Editorial

Some of the worst of an editor's problems spring from the desire to please all of his readers all of the time. Some of our readers want more emphasis on business-to-business material. Others want greater concentration on 'traditional' media, where the bulk of marketing expenditure is still to be found. Still others demand that we be up with the cutting edge of each new technological development affecting our industry. But on one issue there is general agreement: the thing that our readers seek after most avidly (and so do we, on their behalf) is good case study material. There is nothing, we are constantly told — and we believe it — so instructive as a real-life example.

Case study material is not always easy to come by — issues of confidentiality being to the fore — but in this quarter we are lucky enough to have two. The first of these is a look by Peter Sleight at changing times in Alliance & Leicester — 'a direct bank with a high-street presence'. (Yet even after quadrupling its internet spend, making it the leader among retail banks in proportion of business conducted online and direct, A&L will still be spending no more than 20 per cent of its advertising budget on the internet. A reminder, our 'traditional' readers might say, of where the balance of old and new media still lies.)

Our second case study, by Andrea Reid and Daragh O'Brien, is that precious rarity in the genre: an example of how not to do it — how not, in this case, to create, from a series of legacy systems within a company, a database providing a single view of customer (or SVC — apologies for yet another acronym) as a prerequisite for a CRM system. This necessarily anonymous company failed to set clear strategic objectives; it failed to recognise issues of data quality and compatibility between legacy systems, particularly in the area of name and address handling; it allowed intra-company disputes over data ownership to bedevil the project; it embarked on a competing (for resources) systems project, causing SVC to be sidelined. Which is just about the complete gamut of egregious errors for a project of this kind.

The good news is that the company has recognised its mistakes, gone back to square one and restarted the project, with firm strategic objectives, a recognition of the vital nature of clean, unduplicated, structured data, a realisation that a customer database is a *corporate* asset and a properly ordered set of priorities. A case of learning, very expensively, the hard way. The sad thing is that learning, if never precisely easy, does not need to be that hard — and certainly not that expensive. A few days ago we received a letter from a reader complaining that this journal is 'a hard read'. Well, perhaps it is, as reading goes; we ask our authors to produce original material with new ideas and concepts for the consideration and instruction of their fellow practitioners, and such material calls for careful, rather than easy, reading. But it is surely easier to read the thoughts, experiences and recommendations of one's peers — and to learn from them in advance, rather than by analysing too late the rubble of one's own disaster.

Those of us who have worked for many years in direct marketing (meaning, until recently, in direct mail and mail order) have always known that a single customer view is not just a prerequisite of CRM, but a necessity of any kind of joined-up marketing. We have been forced, for decades, to recognise the crucial nature of data quality — not least in what Richard Webber, in a paper in Vol. 3, No. 4 of this journal, referred to as customer recognition systems, and which a reviewer of a book on address data management in our very first issue called 'the most intractable programming problem that the commercial computer industry has had to face'.

We have published paper after paper stressing the need for top management buy-in to major projects, for clear strategic thinking, for internal marketing, for the ordering of priorities. So it is a disappointment to find that those companies which come relatively late to direct marketing, for whom customer orientation is a revolutionary idea, are too often unable to learn from the hard-won experiences of those who have been there before them. Conveying these experiences to those who are

prepared to learn in advance, at the expense of a little hard work, rather than later in the wake of a disaster — that is a major function of any serious journal, and certainly of this one.

Data derived from multiple sources is the opening theme, too, of a paper by Steve Wills on customer insight. Insight, in Steve's view, is the live holistic product of inert data, themselves derived from multiple sources. It needs to be regarded as a strategic asset, and to be managed as such. And if, as Steve would have it, the raw data are the bricks from which the insight house is built, then underlying his thesis is the need for those bricks to be of high and consistent quality.

Just as we have never doubted the need for any company to collate, standardise and integrate the knowledge it acquires from various sources and channels about its customers, so we have never been in two minds about the need to integrate the marketing communications we address to those customers, in such a way as to present, at all touchpoints, a single picture of the company. Hester Stuart-Menteth, Simon Arbuthnot and Hugh Wilson have contributed a piece that examines IMC as observed by the customers of a single company. They examine how customers' experiences of the company, through various touchpoints, have affected their relationship with the company, and also how far these consumers fit the profile of the hypothesised 'new consumer' of recent marketing literature.

Toon Diependaele contributes a paper on Data Collection, on-line and internationally, emphasising the important elements of data gathering, data enrichment and data analysis. This is a subject which, with the continued development of the single market in Europe, and the growth of Internet marketing, will assume an importance even greater than that which it already has.

Susan Adams, Bruce Weinberg, Jaci Jarrett Masztal and Diane Surette have made a study of online shopping by employees at work in the USA and Canada, noting its extent, the time involved, attitudes towards its permissibility and much else. They offer some ideas for marketing strategies to take advantage of what is clearly a huge market segment, and conclude with a series of questions for further exploration.

Andrew Berger has contributed a New Technology Briefing on radio finding identification (RFID: that's one acronym you will become very familiar with in the years ahead, long after you've forgotten what it actually stands for). Those who believe — or just take seriously — the author's contention that RFID will have a greater impact than the internet clearly have some reading and some thinking to do — urgently.

And we are indebted to Alastair Tempest for a further update on the European legal and regulatory scene. It does not make cheerful reading for those who regard the single market as the one solid economic benefit to emerge so far from the European project.

And beyond that we have our usual collection of Abstracts and Book Reviews.

Robin Fairlie and Derek Holder

PS We carry an ad on page 393 of this issue for the IDM's tenth Annual Symposium, entitled:

Empower your brand: Digital, Data, Direct

For further details of this year's exciting 3-day programme (May 9–11), and booking facilities, see under www.theidm.com/symposium. To make sure of your place at this popular event, **BOOK NOW!**