SECTION I

Introduction to IMC

In this first section of the book we shall be introducing the notion of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), and then looking at its overall role in building strong brands and strengthening companies. IMC as a marketing discipline is relatively recent, having emerged in the 1980s. This is not to say that marketers did not do many of the things implied by IMC prior to that time, only that it was not until then that the idea was formalized as it is understood today.

There were many definitions of IMC in those early days; and even today the term is used in a variety of ways in discussing marketing communication activities. To our mind, IMC is basically *planning* in a systematic way in order to determine the most effective and consistent message for appropriate target audiences.

Despite the fact that most marketers believe IMC is important, and should be practiced, the reality is that it is rarely successfully implemented. There are a number of reasons for this, largely concerned with the way companies are organized, their culture, and how those likely to be involved in a truly *integrated* marketing communication effort are compensated. If managers' salaries, promotions, and bonuses are linked to the size of their budgets, their primary concern will likely be to optimize their share of the IMC pie rather than consider what might be best for the brand overall.

To be effective, IMC must follow a thorough strategic planning process, and one will be briefly introduced in Chapter 1. It will outline what is involved in providing a firm foundation for gaining an understanding of the various aspects and elements of IMC that will be discussed in subsequent chapters, leading up to the final section of the book dealing with IMC strategic planning in depth. With this foundation in place, Chapter 2 will consider the role of IMC in building brands and Chapter 3 how IMC strengthens companies. The two are interrelated, as we shall see.

The keys to building effective brands are first finding the correct positioning, and then how to successfully create a strong, positive brand attitude. IMC is critical to ensure that all aspects of a brand's marketing communication is delivering a consistent message toward that end. It also plays an important role in managing the communication strategies associated with a company's branding strategy within its overall product and brand portfolio.

All of the marketing communication efforts for a company's brands will also contribute to its overall corporate identity, image, and reputation. While *marketing* communication is not the only communication effecting corporate identity, image, and reputation, it plays a significant role. IMC programs must therefore also be consistent with, and be a part of the management and delivery of all other aspects of a company's communication. Corporate meaning, which is comprised of all those elements, will inform a corporate brand; and this *corporate* brand must be compatible with all of the brands the company markets.

CHAPTER 1

Overview of IMC

In the world of marketing, there is no question that certain areas that have been practiced in one way or another over the years are suddenly dressed up in new clothes and touted as 'the' new thing. Relationship marketing comes quickly to mind. Marketers always understood (or certainly should have) the importance of sound relationships with their customers, but the mid-1990s saw an inundation of articles in the business press, 'airport books', and even academic work, in the area of 'relationship' marketing. Today, it seems to have morphed into customer relationship marketing, or CRM, and as we shall later see this idea is even informing definitions of IMC.

Why do we bring this up at the beginning of a book on integrated marketing communication? It is to make the point that unlike many fads in marketing, the idea of IMC really was something new in marketing; at least IMC correctly implemented. In fact, in the twenty or so years since the emergence of the idea of IMC in the mid- to late 1980s, few companies have yet been able to truly implement effective IMC. We shall touch on several of the key reasons why later in this chapter. First, however, we need to understand just what is meant by integrated marketing communication or IMC.

What is IMC?

We might briefly define IMC as the planning and execution of all types of advertising-like and promotion-like messages selected for a brand, service, or company, in order to meet a common set of communication objectives, or more particularly, to support a single 'positioning'. We believe strongly that the key to IMC is *planning*, and the ability is to deliver a consistent message.

Original definitions of IMC

In 1989, the American Association of Advertising Agencies (known as the Four A's) formed a task force on integration that was to define IMC from the viewpoint of the Four A's agencies. The task force came up with this definition of IMC: 'A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines (e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations) and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact.'

In the same year, the investment firm Shearson-Lehman Hutton (1989) issued a detailed report on consumer advertising, with special emphasis on diversification into areas that would lead to integration. They concluded that a number of changes at work in the marketplace would force traditional packaged goods marketers to take a much more integrated approach to marketing. They noted that high-involvement non-service products (e.g. automobiles or cruise vacations) where the selling task is more complicated were at that time more apt to use integrated strategies. In general, the report concluded that the dynamics were in place for a surge in demand for integrated communications from all kinds of advertisers.

In their 1993 book *Integrated Marketing Communication* (perhaps the first book to really deal with the subject), Don Schultz and his colleagues talked about IMCs as a new way of looking at the whole where once we only saw parts such as advertising, public relations, sales promotions, purchasing, employee communications and so forth (Schultz et al., 1993). They saw IMC as realigning communications to look at it in the way the consumer sees it, as a flow of information from indistinguishable sources. They observed that professional communicators have always been condescendingly amused that consumers call everything advertising or public relations. Now they recognize with concern, if not chagrin, that that is exactly the point. It is all one 'thing' to the consumer who sees or hears it. They go on to say that IMC means talking to people who buy or don't buy based on what *they* see, hear, feel, and so on, and not just about a product or service. It also means delivering a return on investment, not just spending a budget. This definition 'looks back' at the goals of IMC. We will be looking at IMC largely from a strategic perspective for *planning and implementing* IMC.

At Northwestern University's Medill School in the USA (where Schultz was teaching) the curriculum was in fact changed to focus on this new idea of IMC rather than the more traditional programs in advertising. At the time, they offered their own working definition (Schultz, 1993): 'Integrated marketing communications is the process of developing and implementing various forms of persuasive communication programs with customers and prospects over time. The goal of IMC is to influence or directly affect the behaviour of the selected communications audience. IMC considers all sources of brand or company contacts that a customer or prospect has with the product or service as potential delivery channels for future messages. Further, IMC makes use of all forms of communication which are relevant to the customers and prospects, and to which they might be receptive. In sum the IMC process starts with the customer or prospect and then works back to determine and define the forms and methods through which persuasive communications programs should be developed.'

This definition, while more elaborate than ours, is still basically addressing the need for overall communication planning. It is critical to consider IMC as a *process*, not a 'thing'.

Early management perceptions of IMC

The 1989 Four A's definition was utilized in a study of large consumer packaged goods advertisers in 1991. The study was conducted among senior marketing executives of major packaged goods advertisers. Based upon the Four A's definition, two-thirds of the companies interviewed said that they were in fact now integrated. Generally the managers of these companies believed that IMC is a sound idea and that it has real value to their organizations. Most also believed that IMCs programs would increase the overall effect and impact of their marketing communications programs (Caywood et al., 1991).

Many of the questions in the study dealt with the reliance on or participation of advertising agencies in this integration process. While many of the managers believed that they would rely more heavily on outside marketing communications people in the future and that placing their business with one agency would make them a more important client, they were split on whether or not they would actually use the broader range of services which they expected advertising agencies to be offering. Part of this apparent inconsistency might be explained by the relatively strong disagreement these managers had with the proposition that most of the new ideas in marketing communications actually come from advertising agencies.

In fact, the study generally found that advertising agencies would probably *not* be a favorite supplier of IMCs. Many of the advantages that were seen by advertising agencies as reasons for them to be the integrating force for communications programs apparently were either not important to client companies or else they were not believed. Managers of these companies tended to feel that agencies that offered a variety of different communications alternatives beyond their traditional role would not necessarily have the highest level of talent across all areas of need. This study seems to indicate that advertisers in the early years of IMC were not convinced that advertising agencies were the best qualified to coordinate an IMC program, or that they could do it more cost effectively. Apparently advertising agencies had not demonstrated in the IMC programs they had been coordinating that using a single agency is the best way to implement an IMC program.

In a 1993 study where IMC was defined as 'the strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to influence its perceived brand value', communication and marketing managers from companies (not advertising agencies or other marketing communication suppliers) were asked how valuable they thought IMC was or could be for their organizations (Duncan and Everett, 1993). The mean answer, based upon a 5-point bipolar scale in which 1 indicates 'very valuable' and 5 indicates 'not at all valuable', was a strong 1.76. A majority of these managers also felt their company would be making more use of IMC over the next 5 years, and they expected their agencies and vendors to work more closely together. There is no doubt that marketing and communications managers in the early 1990s felt that IMC was a valuable concept, and one that would play an increasingly more important role in their companies.

Yet after a few years, companies had not yet really begun to put in place the organizational structures needed to implement IMCs programs (Prensky et al., 1996). Marketing managers were in agreement about the need for, and the desirability of IMC, but it was proving difficult.

More recent definition of IMC

The emphasis in those early days was certainly on *planning*, and to our mind this must remain at the heart of any definition of IMC. But today IMC is more likely to be talked about in terms of 'customer relationships'. In fact, Kotler (2003) has put it in just those terms. He now defines IMC as 'a way of looking at the whole marketing process from the viewpoint of the customer'. Yet only a few years earlier (Kotler et al., 1999) he was defining IMC as 'the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organization and its products'.

Others have taken this idea of IMC from a customer relationship view a great deal further. Tom Duncan, at the University of Colorado, who like Dan Schultz and his colleagues at Northwestern, was one of the early academics to restructure their advertising programs in terms of IMC, today sees it as *simply put* (our emphasis) a 'process for managing customer relationships that drive brand value' (Duncan, 2002). Nothing 'simple' at all we would argue. In fact, he goes on to say that what this means is that IMC is a 'cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them'.

There is a lot here in this definition. Of course, marketing is (or should be) about satisfying consumer demand. But we would suggest that the real key here, in terms of IMC, is 'strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent', and to do that requires strategic planning. Duncan goes on to 'define' the major elements within his definition. The idea of a cross-functional process refers to a need for all parts of a company and vendors working on a particular brand to work together to 'plan and merge all messages a company sends to its target audiences'. We totally agree, but as we shall see, getting everyone involved in a brand's marketing communication to cooperate is very difficult. Creating and nourishing stakeholder relationships and profitable customer relationships refers to IMC identifying those target audiences most likely to contribute to long-term profit, including both consumers and others with links to a brand (e.g. Government regulatory agencies and investors). Strategically controlling or influencing all messages means that every contact with the market must be consistent, and encouraging purposeful dialogue implies that people want the ability to interact with a company.

As we said, there is a lot here in this definition. But in the end, IMC is really all about *planning* in order to deliver a *consistent message.* Effective IMC should certainly encourage strong customer relationships, but it does that through effective planning in order to develop an integrated communication program that will optimize specific communication objectives that lead to a desired behaviour on the part of a target audience. Actually, after Duncan explains his detailed definition of IMC (as we have reviewed), even he reminds us that *communication* is the foundation of brand relationships and the basic principle of IMC.

Strategies for building strong profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders is part of the marketing plan, and effective marketing communication should support that plan. We shall leave it to others to discuss IMC in this broader marketing-oriented way. A *strategic* understanding of IMC must be based upon a rigorous planning process that will identify appropriate target audiences, set specific communication objectives for these target audiences, develop marketing communication that will accomplish those objectives in a consistent way, and find the best ways of delivering the message. That is what IMC, and this book, is all about.

Managing IMC

In the early years of IMC thinking, despite the feelings of many marketing managers that advertising agencies may not have been the best planning catalyst for IMC, they did play a major role in providing and managing these initial attempts at integrating marketing communications. A number of very large advertising agencies and agency groups were quite active in this new area of IMC. Such agencies as (then) Saatchi and Saatchi, Young and Rubicam, The Interpublic Group of Companies, WPP Group, Ogilvy and Mather, Leo Burnett Company, and DDB Needham, while all primarily advertising agencies, nevertheless delivered other marketing communication services either from specific divisions, subsidiaries of the groups, or through alliances or joint ventures. They were all selling themselves as able to provide all the services and disciplines a marketer could want for marketing communication.

But even at the time, what they were offering as IMC was not what their clients either wanted or for which they were willing to pay. While 85% of advertisers said they wanted IMC services, only a fraction felt their advertising agency would provide it. Major agencies tried to deal with this issue in different ways. Many agencies set up programs to educate their executives in IMCs. Prior to its break-up in 1995, Lintas Campbell-Ewald, a division of The Interpublic Group of Companies, had for several years offered an extensive training program in IMCs for their middle and upper level managers. Y&R launched a worldwide IMCs training program in the early 1990s aimed at educating top executives, with a goal to extend the training program to all agency managers. Leo Burnett, one of the early leaders in the IMCs arena, implemented a new integrated planning and communications program. Their goal was for all of the Burnett's then 2000 plus US employees to attend the 6-day seminars. Major advertising agencies may have gotten off to a slow or even wrong start, but there is no doubt that they seemed committed to delivering IMCs for their clients.

Even though the marketing communications industry has always been made up of a variety of specialty groups, almost by default traditional advertising agencies took the lead in the IMCs planning for their clients' brands. The reason was simple. The vast majority of a company's communication budget was usually with an advertising agency. But today, there has been a virtual explosion in the number of new agencies devoted to some aspect of marketing communication, fueled in a large part by the (unfortunate) trend toward an ever increasing emphasis on promotion, as well as alternative ways of delivering messages such as 'new media'. Unfortunately, this only complicates the ability to develop and manage sound strategies for IMC. Let us consider for a moment just some of the many groups that could play a role in the creation and delivery of marketing communications.

To begin with, there are all of the traditional sources of marketing communication messages such as advertising agencies (everything from full-service agencies to boutiques), sales promotion or collateral agencies, public relations firms, and specialty agencies (e.g. those that deal with trade shows or with event marketing). Add to them corporate identity groups, packaging specialists, branding companies, the increasing number of direct response agencies, and telemarketers. Then there are Internet agencies, new media, and media buying groups (who themselves are playing a greater role in overall communication strategy).

Distribution channels can also have an impact, and not only with trade communications. Retailers certainly play an influencing role via co-op programs or through channels marketing. All franchise organizations have participation from franchises in their marketing communications. Soft drink and beer companies have bottlers and distributor networks that frequently have a strong voice in the direction of their brand's marketing communication.

Then there is the company's organization itself, which could include any number of departments with some responsibility for marketing communication. And unfortunately, in most cases these departments have their own managers and operate independently of each other. Too many companies still practice vertical rather than horizontal management, and this means departments are often unlikely to even talk with one another let alone work together. Even in large companies where a single group has been created to oversee all marketing communication, and to coordinate the efforts of all outside agencies and suppliers (something essential for effective IMC, we would argue), it is often difficult to rest control from brand management. Also, there is a long history of tension between the sales force and marketing teams.

Now, multiply all of this by the number of countries where a company markets its brands. While it is not unusual for many marketing communication suppliers to have global networks, it is still a management nightmare. Global IMC must take into account local differences while still maintaining a consistent overall positioning for the brand. One way international marketers try to deal with this is by consolidating all their global marketing communication efforts in one agency with the capacity of handling most of its marketing communication needs, either within the agency itself or through its network of sister organizations.

But you begin to get the idea. All of this potential input into a company's marketing communication must be controlled and managed in order to ensure a consistent strategy and message. This is not easy, and even with the best of intentions it is difficult to implement effectively. But, if there is to be effective IMC, this problem must be solved. There must be a central source that has *real* responsibility for not only coordinating the efforts of all those involved in the process, but also the authority to make decisions. And perhaps the most important decision they must have the authority to make is how the marketing communication budget is to be allocated.

The role of advertising and promotions in IMC

We mentioned earlier that one of the main reasons traditional advertising agencies originally took the lead in managing IMC was because that was where most of the marketing communications money was to be found. But this is all changing. With the increasing short-term focus on the bottom line, promotion-oriented marketing communication is playing an ever larger role, and many companies are questioning the role of advertising today. They shouldn't.

What exactly is the role of advertising in IMC? As we have tried to make clear, IMC is a *planning* concept. So, the easy answer is that traditional advertising 'fits' when and where it makes sense in most effectively communicating with the target audience. But this easy answer will not be very satisfactory to many managers.

As Schultz (1995a) once put it, 'An integrated approach to communication planning and implementation does not necessarily reduce the role or value of traditional mass-media advertising'. We agree. In today's world, what is advertising? Television commercials include direct response 800 numbers or ask consumers to look for a coupon in the newspaper – and actually show the coupon. Is this advertising or is it promotion? In the past, advertising has been traditionally delivered via measured media: television, radio, newspaper, magazines, outdoor. But today advertising messages are also delivered through direct marketing and channels marketing (e.g., trade-oriented marketing such as co-op programs), areas where in the past one only found promotional messages.

Look at Figure 1.1. Is this an advertisement or a promotion for Olympus? It certainly looks like an advert, but the headline delivers a promotion-like message. This is a very good example of an advert-like promotion. It contains a well-executed brand-building advertising message, based upon key benefits of the brand, as well as a promotional offer of a free 2GB memory card, along with a 'praiseworthy new price', all designed to create an immediate intention to buy. Do you think this was paid for out of the advertising budget or the promotional budget? Would it make a difference? Not if it was part of an IMC campaign, because it would have been part of the IMC budget. It would have been created because it made good *strategic* sense for the brand as part of its IMCs program.

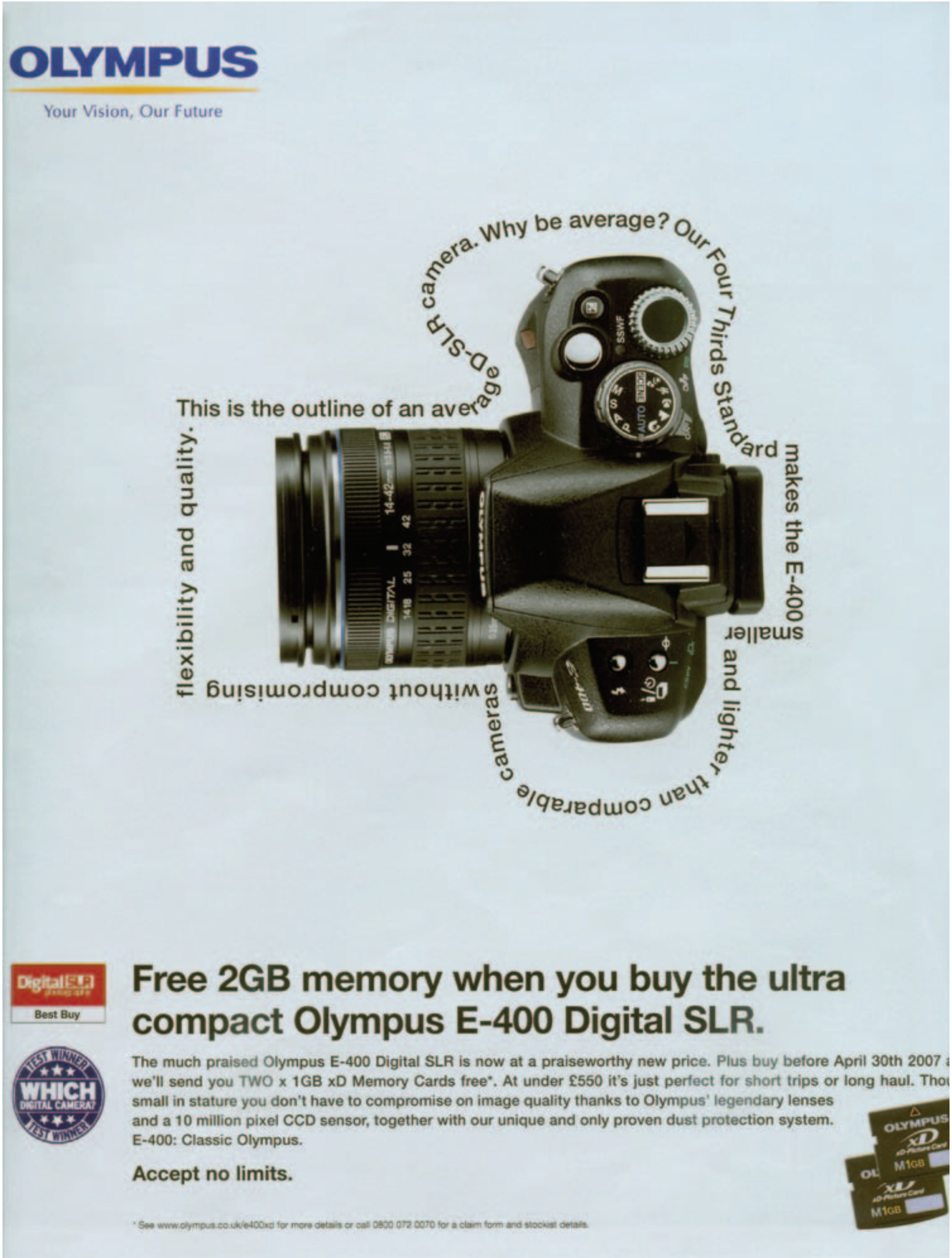

Figure 1.1
A very good example of an advert-like promotion. *Courtesy*: Olympus

The consumer certainly does not know (or, we suspect, care) what constitutes 'advertising', as we mentioned earlier. In an interesting study conducted in the US by the Leo Burnett agency, 1,000 consumers were called at random and asked what they would call a wide variety of marketing communication forms (Schultz, 1995b). They found that consumers answered 'advertising' to over 100 different forms of marketing communication. Many of the answers indeed would fit most advertising executives' definition of advertising. But what about such things as sweepstakes/contests/games, product catalogs, information brochures, window displays in stores, coupons, bill inserts, and such? Sounds more like traditional promotion, but well over 90% of the consumers interviewed called them 'advertising'. In fact, 92% said product packaging is advertising! Perhaps not surprisingly, consumers seem to see almost every form of marketing communication as advertising.

Rossiter and Percy (1997) make two interesting points about the role of traditional advertising versus promotion in today's marketing communication. Addressing the swing to promotion in marketing communication budgets, they point out that in spite of this swing (a) there has been an *increase*, not a decrease in the use of general advertising media in the last decade (from when they were writing in the mid-1990s), and (b) most of the growth in promotion, apart from all-but-required trade promotions, had been *additional* – and most of this in advert-like promotions.

Nevertheless, in traditional terms the rate of advertising growth has basically followed the pace of media inflation, while other areas of non-traditional advertising as well as promotion have experienced real growth. But this second point about advert-like promotions is very important. It is not traditional forms of promotion that are growing, but promotion-oriented messages that are very advertising-like. For example, as Rossiter and Percy point out, direct mail and telemarketing, by far the largest and fastest-growing forms of marketing communication, are generally thought of as promotion rather than advertising. Yet when properly used they are as much advertising, in the sense of building brand awareness and brand equity, as they are promotion in the sense of meeting some short-term sales objective. The same may be said of free standing inserts (FSIs), by far the most widely used way of delivering coupons. In the strictest sense these are promotion-oriented media, and we shall treat them as such in this book. But they are also very *advertising-like* in their ability to help build awareness and equity for a brand.

This blurring of the old distinctions between advertising and promotion is yet another reason for the importance of IMC, because what one might think of as traditional advertising skills now play such a critical role in every form of marketing communication. As we shall see, planning an effective IMC program requires the manager to address strategic creative and media questions that have always been addressed in traditional advertising. These principles are simply being applied to a wider range of options. In IMC, one is setting communication objectives and selecting media to maximize their ability to effectively reach the target market. But rather than only considering various ways of using advertising, or independently considering some form of promotion, the planning and execution of all marketing communication should be *integrated*. The point is that in the end one may consider any marketing communication that deals with brand building as delivering an advertising-like message, and marketing communication that is looking for short-term action on the part of the target audience as delivering a promotion-like message; and promotions should include advertising-like messages.

As we shall see in later chapters, the fact that marketing communication may be delivered via new media or old, as part of a direct marketing campaign or on the Internet, as an advert or promotion, the strategic foundation for the development and execution of the message remains the same. The brain will process the words and images the same way, regardless of how it is delivered. Sound is sound, words are words, and pictures are pictures to the brain, regardless of where the sense organs find them.

The role of advertising agencies in IMC

Because traditional advertising agencies have the experience with advertising-like, brand-building marketing communication, they should have a better sense for what is needed strategically in the planning of all IMC. Most of the new promotion-oriented agencies and media service groups specializing in particular areas will simply not have the advertising-like message skills or experience needed to fully integrate the advertising-like message component in their promotions, or IMC planning in general. For this reason, a strong argument could be made for an advertising agency, one with broad resources, to play the primary role in coordinating IMC; always under the client's management. Unfortunately, for many reasons, today's advertising agencies have fewer resources than they did 20 years ago. But, they are still in a better position for understanding *strategically* what is needed to deliver effective IMC, and to have the relevant creative talent.

■ Barriers to effective IMC

Despite the fact that most marketers seem to agree that IMC makes sense, after 20 years there is very little evidence that it is being practiced by many companies. To the extent that it is being used, it is probably most likely to be found among fast moving consumer goods (fmcg companies) operating globally as they look for ways to coordinate their international marketing communication needs.

It should not be assumed by marketing managers that if they are not practicing IMC they are simply not enjoying the potential benefits of it. Without IMC, a brand's marketing communication could actually be significantly *less* effective. And the more complex the market, the less effective it will be. The lack of IMC, the lack of coordinated communications planning and the delivery of a consistent message, could lead to multiple portrayals of a brand in the market. Even if the positioning is the same, if there is a lack of a consistent look and feel to all of a brand's marketing communication there will be no synergy or 'lift' from the overall program.

With a consistent look and feel (something we will be dealing with in Chapter 9), the overall impact of a campaign is much greater than the sum of its parts because the *processing* of each piece of marketing communication is facilitated by the prior processing of other messages in the campaign. When the individual messages being delivered lack this consistency, the processing of each different piece of marketing communication must begin from scratch. A promotion that contains the same general look and feel as the brand's advertising, which is carried over with the packaging and reflected in in-store merchandising, means that prior exposure to any of these pieces of marketing communication will aid in the processing of the others. If each of these pieces has its own unique look, there will be no prior learning or foundation available when someone sees it. They must process the message on its own. As we shall see in later chapters, getting someone to process marketing communication at all is difficult. Effective IMC helps.

In fact, research has shown that there is a link between IMC and increase in sales, market share, and profit (Marketing Week, 2002). So why hasn't IMC been more widely adopted? We like the reason offered by Pickton and Broderick (2005): it is 'partly due to ignorance, unwillingness and inertia, and partly due to the sheer difficulties of achieving the integration.' Indeed.

Perhaps the single biggest problem revolves around the decision-making structure of most marketing organizations. The structure or organizational make-up of a company or agency, and the way managers think about or approach marketing questions frequently pose problems in trying to implement IMC programs. We shall be looking at this in terms of specific organizational barriers to IMC and an organizations character. Additionally, the issue of compensation is often a serious roadblock to effectively implementing IMC.

Organizational barriers

While effective IMC requires coordination among all of a brand's 'voices', most organizations spend their time developing vertical communications programs. This results in a need for *horizontal* relationships struggling within *vertical* organizations. This leads to problems at the organizational level, where parallel structures, multiple departments, and functional specialties discourage the kind of communication *between* specialties required for IMC planning. This type of problem is epitomized by the brand management concept, and recent moves by some large packaged goods companies to category or channel management is only likely to make the problem worse. IMC requires a central planning expertise in marketing communication. With diffused resources, individual manager relationships with marketing communication agencies and vendors, and (critically) a lack of incentive to cooperate, it is no wonder there are problems when it comes to effectively developing and implementing IMC programs.

Organizational structure

Although there is a broad agreement among marketing managers over the need for IMC, the very organizational structure of many marketing companies stands in the way of it being effectively implemented. At the core of this problem is an organization's ability to manage the interrelationships of information and materials among the various agencies and vendors involved in supplying marketing communication services. There are a number of specific structural factors that can make this difficult.

The low standing of marketing communication in an organization

Unfortunately, for too many marketers, their marketing communication has a very low priority within the organization. For many in top management, spending money on marketing communication is a luxury that can be afforded only when all else is going well. One of the fastest ways for someone concerned with the financial statement to send large chunks of cash to the bottom line is to not spend budgeted marketing communication money.

With this sort of attitude, it is not surprising that those most responsible for marketing communication occupy lower-level positions within the organization. True, senior management does reserve the right to approve a campaign, and often does. But it would be rare indeed to find senior management involved in the *planning* of marketing communication. Rather, it is generally somewhat junior brand managers (or their equivalent) who do the actual strategic planning, and the results of their work are passed up the management ladder for approval. Even at companies where there are specific managers for advertising or promotion, these managers will have little power within the organization, and almost never final responsibility for the budget. Final decision on the budget will be with those managers doing the actual marketing.

We have always found this very shortsighted. As one brand manager put it (in a personal communication with the author), can you think of any other part of business where decisions involving millions are made with so little senior management involvement? If even half the average packaged goods brand marketing communication budget were going to bricks and mortar, no doubt everyone including the board of directors would be involved!

Adding to this problem is the trend toward decentralized decision making. With more and more people empowered to make decisions at lower and lower levels, it makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to ensure an IMC program. This is compounded by the tendency to look to specialists when confronted with large or complicated projects.

Specialization

To effectively manage IMC, those in charge ideally will be marketing communication generalists. Yet where do you find such a person in today's marketing organizations? In fact, what one is most likely to find in companies are people specializing in a particular area; and these specialists rarely talk with each other. They have their own budgets, their own suppliers, and jealously guard the areas they control. The problem becomes even more complex when one considers the marketing communication suppliers these specialists use. Each being a specialist in a particular area (e.g. advertising, direct mail, merchandising), they naturally advocate their own solutions for marketing communication. By their very nature, whether intraorganizational or between suppliers, these specialists will want to keep communications programs separate.

Given the narrow focus and understanding of these specialists, it is very difficult to bring them together in the first place, let alone expect them to have the broad understanding of many marketing communication options necessary for effective IMC planning. But even if they did have this understanding, getting them to give up control, especially when it is unlikely to be financially advantageous (which we shall discuss more specifically later), is a lot to ask. Yet this is precisely what is necessary for IMC to work within an organization.

Organizational character

In addition to the problems inherent in the way most marketing organizations are structured, there are more intangible aspects of an organization's thinking and behaviour that also pose problems for implementing IMC. We have just seen how traditional organizational structure can impede the flow of information and ideas within the organization. Because of this type of structural barrier, it is very difficult for an entire company to share a common understanding of that company's marketing communication.

Yet it is important for everyone working in a company to understand and communicate the appropriate 'image' in any marketing communication. Anyone who has contact with customers must reflect the image projected by the company's marketing communications. This means store clerks, sales force, telephone operators, receptionists; all are part of a company's marketing communication, and hence in many ways are IMC 'media'. Too often only those directly involved with the marketing communication program are familiar with it and this can be a serious problem.

Culture of the organization

How managers think is conditioned by both their own background and the culture of the company. This potential problem is then compounded in the IMC case when the culture of the marketer must interact with the culture of marketing communication agencies and vendors. Managers from different companies are likely to have different views of what makes effective marketing communication. This issue is also discussed later when we look at the potential problems inherent in how different managers perceive IMC. Here we are simply considering their general views of things and how that will be tempered by organizational culture. A great deal of literature on management addresses the idea that an organization will have its own defining culture, and that employees of the firm will absorb that culture. While that culture will not completely determine an individual manager's way of doing things, it will certainly have a significant impact upon its development (Prensky et al., 1996). This leads inevitably to such organizational feelings as 'This is the way we do it'; 'We've always done it this way'; 'It works for us.' Attitudes such as these can get in the way of integrated thinking and planning, both within an organization and working with outside agencies and vendors.

Management perceptions

How managers perceive IMC can often impede the implementation of effective IMC. When managers come from different backgrounds or different marketing communication specialties, either within the marketing organization or at marketing communications agencies or vendors, they are likely to have different perceptions of what constitutes IMCs and the roles various people should play in IMC planning and implementation. Additionally, there are strong proprietary feelings among managers toward the 'superiority' of their own specialty within the communication mix.

Because of this, it is not surprising to find that there are any number of notions about how best to go about implementing IMCs. The 1991 study among marketing managers discussed earlier in this chapter found a variety of opinions about how IMC should be achieved (Caywood et al., 1991). Among the managers who said they were familiar with the term 'integrated marketing communications' (a surprisingly low 59%), about 60% seem to look at the responsibility for IMC planning in roughly the same way as we do: 35% felt they would collectively set communication strategies with all of the appropriate agencies and vendors, and then specific assignments would be executed by the best qualified agency or vendor. Another 25% felt they alone were responsible for setting the IMC strategy, but would then make specific assignments to appropriate agencies or vendors, and expect them to coordinate the execution.

We, of course, argue that while the marketer must take the lead in IMC planning, strategy should be worked out among all relevant parties, who then execute creative work guided by the common creative brief(s), coordinated through the marketer. Among the remaining managers, 25% felt that they would work with one agency in setting strategy, and then leave it to the agency to execute everything (the notion of full-service agencies or 'one-stop shopping' encouraged by some advertising agencies); and

7% felt they would set the communication strategy and then have it executed by the individual agency or vendor most appropriate for each task (advertising, direct mail, merchandising, etc.). The remaining 8% held various other opinions.

Resistance to change

Different perceptions of IMC will certainly mediate effective implementation. But much more troubling is the natural resistance to change that the idea of IMC is likely to trigger, making it difficult to implement despite general acceptance of the benefits. The most serious concern is probably a fear that the manager responsible for IMC planning will not fully appreciate someone else's area of expertise. This is a problem that is especially compounded when advertising takes the lead (which it should in most cases, as we have seen) because of long-held feelings that advertising managers simply do not understand or even consider other means of marketing communications (which unfortunately, is too often the case). This is aggravated by the short-term tactical experience, for example, of those working in promotion versus the more long-term thinking of advertising managers. If employees feel the IMC manager does not fully appreciate their worth, they are certain to worry about where their specialties will fit in department budgeting, and fear their jobs will become less important or even redundant. Such feelings could easily cause resistance to the implementation of IMC planning.

Another way of looking at some of these issues of resistance to change is in terms of both intraorganizational and interorganizational politics. It doesn't matter if the motivation is individual self-interest or actual belief in the superiority of one's way of doing things, the result is the same. People, departments, and organizations want power and the rewards that go with it. Too often managers and their staff believe they will be giving up too much if they implement effective IMCs planning. Compensation is only one aspect of this problem. There are feelings of prestige and position that have in many cases been hard-won, that the combining of responsibilities required by IMC seem to threaten. This can be a very difficult problem.

Financial emphasis

Another important aspect of the character of an organization that bears upon IMC implementation is the misguided emphasis upon financial rather than consumer considerations in the development of marketing strategy. The attitude of many managers is to let financial considerations drive their thinking when setting marketing objectives, rather than consumer wants or needs. But the consumer should be at the center of IMC planning. IMC requires an understanding of how consumers make decisions and behave, as we shall discuss later in the book. When a marketer's attention is more financially focused than consumer focused, the planning environment will be less likely to successfully nurture IMC.

Compensation

Compensation issues are less of a direct problem within a marketing organization than with agencies and vendors. Still, even there it is a problem. We have already referred to several circumstances where marketing communication specialists within a company are likely to be concerned about the importance of their position in a realigned IMC-oriented marketing communication group. Such concerns lead quite naturally to worries about salaries and promotion, and dampen enthusiasm for IMC.

But the real concern over compensation lies with those agencies and vendors that serve the marketing communication needs of the marketer. This has certainly proved to be a stumbling block to many large advertising agencies that have tried to offer their clients a full range of marketing communication services. Group managers at these agencies are traditionally rewarded based upon their total billings and income. That being the case, how likely is it that the management of the advertising group will suggest to their client that perhaps they would be better off spending more of their money on direct marketing, even if there is a direct marketing group at the agency, let alone if the work would need to be done elsewhere?

Somehow these managers (at least within an agency or vendor offering multiple communication services) must be compensated without regard to how much is spent on their particular specialty, but in terms of the overall business. Without such a scheme, IMC is impossible because those in charge of a particular type of marketing communication will be more concerned with 'selling' their specialty, not with how their specialty will best contribute to an overall IMC program.

This problem is aggravated when a number of competing agencies or vendors are asked to work together. In fact, this is the primary reason many agencies and vendors have sought to provide a number of different types of marketing communications in order to maximize their chances of retaining business. Such firms have either tried to create groups within their organization to provide a variety of marketing communication services or have merged with other suppliers. While such moves offer the potential for higher profit or greater financial stability overall for the agency or vendor, as discussed above it is not easy to manage the compensation between the competing specialties.

It should not be surprising that any company will want to maintain its profitability in a changing world. In doing this, it should likewise not be surprising that they will be more interested in their own financial well being than in providing the best overall IMC program for their clients. This underscores the need for tight control of planning by the marketer.

Overcoming the barriers

Although the need for IMCs is widely understood and accepted, as the foregoing discussion makes clear, the path to implementation is hampered by many potential barriers. We have summarized these potential barriers in Figure 1.2. Yet these barriers are not insurmountable, and the rewards from effective IMC make the effort worthwhile. By becoming aware of these potential problems, and identifying them within their own organization, managers are on the way toward overcoming them.

Organizational barriers
- Vertical organizational structures where cooperation is needed between functions
- Structure makes it difficult to manage information from various agencies and vendors
- Low standing of marketing communication function

Organizational character
- Rigid organizational culture
- No common understanding of what constitutes IMC
- Resistance to change and fear over who will be in charge
- Financial considerations placed ahead of consumer considerations

Compensation issues
- Without budget control, communication specialists fear they will lose position and financial reward
- Rewards are linked to budget size or billings, not the overall program

Figure 1.2 Barriers to effective IMC

We do not pretend that dealing with these problems is easy. After all, they go to the heart of how companies function day-to-day. The way decisions are made, the way an organization is structured, are all part of the operational lifeblood of a company. Change requires trust, and this trust comes from a total understanding of what is involved and the long-term potential.

Identifying IMC opportunities

It could be said that every opportunity to use marketing communication is an IMC opportunity because all marketing communication should be based upon careful strategic planning in order to ensure a consistent message; and in almost any case more than one way will be required to deliver that message. Remember that *any* communication between a brand and its market is part of its marketing communication. So even if all that is used is a direct mail program, there must be correspondence between the content of the mailing and the envelope it is mailed in; and if there is a package involved, that package should reflect the benefit and imagery contained in the direct mail piece.

If you own a small business in a small town, say a dress shop, and you want to place an advert in the local newspaper announcing a sale, the imagery presented in that advert should be consistent with the image of the shop itself: the type of merchandise, the signage, and the general 'feeling' the customer will experience when visiting the shop.

But more often when one is thinking about IMC one is concerned with larger marketing communication programs. Perhaps the single best key to identifying a need for an IMC program is the complexity of the market with which one is dealing. The more complex, the more likely it will be that multiple or novel solutions will be required. Many things can contribute to the complexity of a communication problem. The most obvious is multiple communication objectives, but there are others that involve the target audience, the product or service itself, and the distribution of the product or service, as outlined in Figure 1.3.

	Indications of complexity
Target audience	• Multiple people involved in decision • Audiences with conflicting interests • Different media habits
Product or service	• Highly technical or innovative • Variety of models • Multiple attributes
Distribution	• Highly influential in decision • Limited or specialized

Figure 1.3
Market complexity

Target Audience Complexity There are a number of target audience considerations that lead to complexity in planning and delivering marketing communications. To begin with, the more people involved in the decision process, the more difficult the communication task. In the simple case, where one person plays all of the roles in a decision, such as someone looking for a snack in the afternoon for an energy boost, a straightforward message to a single individual is all that is needed. But as more people become involved in the decision, the potential need for multiple messages through a variety of media or delivery systems increases. This can happen in situations as varied as a family where children are lobbying parents for a special treat to a large company planning to update its word processing systems in all of its departments.

Product or Service Complexity If the product or service is highly technical or innovative, the communication task can be more complex. For example, when a new consumer electronics product is introduced, people need to be made aware of it, and interest stimulated. But they also will want a high level of information to complete what is usually a high-involvement decision. If a number of models are available, again the information requirements will be greater. Even with seemingly less complex consumer needs, this opens up opportunities for IMC. For example, dehydrated soups can be marketed as soup or as cooking ingredients, as great for lunch or good to take on a camping trip.

Distribution Complexity An often-overlooked opportunity for IMC can be found in the distribution for a product or service. This goes beyond simple trade promotions. Many delivery systems have a great deal of influence on a brand being chosen. A good example would be travel agents, who almost always will have a significant influence on everything from minor considerations such as what hotel to stay at or what car to rent, to a major decision such as what cruise line to select for a Caribbean cruise.

Understanding consumer decision-making

The more complex the market, as we have just seen, the more likely it is that an IMC program will be needed. But even in seemingly uncomplicated situations a more extensive IMC program may be needed than is apparent at first glance. In Chapter 11 we will be talking about consumer decision-making, and will introduce something called a behavioural sequence model (BSM), which helps a manager better understand how his or her target audience makes purchase decisions in the brand's product category. It provides a detailed and dynamic picture of the target audience in terms of the overall decision process and enables a manager to recognize potential IMC opportunities.

A BSM utilizes a flow chart format to identify where a target audience is taking action or making decisions that will ultimately affect purchase. It identifies the major behavioural stages preceding, including, and following purchase or use. Then for each stage in the decision process it summarizes roles involved, where it occurs, when, and how. As a manager reviews all of this information, he or she is in a perfect position to organize their objectives and identify those touch points at which marketing communication may be most effectively employed.

Suppose you are the brand manager for a new product entry into a frequently purchased packaged goods product category; something like a new laundry detergent or fabric softener. How would understanding the way consumers make decisions in the category help you recognize IMC opportunities? If you find that a single person is likely to play all the roles involved in the purchase decision (which would make sense for something like a laundry detergent or fabric softener), then you would only have that person to worry about in you communication's planning. However, you still must be concerned with whether that person requires a single message to stimulate purchase, or whether several messages, perhaps delivered in different ways, would be necessary. Since we are talking about a new product, you will probably need more than one delivery medium. For example, broadcast advertising does a great job of raising people's awareness and awakening latent interest in a product. Unfortunately, most packaged goods categories do not excite the consumer, so it is quite easy for people to forget about a new product. For that reason, it would make sense to perhaps provide an incentive for trial with a coupon, and some sort of in-store display or shelf-talker to arrest the shopper's attention and remind them of any interest in the product that the advertising generated.

If all one did was advertise, there would be no guarantee that shoppers would spot the item at the point of purchase because their behaviour in the store is so routinized (Howard, 1997). In this example, broadcast advertising would be great for driving up awareness and interest, but additional help may be needed when the actual purchase decision is made; help traditional advertising would not provide. This would be made clear from an understanding of the decision process, as it reminds you that even though only one person is involved in the decision, the decision is not finalized all in a moment. Initial interest is aroused, but will likely lie latent until re-aroused in the store.

A good understanding of how a target audience makes decisions will alert a manager to the many possible marketing communications options that might be required, and help pinpoint:

- Complexity of the target audience
- Complexity of the distribution
- Complexity of the purchase decision
- Short- versus long-term communication objectives
- Need to isolate segments
- Need for multiple messages
- Opportunities for unique message delivery
- Opportunities for trade incentives
- Likely importance of retail messages

We have seen how complexity in the market in-and-of itself implies a need for IMC. Understanding consumer decision making helps alert the manager to more subtle complexities that are more a function of how consumers make decisions than of actual market conditions. For example, the roles played by various members of the target audience may add a complexity not otherwise easily noticed; and the ways in which information is gathered may signal *consumer-perceived* complexity within distribution that might otherwise be overlooked.

But the most important insight into the need for IMC and the guidance for strategic IMC planning provided by an understanding of consumer decision making is related to message needs. As one looks at how people go about making decisions in a category, the more complex the process, the greater the need for multiple options to deal with that complexity. If the decision is one that builds over time, such as the decision to buy a new automobile, it will help identify short versus long-term communication objectives. Continuing with the automotive example, over the long-term one must nurture an image for a vehicle that will help bring it into the consumers' considered set when they begin to think about a new car, but also provide detailed information and incentives for the short-term when the final choice is being made. The need for an IMC program under these circumstances would be obvious from an understanding of how decisions are made for a new automobile.

The roles people play, and the number of people involved in the decision, may suggest a need to isolate particular segments or a need for multiple messages. When, where, and how various stages of the decision process occur may suggest opportunities for unique message delivery. How important is the trade in affecting the decision? How much of the decision takes place in the store? Answers to such questions may suggest an opportunity for trade incentives or the likely importance of retail messages. Where and how understanding the brand decision-making process fits within the overall strategic planning process is briefly addressed below, and in more detail in Chapter 11.

IMC strategic planning

In the last three chapters of this book we will be taking a close look at the strategic planning process and how it leads to effective IMC. At this point, however, a brief introduction to the steps involved in IMC strategic planning is in order. This will provide a framework for better understanding the importance of the material in the chapters leading up to the specific discussion of IMC strategic planning in the development of effective IMC.

The strategic planning process itself begins with consideration of the marketing plan. Although the ultimate consumer is at the heart of any communications program, with IMC there is much more. The marketing plan will identify generally whom we wish to reach as ultimate purchaser or user. For example, it will indicate whether a trial or repeat purchase strategy is to be pursued. Is the brand looking primarily to attract new users (a trial action objective) or to increase business from existing customers (a repeat-purchase action objective)? But the marketing plan does not deal with others who may play an important role in the decision process. The manager needs to know as much as possible about all of the influences in the market that are likely to contribute to a positive response to the brand. The ultimate purchasers or users, along with anyone who may influence their decisions, are potential targets for communication. This could include other people who may have an influence upon the ultimate consumer, the trade, or even the image and reputation of the company (as we shall see in Chapter 3). Gaining this additional insight will be part of strategic planning process.

Additionally, the marketing plan will provide a *general* positioning for the brand. It will identify the brand's major competition and such things as whether it will be marketed as a 'value' brand or 'luxury' brand, etc. While this will set the overall parameter for the brand's positioning in the market, how the brand will be positioned within its marketing communication is part of the strategic planning process.

In order to develop effective marketing communication for a brand, it is important for managers to organize their thinking in terms of how an IMC program will help meet the brand's marketing objectives.

Reviewing the marketing plan proves the necessary background on how the brand is to be marketed, and identifies the target market and overall positioning for the brand. With this background the manager is ready to begin the strategic planning process that will lead to an IMC plan that will support the marketing objectives for the brand.

The five-step strategic planning process

Strategic planning for IMC involves a five-step process. First, one must identify and select the appropriate target audience; next, determine how they make brand decisions; establish how the brand will be positioned within its marketing communication, and select a benefit to support that positioning; then set the communication strategy; and finally match the appropriate media options to that strategy to optimize delivery and processing of the message. Figure 1.4 provides an overview of the IMC strategic planning process, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

Figure 1.4 The five-step IMC strategic planning process

Step one	Identify and select the appropriate target audience
Step two	Determine how that target audience makes product and brand decisions
Step three	Establish how the brand will be positioned within its marketing communication and select a benefit to support that position
Step four	Set communication objectives
Step five	Identify appropriate media options consistent with the communication objectives to optimize message delivery and the processing of the message

During this process, the manager must begin to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various advertising and promotion options for satisfying the communication objectives. Advertising and specific promotions have particular strengths, and these must be matched to the communication tasks. It will not be at all unusual at this stage to consider many more potential communication options than the brand has the resources to execute. But this is part of the strategic planning process, and one of the real strengths of IMC. *Everything* is considered, then the best choices are made within strategic and budget parameters.

Consider this example. Suppose a company is introducing a new snack product. If we want mothers to purchase the new snack for their children, we will probably need to make both mother and children *aware of the brand* and to form a positive *brand attitude*, and we will certainly want the mother to form a positive *brand purchase intention*. One can advertise to both children and mothers to make them aware of the brand, but probably in different media. For example, one might use television advertising in children's programming and print adverts in women's magazines. These same vehicles could also be used for messages aimed at creating a positive brand attitude. In fact, the same adverts would no doubt do both jobs. But would this be enough? Perhaps a premium could be offered to children to stimulate heightened interest, especially if there is heavy and popular competition. Where is a mother actually likely to make up her mind to buy the snack? Probably at home, at the insistence of the child. But if the child is not with the mother when she is shopping, will she remember? To help, some in-store merchandising might work.

You can see that even with this rather simple example, a number of alternative communication tasks are suggested, using both advertising and promotion, and delivered in various ways. It may be that in the end only a single commercial is produced and run in early evening family programming. That would still constitute IMC even though only television advertising was used. IMC is the strategic planning *process*, not whether multiple marketing communication voices are used. Strategic IMC planning is used to arrive at the optimum solution within strategic and budget constraints, whatever the eventual execution. While this would be highly unusual, this underscores the important point that IMC is the result of a planning process that leads to the optimum communication program for a brand, what ever that might be.

This strategic planning process may seem simple enough, and managers may think, 'We do this already, or near enough.' We agree that the logic is rather straightforward, but the implementation requires a great deal of attention and understanding. That is what this book is all about.

Summary

In this chapter a number of IMC definitions were introduced. From the beginning, definitions of IMC have built around two key elements: the role of multiple communication vehicles and the need for consistency in message delivery. At the heart of these definitions is the idea of *planning*. Even though more recent definitions have considered IMC in terms on of 'customer relationships' (reflecting the late 1990s marketing interest in the subject), we have argued that at its core IMC is about *planning* in order to deliver a *consistent message*.

There is no really settled way in which IMC is managed and delivered. Early on, large advertising agencies and their holding companies began to offer a variety of marketing communication services to clients, drawing upon their wide base of operations. But in the end, this did not work out well, even though it tends to remain the best option for ensuring central planning (especially for global marketers).

To effectively implement IMC, it is critical to understand the roles of traditional advertising and promotion in the marketing communication mix. In today's world it is often difficult to decide whether something is an advert or promotion offer. From a strategic standpoint, the only important consideration is how the message fits within the overall IMC program. As we shall see in later chapters, advertising-like messages are used for longer-term strategic efforts to build brand awareness and attitude while promotion-like messages are designed for shorter-term tactical needs to stimulate an immediate sales response.

While most marketers believe IMC is important for their brands, there are a number of barriers that stand in the way of effective implementation. In fact, true IMC is the exception, not the rule. The difficulty comes from the ways in which most companies are structured, the character of most organizations that militate against change, and compensation issues. Overcoming such deeply rooted organizational practices is very difficult, and requires the commitment of top management to succeed.

Almost any marketing communication task is an opportunity for IMC, and identifying the important touch-points for communication comes from an understanding of how consumers make brand decisions in the category. This is a key part of the strategic planning process. It begins with a review of the marketing plan, leading to target audience selection, modeling the brand decision process, identifying the optimum positioning for the brand, establishing the communications strategy, and then selecting media consistent with that strategy to effectively deliver the message.

Review questions

1. How would you define IMC?
2. Discuss why you feel recent definitions of IMC are or are not an improvement upon earlier definitions?
3. What is required for effective management of IMC?
4. How is the trade involved in a brand's IMC?
5. What are the unique roles of advertising and promotion in IMC strategy?
6. Why is it so difficult to implement effective IMC?
7. How can the barriers to IMC be overcome?
8. Identify companies you believe practice IMC, based upon their marketing communication, and discuss what it is about their marketing communication that makes you say that.
9. What are the important keys to identifying IMC opportunities for a brand?
10. Is IMC appropriate for all brands?

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