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Strategy in Direct and Interactive Marketing and Integrated Marketing Communications

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Abstract

Continuing advances in database management and communication technologies have greatly accelerated the ability of marketing to become more direct, highly focused, and increasingly interactive. Academic programs must be able to provide students with both the theoretical knowledge and the applied skills to meet the business expectations and provide students with distinctive and sustainable career advantages. Professionals in direct and interactive marketing (DIM) and integrated marketing communications (IMC) have worked to reach a profitable balance between science and art as well as technique and creativity. At its best, DIM in IMC combines the freedom to explore new worlds of creativity with the discipline of measured response. This paper offers an overview of direct and interactive marketing strategy concepts, presented in ways that encourage effective teaching and learning.

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1. Introduction

Marketing has become more direct, highly focused, and increasingly interactive. The consumer acceptance coupled with compressed value chains, individualized target markets, and personalized business relationships have dramatically changed the face of the practice we call marketing. Continuing advances in database management and communication technologies have greatly accelerated the ability to go direct. Because these changes are occurring at such a rapid pace, organizations frequently have trouble understanding and adapting to this one-to-one marketing phenomenon. Herein lies the opportunity for students and the challenge of academia. (Hauser & Lewison, 2005)

While many business firms may lack the expertise to pursue high level direct marketing initiatives, they expect their new hires, usually recent college graduates, to bring to the table the knowledge and a set of competencies consistent with the new realities of direct marketing. Therefore, academic programs capable of providing the theoretical knowledge together with the basic skill and core competencies needed in the application of said knowledge will provide their students distinctive and sustainable career advantages within the real world marketplace. Direct interactive marketing is an exciting, robust, and expanding field of endeavor.

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Marketing educators should strive to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed for effective integrated marketing communications. Some marketing professionals express concern that graduates do not know how to execute theoretical concepts in practical situations. Thus an interdisciplinary approach that mirrors the IMC profession makes most sense. The key to managing that process in the classroom is to present IMC as a whole concept with several parts rather than distinct practices that get cobbled together to form an overall IMC plan.

Indeed previous research on effectively teaching concepts in IMC includes using a broad perspective (Scott, 2001) and an interdisciplinary approach (Everett, Siegel, & Marchant, 1999). However, a study on marketing curriculum and delivery found that in general, IMC is taught in a typical classroom lecture environment without utilizing active learning (Schultz, Kerr, Kim, & Patti, 2007). Active learning enriches the classroom experience and has a positive impact on student outcomes (Drea, Tripp, & Stuenkel, 2005).

Applied marketing courses, such as direct and interactive marketing, should include experiential activities that apply knowledge and foster skills development (Schibrowsky, Peltier, & Boyt, 2002). Further, instruction in direct marketing should also include developing technical skills and practical learning opportunities. In general, a solid approach to direct and interactive marketing education includes linking classroom experiences with industry expectations.

2. Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is an approach to brand communications where the different modes work together to create a seamless experience for the customer and are presented with a similar tone and style that reinforces the brand's core message. Its goal is to make all aspects of marketing communication such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations direct marketing, online communications and social media work together as a unified force, rather than permitting each to work in isolation, which maximizes their cost effectiveness.

IMC is becoming more significant in marketing practice because of the reduced cost effectiveness of mass media and media fragmentation. As consumers spend more time online and on mobile devices all exposures of the brand need to tie together so they are more likely to be remembered. Increasingly the strategies of brands cannot be understood by looking solely at their advertising. Instead they can be understood by seeing how all aspects of their communications ecosystem work together and in particular how communications are personalized for each customer and react in real time, as in a conversation.

This is enhanced when integration goes beyond just the basic communications tools. There are other levels of integration such as Horizontal, Vertical, Internal, External and Data integration. Here is how they help to strengthen Integrated Communications.

Horizontal Integration occurs across the marketing mix and across business functions - for example, production, finance, distribution and communications should work together and be conscious that their decisions and actions send messages to customers.

While different departments such as sales, direct mail and advertising can help each other through Data Integration. This requires a marketing information system which collects and shares relevant data across different departments.

Vertical Integration means marketing and communications objectives must support the higher level corporate objectives and corporate missions.

Meanwhile Internal Integration requires internal marketing - keeping all staff informed and motivated about any new developments from new advertisements, to new corporate identities, new service standards, new strategic partners and so on.

External Integration, on the other hand, requires external partners such as advertising and PR agencies to work closely together to deliver a single seamless solution - a cohesive message - an integrated message.

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