Editorial

Business-to-business (B2B) marketing is a part of marketing not often given the coverage the subject deserves. How many seminars or courses have you attended where it has almost been totally ignored, with the focus being on business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing?

Yet in recent years B2B marketing has been transformed, particularly with the advances in targeting and through the application of new media, and B2B e-commerce marketing is expected to grow to \$1.5bn by 2005.

Today B2B marketing faces many challenges, such as how to:

- manage multi-customer channels to maximise return on investment
- increase the efficiency of demand and lead generation
- make more productive use of data and targeting systems
- build a brand online and maximise online opportunities
- initiate breakthrough, engaging marketing communications
- ensure data quality is the top priority in an operation.

We have dedicated this issue of the journal to B2B marketing. The first three papers, and the case study and best practice pieces give extensive coverage of the subject.

The first paper by Diana Woodburn, a visiting Fellow to Cranfield and Director of the Marketing Best Practice consultancy, focuses on the topical issue of key account management (KAM). A key account is 'a customer deemed to be of strategic importance to the selling company'. It is clear KAM is concerned mainly with retention, and selection of key accounts is based on their potential rather than their past performance.

To make the selection and manage the business key account managers need a deeper understanding of the customer than ever before. This paper examines KAM in financial services, concluding that it is generally quite poorly understood, but suggesting that understanding of markets and market share could be improved using techniques such as market mapping.

The next paper, by Richard Webber, Richard Lloyd and Sue Walters, examines the topic of targeting using internal and external data, and looks at the commonalities between B2B and B2C.

The paper explains how recent developments in business credit risk management are now making available new sources of external data on businesses; how this information, when combined with existing business data sources, can create a multivariate classification of businesses; and the extent to which this new classification is likely to redress the current information imbalance between B2B and B2C marketers.

The third paper concerns supplier relationship management (SRM). With low-cost web-based customer management and sales development solutions at last gaining market acceptance, the tools are on hand for organisations to link up with their marketing suppliers. These can also be extended, using the same methodology, to working with their channel partners.

The result is massive savings in project management time associated with marketing campaigning, real-time handling of enquiries and leads that convert at a much higher rate into business, the ability to run far more marketing and lead generation campaigns using the same resources and a substantially better buying and customer service experience.

Our next paper swings to the diametrically opposite end of the spectrum. It hypothesises whether the Nectar scheme can work where the Shell Smart loyalty programme failed. If market research is anything to go by Nectar is a success: 17 million customers in 12.5 million households and more than 76 billion points issued by April 2003. But as the authors point out, the real test will have to wait a long while for the analysis of customer data. Tesco spent many years getting it right and Nectar faces a big challenge.

Our final paper, by Paul Cook, investigates the accuracy of IP cookie-based web analytics through an examination of two of the UK's busiest e-commerce sites — William Hill and Asda. It concludes, not unsurprisingly, that the Holy Grail for marketers is for their customers to log in to the website, opening the door to meaningful metrics.

Gary Stevens authors the New Technology Briefing on optimal e-mail marketing. He aims to outline the new best practice options available to marketers producing e-mail-based communications, from full-service agencies which can manage a campaign in its entirety to web-based or in-house departments and systems. It also describes the thought process a marketing organisation must go through to determine which level of support best meets its requirements and those of its brands.

Lastly, there is an excellent case study from Miele. Miele is a well-known German manufacturer of high-quality domestic appliances. It had a dual-channel approach (direct to customers and through the partner network). This was found to be counterproductive as both channels were competing for sales leads. Deciding to go only through a selected group of the UK's best dealers, the Miele Partnership Support System (MPSS) was designed to provide a one-stop-shop support system that was quick and easy for everyone to use. The system integrated the sales lead management, sales support, finance and warranty, partner training, advertising, direct marketing, PR and product sales coordination, all 'under one roof'.

Hopefully this will be the start of a series of B2B issues over the years. Your comments and views would be much appreciated.

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Co-Editors in Chief