shifting from selling to buying; that the Internet will create a change from emotional to rational buying behaviour; and that interactivity and customer bonding are uniquely associated with the Internet.

Some contradictions

You may not, of course, agree with the fact or sentiment of all these observations. Indeed, there are a number of contradictions evident in some of them. Molenaar describes the existence and operational modes of 'buying' websites and 'selling' websites, yet goes on to state that 'organisations do not sell products or services on the Internet; rather, the customer purchases them — the process is thus a buying process not a selling process'. He describes how the Internet has created the need for greater customisation, then says, 'with the . . . popularisation of the Internet, the merits of the niche strategy rapidly declined'. Such contradictions are not irresolvable, but useful explanation of their relevant context and implication is lacking.

As your reviewer I am obliged to advise that if you have any reasonable understanding of interactive or direct marketing, mail order, CRM or ERP, then for the most part you will find yourself simply nodding along in agreement with much — though not all — of the text. And given that you are a reader of this journal, you are most unlikely to learn very much that is new to you.

No bright new strategies

The author *does* lay down a yellow brick road. But just like the film, this takes the adventurer home to the present day — perhaps with a fuller macro-understanding of how direct marketing, CRM and the Internet all fit together, though alas with no bright new strategies to inspire your future forays into the market-place.

Neil Morris M IDM