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Book Reviews

Targeting Customers: How to Use Geodemographic and Lifestyle Data in Your Business (3rd edition)

Peter Sleight

WARC, 2004; 200pp; £45; ISBN 1841161453

Third edition

The publication of the third edition of *Targeting Customers* is nicely timed to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the UK 'launch' of geodemographics. When Baker, Birmingham and McDonald first introduced the concept in a paper at the annual conference of the Market Research Society in 1979, few would have predicted that this new form of segmentation would establish for itself a permanent position and specialism within the marketing industry. That the marketing industry continues to recognise geodemographics as a coherent market, with an expert mix of vendors, products and applications, is in no small part due to the efforts of Peter Sleight. It is the previous editions of this reference book which have defined the industry to its potential customers as well as to its own practitioners.

The geodemographic industry defined by Sleight

The excitement that Sleight conveys is not just for the business applications of geodemographics (and lifestyles), but for geodemographics as a market in its own right. As a one-time specialist in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) marketing his chronicle details with enthusiastic gusto the origins and growth of the category itself, the emergence of the established brands, their alliances and their acquisitions and the arrival of the new niche players. Nor does it neglect the multiplicity of rebranding initiatives, the brand extensions and the unceasing proliferation of product features by which vendors seek to generate competitive advantage within an increasingly crowded and confused marketplace. The seven years since the publication of the second edition have generated sufficient excitement in these areas to justify major updating of many sections.

Conveys excitement

When covering as technically complex a market as this it is often difficult to find an author who has the objectivity that comes from not being associated with a leading vendor and whose knowledge of the industry is detailed and comprehensive. Strengths of this and previous editions are that the chronology, brands and vendors have been researched in meticulous detail and set out in everyday conversational English. This would make the book a particularly appropriate read for marketing managers who need a readable overview of the industry, for students and for analysts finding themselves working in the industry for the first time. Consultants, whether internal or external, tasked with advising management on how to organise an effective market analysis capability would also find much of value in this book.

Meticulous research and conversational English suitable for all readers

A reference book

As Sleight would be the first to concede, this is more of a reference book than a technical manual. It might be of interest but rather less relevant to a business analyst wanting to evaluate specific quantitative

Fusion of techniques a future probability

techniques, or to the social scientist wanting to explore the theoretical basis on which neighbourhood is used as a basis for segmentation.

Looking forwards to the fourth edition of *Targeting Customers* or even to the 50th anniversary of geodemographics, I wonder how much longer this specialism can continue to define itself in its current form. As Sleight himself explains, the differentiation between geodemographics and lifestyle surveys is blurring, as is the distinction between multivariate segmentations that work at the postcode and the household/individual levels. In the area of database marketing and customer relationship management it seems to me that effectiveness will increasingly depend on competencies in the fusion of techniques which combine segmentations based on internal customer data with those based on external geodemographic or lifestyle data.

Bespoke applications

Within large organisations dependent on aligning large numbers of staff around a common segmentation system, the requirement for accessible visualisation tools which make the categories come alive may already have become as important as geographical information systems (GIS) and mapping tools. Bespoke applications incorporating this material may be as important a source of profit to vendors as highly developed GIS tools. At the point in time where academics discover the value of geodemographics through *Up My Street* and the Cabinet Office hosts interdepartmental seminars on geodemographics, it is possible to imagine the day when the targeting of customers becomes just one application for this chameleon of a business category.

Richard Webber F IDM

The Philosophy of Branding

Thom Braun

Kogan Page, 2004; hardback; 192pp; £9.99; ISBN 0 7494 4193 3

The author's two passions

The title of this small book is a much closer guide to its contents than I expected when first picking it up: it has at least as much to say about philosophy as about branding — by an author who admits to a passion for both subjects. This might make it sound a self-indulgent work — the attempt of a man with two imperfectly related private passions to forge a relationship, however implausible, between them.

But, if this is your initial suspicion, a little reading should dispel it. Chapter by short chapter we are introduced to a selection of the West's greatest philosophers, from Heraclitus in the sixth century BC to Karl Popper who died in 1994; we are given a résumé of the actual thinking of each, followed by a more speculative outline of what each would have had to say, consistent with the preceding résumé, about brands and branding had the subject occurred to them. And at the conclusion of each chapter we have that philosopher's 'top tip' for brand marketers.

Top tips

Actually, these top tips are collected together again at the end of the book, and this could be a good place to start. But do not, on that account, neglect the main text. If it sounds daunting, be assured it is not. It is clearly, even quite racily written; its serious points are well made; and its practical

Clear, racy, practical

advice is worthwhile. And if, along with some excellent advice on brand management issues, we learn something about the history of Western thought — a subject not, one would have to admit, wholly divorced from brand management — well, that can't be a bad thing, can it?

Branding as a Platonic concept

Of course, it is one of the functions of a good book (which this is) to provoke further thought. The concept (repeated early in this book) that the essence of a brand lies in the bundle of attributes and associations that surrounds it in the minds of its public is a wholly Platonic idea. But it is Plato stood on his head in the same way that Marx, with his materialist dialectic, stood Hegel's idealism upside down. (Strangely, our author devotes a chapter to Hegel, but makes no mention of Marx.) Consider: Plato held that the objects we perceive in everyday life are mere shadows or appearances — incomplete and imperfect copies of the 'real' forms or ideas created by God. Thus, there are many different chairs in this world — but only one form exists which encapsulates the essence of chairness. This form is the 'real' chair, of which the chairs we see around us are imperfect copies.

The brand as an idea . . .

In much the same way we might say that there are many physical versions of the Jaguar XJS — but that the brand that carries this name is not contained in any one of them, but rather in the apprehension — the idea — of the XJS which exists in the minds of those exposed to it. What we do not do is to claim that this idea constitutes, in some metaphysical sense, the 'real' XJS with the cars on the road being mere imperfect copies. (Although it's a nice concept, bearing in mind Jaguar's long-standing reputation for Monday and Friday cars.) Rather, we accept that the idea of the XJS — the essence of the brand in people's minds — is an amalgam of the perceived qualities of all the cars of this marque. Creating the required perception is, of course, the business of the brand manager — but the actual perception created will not, in the long run, be a million miles away from the reality summed up by the collection of cars on the road. (Even a brand manager can't fool all of the people all of the time.)

. . . and as an amalgam of actual experiences

So, the Platonic concept of a brand that has an existence separate from (and in a sense superior to) any of its physical manifestations remains with us. What has changed is that we have moved from the view that the idea — the brand — is primary and its manifestations secondary, to the recognition that it is the manifestations — with a little help from the brand manager — that create the idea, the essence, the brand. Induction rather than deduction; pragmatism rather than idealism. But right side up or upside down, there is no escape from Plato.

Robin Fairlie F IDM

The Communications Challenge

Julian Saunders (ed.)

The Account Planning Group, 2004; available from www.apg.org.uk; £15.00 (excluding p&p)

The Communications Challenge lives up to its promise as a practical guide to media-neutral planning. Whether you are a direct marketer or a

A guide to media-neutral planning

brand marketer, whether you are a junior executive or a senior director, the neutral challenge is one you can no longer shy away from. For years it has enjoyed the lip-service of many a media director, and indeed more than a few marketing columnists, but now, finally I hear you say, the media-neutral age is with us.

The principles are simple: media choices have increased, many traditional channels have suffered audience fragmentation, media consumption has undergone a step-change, advertising effectiveness has evolved and media planning needs to catch up.

The challenge for most of us is that real evidence is thin on the ground: the theory is still filling out and the deep econometric models that marketers need truly to 'know' live only in the hands of a select few agencies and clients. For the rest of us, learning from the case studies collated by Julian Saunders is critical. Media-neutral planning stems from a highly scientific approach to understanding the incremental effect of exposure and interaction on each occasion with each marketing channel.

With a pedigree that includes Ogilvy and McCann, Saunders is well placed to tell the story of media neutrality by himself; but instead, *The Communications Challenge* is a collaboration with some of the most respected of the industry: Admap's Roderick White provides his insight on customer insight, former PHD managing director Tony Regan and APG chair Marie Louise-Neill take a look at campaign evaluation, with Peter Crawshaw exploring channel planning and Janet Grimes creativity. And they do this while retaining consistency in a light, easily accessible and richly illustrated text. The history of their expertise shines through, including agency management, branding, marketing, digital, account planning, media planning, data planning, CRM and customer research. Yes, this is an excellent way to get to grips with the media-neutral challenge.

A collaboration of respected authors, with consistent editing

'The customer's journey'

Saunders has been talking about 'the customer's journey' for some time, and by taking a fresh look at how we make purchases what becomes clear is what we all know from our personal experience: for customers, the buying process is not just a couple of steps but many different touchpoints in their journey towards a purchase. With customers interacting with different media throughout, it follows that the roles each play will vary depending on the point in the journey. In *The Communications Challenge* he combines this individual approach with the macroeconomic modelling approach to provide a holistic view of what it means to be media neutral.

All marketers need to understand the theory and practice of media-neutral planning: this is an excellent place to start.

*Danny Meadows-Klue
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