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Strategic Integrated Marketing Communications

Fourth Edition

Larry Percy

Strategic Integrated Marketing Communications

This book provides a disciplined, systematic look at what is necessary to the planning and implementation of an effective Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) programme.

Throughout, attention is paid to balancing theory with practical application, how to successfully implement theory for effective communication. Step-by-step, knowledge and understanding builds through the book, starting by laying a foundation to provide context, looking at the role of IMC in building brands and strengthening companies. The book then considers what goes into developing and executing effective messages, and how to ensure that they are consistent and consistently delivered, regardless of media. A detailed, practical overview of the strategic planning process is provided, illustrated by numerous examples and cases, along with 'desktop' tools and worksheets for developing and implementing an IMC plan.

The 4th edition of this classic textbook has been fully updated throughout, and includes:

- Updated and expanded coverage of digital media, including issues relating to privacy and media strategy.
- New sections on setting campaign budgets, brand architecture, target audience action objectives, social marketing communication, and such practices as gamification and experiential marketing.
- Extended content on international advertising and shared cultural values.
- The introduction of a channels-based typology of marketing communication.
- Updated international examples and case studies throughout.

A comprehensive and accessible guide to the steps of planning and developing an effective IMC campaign, this book should be core reading for students studying Integrated Marketing Communications, Strategic Communications, Principles of Advertising, Media Planning and Brand Management.

Larry Percy is a marketing and communications expert and consultant with more than 40 years' experience. He previously held posts at Copenhagen Business School, University of Pittsburgh's Katz Graduate School of Business, the University of Oxford, Luiss Business School in Rome, and the Stockholm School of Economics. He has more than 90 publications to his name, including 12 books, and has served on the editorial board of a number of academic journals.

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Strategic Integrated Marketing Communications

Fourth Edition

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Preface

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) as it is generally understood today has been around now for some 35 years. It was back then that academics and marketers began to take the various ideas associated with effective marketing communication and put them together in a consistent and systematic way. Of course, many of these principles had been around for a long time, but it was the idea of integrating all aspects of communication that took hold.

Yet, as we have been pointing out since the first edition of this book, IMC is honoured more on paper than in reality. Even though managers continue to agree that IMC is important to their marketing communication efforts, and many will say they do indeed practice it, the sad truth is that it is rarely the case. There are many reasons for this, and we will be dealing with some of them in the first chapter.

Nevertheless, IMC does provide the best possible approach to building an effective communication program for a brand or company. Why? It is because at its heart IMC is all about planning and consistency of message and execution. A disciplined strategic planning process will help ensure that the right message reaches the correct target audience at the right time in order to maximize the likelihood of effectively processing the message, leading to the desired communication effect. It is also what ensures that each execution no matter how it is delivered, has the same message and a consistent look and feel. This means for messages in everything from traditional media to digital media, business cards, trade shows, packaging, the sides of delivery trucks, sales kits; *anything* at all where a potential consumer may be exposed to the brand or company. It is this consistency across media, and within campaign as well, that optimizes the likelihood of a brand's message getting through, even in a world full of distractions.

This planning process and how to execute it is what this book is all about. Throughout, we are paying attention to what is all too often a contentious relationship between academic theory and practical application. It is essential to understand the theory underlying effective communication, but that theory must be applied. In the book we present the essential theory, and we show how it is used to plan and execute an effective IMC campaign.

The book begins with an overview of IMC to provide context, looking at its origins as a marketing discipline and its importance to brands and companies. With this as a foundation we examine the building blocks of IMC, beginning with a look at its major components, with a special emphasis on digital media, and then looking more deeply at what is required to develop and execute an effective message. In the last section of the book all of this comes together in a detailed consideration of the strategic planning process, what goes into it, the process itself, and how it is implemented. Along the way numerous cases and examples are provided, plus a number of 'desktop' tools and worksheets that help summarize what goes into effective IMC planning and implementation.

New to this edition is a much expanded look at media and media planning concepts such as reach and effective frequency. Throughout, more attention is given to digital media, including an expanded section in the media chapter. A general model of positioning is now included that underscores the important relationship between positioning and brand awareness and brand attitude strategy. Also new is a look at the role the preconscious plays in message processing, and a section has been added on content marketing.

Many people have been involved in bringing this new edition to publication, and I want to thank them all. I would especially like to thank Laura Hussey at Routledge who has helped with the many details needed. And as with everything I write, my grateful thanks to Kristie Hutto. She continues to manage typing it all from my not always easy to read hand-written pages. Beyond those directly involved with the book, I want to again acknowledge and thank my long-time colleague and friend John Rossiter, who continues to provide intellectual stimulation and challenges, making all of my work better. There is no one better in our field. And as always, thanks to my wife Mary Walton for her continuing support and encouragement.

Larry Percy

Part I

Introduction to IMC

In the first part of the book we introduce the notion of integrated marketing communication (IMC) and look at its overall role in building strong brands and strengthening companies. IMC as a marketing discipline emerged in the1980s. This is not to say that marketers did not do many of the things implied by IMC before this 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 when discussing marketing communication activities. IMC is *planning* in a systematic way in order to determine the most effective and consistent message for the appropriate target audience.

Despite most marketers believing IMC is important and should be practised, the reality is that it is rarely successfully implemented. There are several 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; 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 part of the book, which deals 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 will see.

The key to building effective brands is first finding the correct positioning, and then successfully creating a strong, positive brand attitude. IMC is critical to ensuring that all aspects of a brand's marketing communication are delivering a consistent message towards 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 the marketing communication efforts for a company's brands will also contribute to its overall corporate identity, image, and reputation. Although *marketing* communication is not the only communication affecting corporate identity, image, and reputation, it plays a significant role. IMC programmes 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 the brands the company markets.

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1 Overview of IMC

In the world of marketing and communication, much changes. There is no question that over the past several years we have seen a surge in e-marketing and a seemingly endless stream of digital media introductions, especially with social media. This has led many to suggest that the role of advertising and other marketing communication options, and how they work, is also changing. It is *not*. The mind still processes information in the same way, and the *role* of advertising and other marketing communication continues to be what it has always been: to move more of a branded product or service or to obtain a higher price point than would have been possible without it. Rossiter and Percy (2013) have provided a number of examples of how both practitioners and academics are encouraging this false notion with the use of what they call 'masking jargon'. In effect, using new terms for old concepts; providing an illusion of change.

Why do we bring this up at the beginning of a book on integrated marketing communication? When the idea of IMC emerged in the mid- to late 1980s it was something new, not just a new name for the practice of including various types of marketing communication options in a campaign; that is, it was new if correctly understood and implemented. Unfortunately, few companies seem able to truly implement effective IMC. We will touch on several of the key reasons for this later in this chapter. First, however, we need to understand just what is meant by integrated marketing communication (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 aim is to deliver a *consistent* message, something that has become more and more difficult in the age of digital media, where the content of advertising for a brand may change frequently, even daily.

Original definitions of IMC

In 1989, the American Association of Advertising Agencies (known as the 4As) formed a task force on integration that was to define IMC from the viewpoint of the 4As agencies. The task force came up with this definition of IMC:

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> 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 happening 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 (for example, cars or cruise holidays), where the selling task is more complicated, were at that time more apt to use integrated strategies. The report concluded that the dynamics were in place for a surge in demand for integrated communication 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 IMC as a new way of looking at the whole, where once we only saw parts such as advertising, public relations, sales promotions, purchasing, employee communication, and so on (Schultz et al., 1993). They saw IMC as realigning communication to look at 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.

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; it is 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 largely from a strategic perspective for *planning and implementing* IMC.

More recent definitions 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, 20 years on, IMC is considered more from a customer relationship point of view. Tom Duncan, at the University of Colorado, who like Don Schultz and his colleagues at Northwestern, was one of the early academics to restructure their advertising programmes in terms of IMC, saw 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. 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 will 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 (for example, 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 programme that will optimize specific communication objectives that lead to a desired behaviour on the part of a target audience. Many of the original concepts associated with IMC have changed or evolved over the years (Kitchen and Schultz, 2009), but again we would argue that the key to IMC remains understanding it strategically, as a *planning* function.

Strategies for building strong profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders are part of the marketing plan, and effective marketing communication should support that plan. This is perhaps a good place to say something about what should be involved in setting objectives for long-term profit in IMC planning. Rossiter et al. (2018) have made an important point about market share and profit. While building market share is of course desirable, they suggest it is widely misunderstood. The ultimate objective for every company is *profit*. But if you cannot easily change your price or the cost of production, the only way to increase profit is by increasing *unit sales,* or more specifically the rate of unit sales. It therefore follows that unit sales should always be the primary operational marketing objective for an IMC programme, and *not* market share.

A *strategic* understanding of IMC must be based on 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 communication. A number of very large advertising agencies and agency groups were quite active in this new area of IMC. They were all selling themselves as being 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 what they were willing to pay for. Although 85 percent 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 programmes to educate their executives in IMC. Major advertising agencies may have had a slow or even wrong start, but there is no doubt that they seemed committed to delivering IMC for their clients. In today's world, however, very little, if any, of this early zeal remains.

Even though the marketing communication industry has always been comprised of a variety of speciality groups, almost by default traditional advertising agencies took the lead in the IMC 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 specific aspects of marketing communication, fuelled in a large part by an (unfortunate) trend toward an ever-increasing emphasis on promotion, as well as a surge in digital media. There are now 'digital' agencies, for example, that deal only in advertising for digital 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 communication.

To begin with, there are all 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 (for example, those dealing with trade shows or 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, digital and social media agencies, 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 through co-op programmes or channels marketing. All franchise organizations have participation from franchises in their marketing communication. 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 practise vertical rather than horizontal management, which means departments are often unlikely to even talk to each other, 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 wrest control from brand management. There is also 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. An example of this, Reebok's problems with managing its social media globally, is discussed in the box below.

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, not only for coordinating the efforts of all those involved in the process, but also for the authority to make decisions. 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 promotion 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 money for marketing communication was to be found. But all of this has changed. With the increasing short-term focus on the bottom line, promotion-oriented marketing communication is playing an ever-larger role, and, along with the increasing growth in digital media, many companies are questioning the role of advertising today. They shouldn't. The role of advertising in IMC is now, as it has always been, to sell more of a branded product or service, or to achieve a higher price that consumers are willing to pay than they would otherwise be willing to in the absence of advertising (Rossiter and Percy, 2013).

Too much social media?

Can you have too much social media? For many multinational companies, the answer is 'yes'. Reebok was one such company. Marketing managers around the world were establishing several media campaigns with Facebook and Twitter, and showed content on numerous YouTube channels. Management knew this was a problem and an audit was initiated to identify company-created and fan-created accounts using Reebok trademarks. The results uncovered 232 Facebook pages, 30 Twitter accounts, and some 100 YouTube channels. Based on this, individual markets were asked to eliminate local accounts in favour of global Reebok accounts. For some markets, for example Hong Kong, this made a lot of sense. For others, such as India, where their Facebook page had nearly 1.8 million fans, it did not make sense. After their audit, Reebok's overall social media presence was cut roughly in half, and management reported that the effect paid off.

Source: *Advertising Age*, 10 December 2012

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

In today's world, where does advertising end and promotion begin? If a commercial includes a direct response 0800 numbers or asks consumers to print a coupon, is this advertising or is it promotion? In the past, advertising has been traditionally delivered through measured media: television, radio, newspaper, magazines, outdoor, and more and more today, digital media. But advertising messages are also delivered through direct marketing and channels marketing (for example, trade-oriented marketing such as co-op programmes), areas where in the past one only found promotional messages. As we shall see later, different from advertising only in the sense that the communication objective requires immediate action.

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

Rossiter et al. (2018) make two interesting points about the role of traditional advertising compared with 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 had been an *increase*, not a decrease in the use of general advertising media, especially digital, and (b) most of the growth in promotion, apart from all-but-required trade promotions, had been *additional* – and most of this in advertising-like promotions.

Nevertheless, in traditional terms the rate of advertising growth has followed the pace of media inflation, while other areas of non-traditional advertising, as well as promotion, have experienced real growth. This second point about advertising-like promotions is very important. It is not traditional forms of incentive promotion that are growing, but promotion-oriented messages that are very advertising-like. For example, as Rossiter and Percy (1997) point out, direct mail and telemarketing are thought of as promotion rather than advertising. 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 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 have such a critical role in every form of marketing communication. As we will see, planning an effective IMC programme 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 certain 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 message, and any marketing communication that is looking for short-term action on the part of the target audience as delivering a promotion message. Promotions should include advertising messages.

As we shall see in later chapters, it does not matter what form a marketing communication message takes or how it is delivered, 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 they are delivered. Sound is sound, words are words and pictures are pictures to the brain, regardless of where the sense organs find them. As Bavelier and Green (2011) put it, technological changes do not change the way the brain works, and the principles of brain organization have not changed since the advent of language thousands of years ago. This is especially important to keep in mind when using digital media. It will be processed in the same way as a message delivered in any other medium.

Barriers to effective IMC

Despite the fact that most marketers seem to agree that IMC makes sense, after 30 years there is little evidence that it is being practised by many companies. Where 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 practising IMC they are simply not enjoying the potential benefits of it. Without IMC, a brand's marketing communication could be significantly *less* effective; 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 a brand's marketing communication there will be no synergy or 'lift' from the overall programme.

With a consistent look and feel (something we deal with in Chapter 10), 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 see in later chapters, getting someone to process marketing communication at all is difficult. Effective IMC helps.

Research has shown that there is a link between IMC and an 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 programmes. We will be looking at this in terms of specific organizational barriers to IMC and an organization's 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 programmes. 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* specialities required for IMC planning. This type of problem is epitomized by the brand management concept, and moves by some large packaged goods companies to category or channel management are 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 programmes.

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 only be afforded 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.

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

Specialization

To effectively manage IMC, ideally those in charge will be marketing communication generalists. Where do you find such a person in today's marketing organizations? What one is most likely to find in companies are people specializing in a particular area, and these specialists rarely talk to 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 (for example, advertising, direct mail, merchandising), they naturally advocate their own solutions for marketing communication programmes.

By their very nature, whether intraorganizational or between suppliers, these specialists will want to keep communications programmes 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 will 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.

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, and 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 programme are familiar with it and this can be a serious problem.

Culture of the organization

How managers think is conditioned both by 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. 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. Although that culture will not completely determine an individual manager's way of doing things, it will certainly have a significant impact on 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 specialities, either within the marketing organization or at marketing communications agencies or vendors, they are likely to have different perceptions of what constitutes IMC 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 IMC. 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.

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 problem is especially compounded when advertising takes the lead (which it should in most cases) 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 compared with 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 IMC planning. Compensation is only one aspect of this problem, as discussed below. There are feelings of prestige and position that have, in many cases, been hard-won, and 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 on IMC implementation is the misguided emphasis on 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 centre of IMC planning. IMC requires an understanding of how consumers make decisions and behave, as we 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, but 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.

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, as well as within even smaller agencies where there are groups dedicated to different areas of the business, especially for digital media advertising. Group managers at these agencies are traditionally rewarded based on their total billings and income. That being the case, how likely is it that the management of the traditional advertising group will suggest to their client that perhaps they would be better off spending more of their money on social media or direct marketing, even if there is a digital or 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 programme. This problem is aggravated when a number of competing agencies or vendors are asked to work together.

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

Overcoming the barriers

Although the need for IMC is widely understood and accepted, as the previous discussion makes clear, the path to implementation is hampered by many potential barriers. We have summarized these potential barriers in Table 1.1. 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.

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 and the way an organization is structured, are 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 on careful strategic

Table 1.1 Barriers to effective IMC

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
- Specialization gets in the way of integration

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 programme

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 programme, there must be consistency 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 advertisement in the local newspaper announcing a sale, the imagery presented in that advertisement 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 programmes. Perhaps the key to identifying a need for an IMC programme 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 Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Market complexity

	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

Target audience complexity: There are a number of target audience considerations that lead to complexity in planning and delivering marketing communication. To begin with, the more people involved in the decision process, the more difficult the communication task. In a simple case, where one person plays all 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 IT.

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 will also want a high level of information to complete what is usually a high-involvement decision. If several models are available, again the information requirements will be greater. Even with seemingly less complex consumer needs, this opens opportunities for IMC. For example, dehydrated soups can be marketed as soup or as cooking ingredients, as great for lunch or 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.

Understanding consumer decision making

The more complex the market, as we have just seen, the more likely it is that an IMC programme will be needed. But even in seemingly uncomplicated situations a more extensive IMC programme may be needed than is apparent at first glance. In Chapter 12 we talk further about consumer decision-making, and something called a behavioural sequence model (BSM), which helps a manager better understand how their 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 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 implies a need for IMC. Understanding consumer decision-making helps alert the manager to 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.

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 car, it will help identify short- and long-term communication objectives. Continuing with the car 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 programme under these circumstances would be obvious from an understanding of how decisions are made for a new car.

IMC strategic planning

In Part IV we take 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 communication programme, with IMC there is much more. Are we looking at local or regional markets, or globally? The marketing plan will detail this. It will also identify 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 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 on the ultimate consumer, the trade, or even the image and reputation of the company (as we will see in Chapter 3). Gaining this additional insight will be part of the 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. 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 programme will help meet the brand's marketing objectives. Reviewing the marketing plan provides 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 in turn support the marketing objectives for the brand.

Table 1.3 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

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; second, determine how they make brand decisions; third, establish how the brand will be positioned within its marketing communication, and select a benefit to support that position; fourth, set the communication strategy; and finally, match the appropriate media options to that strategy to optimize delivery and processing of the message. Table 1.3 provides an overview of the IMC strategic planning process, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 12.

During this process, the manager must begin to consider 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 cereal aimed at children. If we want mothers to purchase the new cereal for their children, we will probably need to make both mother and children *aware of the brand* and form a positive *brand attitude*, and we will certainly want the mother to form a positive *brand purchase intention*. One can advertise to both mothers and children 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 advertising in women's magazines. These same vehicles could also be used for messages aimed at creating a positive brand attitude. In fact, the same advertisements 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 likely to make up her mind to buy the new cereal? 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