

## Chapter 1

# Defining integrated marketing communications

### Chapter overview

This chapter provides a broad understanding of what integrated marketing communications (IMC) is and why it is used. It will introduce the idea of communication barriers, to help explain why creating an effective marketing communications (marcoms) campaign is so challenging, and touch on various theories of communication. In later chapters, there will be discussion of how these communication barriers can be overcome. This chapter also discusses the steps involved in the marcoms planning process, aided by 11 questions. We then give an example of how a business school uses these questions to help develop a marcoms program to benefit its Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree.

This chapter has two parts: part 1 deals with the principles of IMC and outlines the steps involved in planning a marcoms campaign, while part 2 deals with a more advanced but nuanced understanding of IMC.

### Learning goals for part 1

After reading the part 1 of this chapter, you will understand:

- ✓ what IMC is and why it is used
- ✓ what communication barriers are
- ✓ how to use conversion ratios as a diagnostic tool
- ✓ how 'synergistic' effects are achieved by coordinating different communication disciplines
- ✓ the difference between, and relationship of, media and creative integration
- ✓ the IMC planning process
- ✓ why the buying motivation and media usage habits of the target audience are important in the planning process.

## Learning goals for part 2

After reading part 2, you will understand:

- ✓ the strategic view of IMC
- ✓ the stages of IMC implementation
- ✓ barriers to IMC implementation.

## PART 1: BASIC THINKING

### Is integrated marketing communications (IMC) the answer?

Before planning any campaign, a marcoms manager should ask whether a communications campaign is really the solution he or she needs. Often, the product may not be ready, the distribution may be inadequate, or the service may not be up to scratch. In fact, there might be a host of reasons why a manager may not necessarily need to start a marcoms program immediately. For instance, if the product is not ready, even a great marcoms program can destroy the brand faster than if there were no campaign at all. We can say that nothing kills a bad product faster than a great campaign – a reminder to marcoms managers to step back and survey the situation before getting started. This is important because a marcoms campaign can fail for many reasons. Let's just consider three of them.

First, a brand will never thrive if a customer only makes a single purchase. People will buy a brand to try (known as the 'trial'), but to survive and prosper, most business need repeat purchase (known as the 'repeat').<sup>1</sup> A great campaign can induce a trial, but if the product does not deliver on its promise there will be no repeat. Second, the pricing of the product may not be correct: it may be too expensive or too cheap. If it is too expensive, the target audience will not perceive the brand to be of value, and so the trial rate will be lower than expected. Similarly, if a luxury brand is too cheap, the target audience may doubt its quality, and this too will lower the trial rate. Third, the distribution may be limited. For instance, the brand may be too narrowly distributed. A good campaign may yet spark anger and unhappiness among those who cannot buy the product. For reasons such as these (and there many more), it is important to ask whether a communication task is the right choice at that time. So, how can you tell if things are not quite right? Below are two simple diagnostics (a diagnostic being a way to assess a situation using proven methods).

- *Compare the ratio of trial to repeat purchase*

Figure 1.1 shows two similarly priced brands. For brand A, the conversion ratio is only 5%. This means that, out of 100 people who have tried brand A, only 5% made

a repeat purchase. Out of those who have tried brand B, the conversion ratio is 25%. All things being equal, this implies that brand A has not delivered on its promise compared to brand B or, to put it another way, brand A is likely to lose market share to brand B.

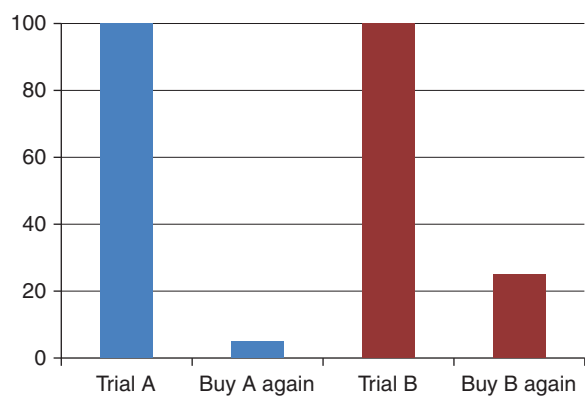


Figure 1.1  
Percentage of trial and repeat purchase

- Compare the ratio of attitudinal to behavioural data  
Figure 1.2 shows the percentage of people who said how much they liked brands A and B and whether they have tried the two brands. We can see that both brand A and B have similar levels of brand likeability (also known as brand attitude) at 30%. However, out of 30% of people who said they liked brand B, only 10% have actually tried it.

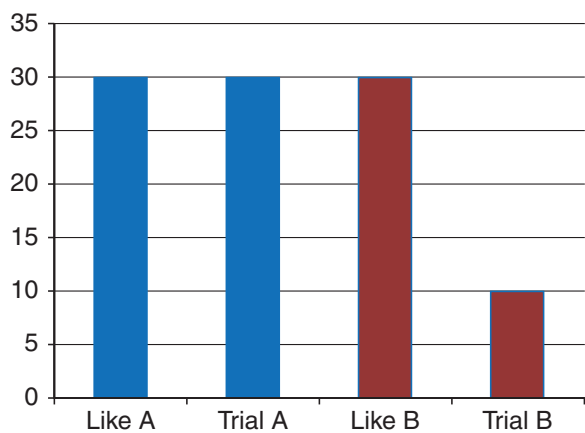


Figure 1.2  
Percentage of likeability and trial

Look at the graphs for brand A, which show that 30% of people said that they like it, and that all of these people have tried it. This result is interesting because even though both brands have the same level of brand attitude (30%), brand A somehow manages to achieve a higher trial rate. What could account for this difference? We can eliminate brand attitude, because both brands are equally liked. We can also eliminate price, since both brands are of similar price. One probable reason is that brand A has better distribution than brand B, allowing more people to access brand A.

Imagine that you are the marcoms manager for brand B. The scenario outlined here simply shows that you have a good product but that it suffers from restricted distribution. Therefore, it might pay to first increase the distribution of brand B before embarking on a marcoms campaign, or perhaps to limit the marcoms campaign to areas in which brand B is readily available.

Now, imagine you are the marcoms manager for brand A. Although brand A is widely distributed, people do not seem to engage in repeat purchase behaviour, as evidenced by the low repeat rate shown in figure 1.1. This may imply that brand A is not as good a product as brand B. Under such circumstances, it might not pay to embark on a marcoms campaign for brand A until there is an understanding of why the repeat rate is so low.

In this example, the data of two brands are used to illustrate the importance of diagnosis. In practice a marcoms manager can also use norms (from company archives, or market research agencies) or run tests or experiments to help clarify his or her diagnosis. Here, what the scenarios demonstrate is the importance of understanding the brand's state of affairs before embarking on a marcoms program.

## What is IMC and why do we need it?

There are many definitions of IMC.<sup>2</sup> In this text, we use the following definition:

*IMC is defined as a research-based, audience-focused, result-driven, communication planning process that aims to execute a brand communication program over time so that there is clarity and consistency in the positioning of the brand. This is achieved by coordinating different communication disciplines and integrating the creative content across different media. The ultimate aim is to achieve short-term financial gain and long-term brand equity.*<sup>3</sup>

Although this definition is long, it covers a number of key points a marcoms manager should know in order to develop an effective marcoms program.

First, IMC is a planning process rather than a concept. It aims to achieve a coordinated execution of a marcoms program. This means much thinking has to be done upfront. Second, the communication disciplines chosen for an IMC campaign – for example, advertising, direct response, sales promotion, marketing-oriented public relations (PR), sponsorship or social media – must complement each other, so that the strength of one medium makes up for the weakness of another. Third, IMC must be supported by research, and not guesswork. This means using diagnostics (as illustrated above) or other forms of research to help increase the probability of success. Fourth, it must take the target audience into consideration. This means understanding their decision process, motivations for buying (or not buying) and their media usage habits. Fifth, it must be result-driven, which entails being accountable and ensuring a fair return

on investment (ROI). Sixth, it must aim for clarity and consistency in the ‘look, feel and voice’<sup>4</sup> of the brand over time, so that there is no confusion in people’s minds. This demands clear and consistent brand positioning in all communication collateral. Seventh, media and creative content must support each other in this endeavour. This means that the creative content must be appropriate for the medium. Now that we know what IMC is, we may next ask if it is always needed. The answer is no. IMC is only needed when there is complexity, which may come from having:

- many communication disciplines (sales promotions, direct marketing, personal selling and so on)
- many brand contact points
- more than one target audience
- more than one message to be communicated
- a range of creative content to be used
- a target audience that habitually uses different media
- different geographical areas to be targeted
- the need for trade support.

## Coordinating different communications disciplines

A key impetus for the rise of IMC as a concept is growing complexity of the marketing environment. Take the example of customer contact points. Today, a customer can contact an organisation in a range of ways, from a simple telephone call to a message sent through the brand’s social media pages. Further, customers have all this literally at their fingertips, using their mobile phones. With the advent of the Google Glass, a simple voice command is all this is needed to send a message, take a picture, record an event, and share it with others, live.<sup>5</sup> So, as communication technologies explode, more coordination of activities will be needed.

Each communication discipline also has its own strengths and weaknesses. This means that when we try to coordinate our marcoms activities we aim to select disciplines that complement each other. In this way, the strength of one discipline makes up for any weakness in another. For instance, advertising is very effective in creating brand awareness but much less so in converting sales, while personal selling is the reverse. In sequencing marcoms activities, then, we should logically use advertising to create brand awareness *before* sending out salespeople.

A small organisation that cannot afford advertising has other options, for example, marketing-oriented PR,<sup>6</sup> direct mail and email campaigns. If generating free publicity is a particular strength (because of the nature of the business or because a brilliant publicist is on the team), then a creative strategy revolving around marketing-oriented PR should be explored. Creative thinking is needed to come up with a newsworthy idea

to make this work. The major advantage is that if such a strategy is well crafted, it can generate publicity for the brand at a fraction of the cost of advertising. In the planning process, we can also consider different combinations – for example, we might first execute an email campaign, followed by a publicity stunt and then direct mail. Alternatively, we might use publicity to generate interest in the advertising<sup>7</sup> and from this evoke interest in the brand.

We can quickly see that the ability to combine these disciplines is only limited by our imagination. But there are some important aspects to consider, including, first, the effectiveness and affordability of a discipline. After all, there is no point considering using the sales force, for instance, if it is too costly to do so, even though it might be very effective. Instead, we might consider using telemarketing, a cheaper form of personal selling. Second, a centrally planned IMC strategy is required given its complexity and so that the intricacies of one task controlled by one manager can be properly coordinated with another task controlled by another manager. So, as an example, manager A's execution of publicity may be timed to occur before manager B's direct mail campaign can begin.

## Media and creative integration

After deciding how communication disciplines (and the managers who look after them) are to be coordinated, the next decision is which media to use. This typically involves the mass media (that is, television, radio and print) for a major campaign. In fact, it is more accurate to use the term 'integration' at this level of coordination. Let's turn to the idea of media and creative integration. Media integration refers to the combination of various media (for example, radio, print, television, and so forth) to achieve a 'synergistic' effect, which we will look at in more detail in a moment. Creative integration, on the other hand, refers to creative unity in a branded message across these media.

### Media integration

One reason for aspiring media integration is to achieve a 'synergistic' effect. Sometimes called the 'media multiplier' effect, it means that the combined effect of two media is greater than that of one medium in isolation. In other words, the sum of the parts is greater than the whole or, colloquially, two plus two is now five, not four.

Research has shown that consumers learn faster when they are exposed to the same message in different media. For instance, when point-of-sale displays are tied in with television advertising, they produce more sales.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, when an audio track of a television ad is played on radio, it increases people's recall of that ad and the brand.<sup>9</sup> Further, when consumers are exposed to a web page of a product as well as its television ad, they tend to pay more attention, have more positive thoughts and find the message more credible than if they just saw the web page or ad twice.<sup>10</sup> In other words, cross-media strategy is generally more effective.<sup>11</sup>

One explanation for this synergistic media effect is that when a consumer sees the same message in another medium it creates a slight perturbation in their mind because, first, the context is different and, second, the creative execution may also be slightly varied. This raises more attention, resulting in more elaborative encoding and so better memory of the material.<sup>12</sup> This implies that synergy will lead to greater efficiency. Such synergies have been modelled and identified between television and radio,<sup>13</sup> and between television and print,<sup>14</sup> although the largest effect seems to be between television and the internet.<sup>15</sup>

## Creative integration

The synergistic effect implies that the creative content in one media must be related to another since, if it does not, the brand image will not be unified and the end result will be confusing. So, synergy requires *external* creative consistency. However, external consistency is only half the equation. Ideally, we also want the creative elements to be *internally* consistent as well. For instance experiments have shown that pictures that show a closer unity between the brand name and the product yield better brand memory compared to the control. An example of creative unity likely to yield the highest level of brand recall is a picture of a courier service called (i) 'Rocket Messenger Services' showing (ii) a delivery man carrying a parcel with (iii) a rocket strapped behind his back.<sup>16</sup> If components (i), (ii) or (iii) were not related, a lower level of recall would result.<sup>17</sup>

It is even better if additional meaning can also be incorporated into the unified creative content. For example, a picture of Superman holding up a fence, shown with the name of the company called 'Superman Fence Company', is more memorable than a picture of a house surrounded by a fence, with the brand name 'Gateway Fence Company'. In this case, the picture of Superman imparts an additional meaning around the idea of strength.

In short, creative integration requires both internal and external consistency. As the examples above demonstrate, internal consistency means that there is creative unity in all elements of the execution to convey a desired message (whether in the picture, headline, brand name, logo, slogan, copy, colour, style, tone or personality). As we have seen, external consistency involves the adaptation of a creative idea for different medium, retaining the same 'look, feel and voice' as the original.

## Harmonisation

Unfortunately, some creative ideas tend to work better in one medium than another. For instance, if a creative idea for television uses the idea of 'sex appeal', this will certainly take advantage of the medium's ability to convey eroticism, but may not be easily translated to other media such as print or radio. This is because, with visual moving images, feelings of eroticism are more easily aroused. Therefore, the creative idea should be one that can be fully realised in the primary medium. The medium and creative content are therefore not independent but rather, in the context of integration, must support each other.

We might think of integration as like a well-tuned, well-synchronised orchestra, in which each musician is not only pitch-perfect but also plays in tempo with the rest of the musicians – in other words, there is harmony. If the musical instruments are out of tune or the playing not in tempo, or both, there is disharmony. In the same way, in IMC, the ideal is to achieve both media and creative integration. When neither is achieved, the campaign could be said to be chaotic (as illustrated in figure 1.3). The aim is to strive for harmonisation between elements.

**Figure 1.3**  
A musical metaphor for  
types of integration

		Media integration	
		Low	High
Creative integration	High	Out-of-tempo	Harmonious
	Low	Chaotic	Out-of-tune

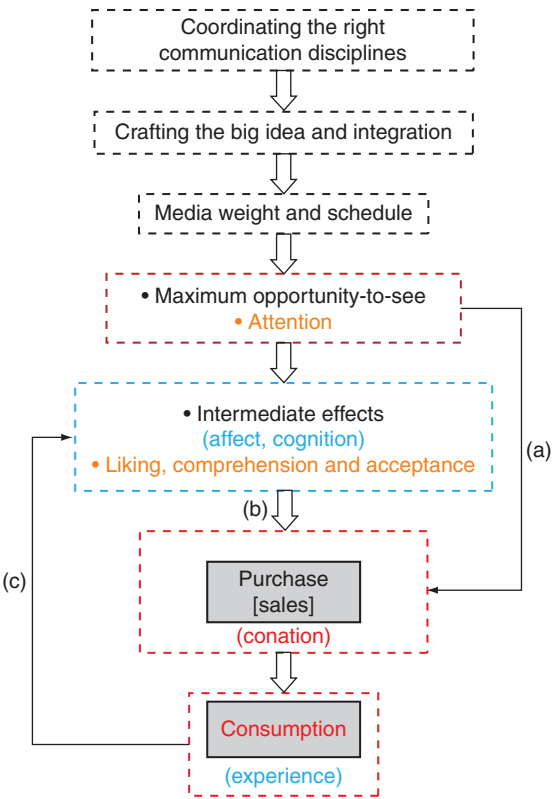
## A theoretical framework of communications

A marcoms campaign should have a theoretical framework of processing (with inputs and outputs), as shown in figure 1.4. The first step is to figure out which communication disciplines (such as advertising, personal selling or other communication disciplines) are the most appropriate for a campaign and how they can best be coordinated. Then, depending on the decisions made, the next decision is which media to use. If mass advertising is used, especially that involving television, then a good creative idea is generally needed, with full integration across the different media selected for the campaign.

By selecting the right media (see chapter 5) and deciding on the schedule and weight of the message, we maximise the opportunity for the target audience to see or hear it (see chapter 4). If the message is based on true consumer insights (see chapter 2) and embodied in a well-crafted creative idea (the ‘big idea’), it should gain the attention of the target audience (see chapters 6 and 7). If this does not lead to immediate purchase (via path A), which is what one would expect with sales promotions, direct marketing and personal selling (see chapters 10 and 11), then, at a minimum, the communications



should leave some impression in their minds; that is, the message should make the target audience feel and believe something positive about the brand. To put it another way, the audience’s feelings (affect) and thinking (cognition) about the brand, in the form of associative memories, should become stronger and more positive.



**Figure 1.4**  
A theoretical framework  
for marketing  
communications in a  
campaign

These associations created can be thought of as the intermediate effects of the communications. Although we cannot ‘see’ these effects (just as we cannot see magnetic waves) we can measure them. We can also verify if these effects are due to our liking, understanding and acceptance of the message (see chapter 12) or perhaps the influence of others in our social networks (see chapter 8).

If these brand associations grow to be strong, it will increase the probability of purchase (via path b) (see chapter 3). The observable manifestation of this behaviour (called ‘conation’) is sales. However, these brand associations can also be learned, probably more strongly, from our consumption experience (via path c).

In the theoretical framework shown in figure 1.4, the blue areas and words represent the individual’s mental representations or memories of the brand (for example, feelings, beliefs, experience about and of the brand), while the area shown in red represents their actions (for example, purchase and consumption). The orange area represents their specific

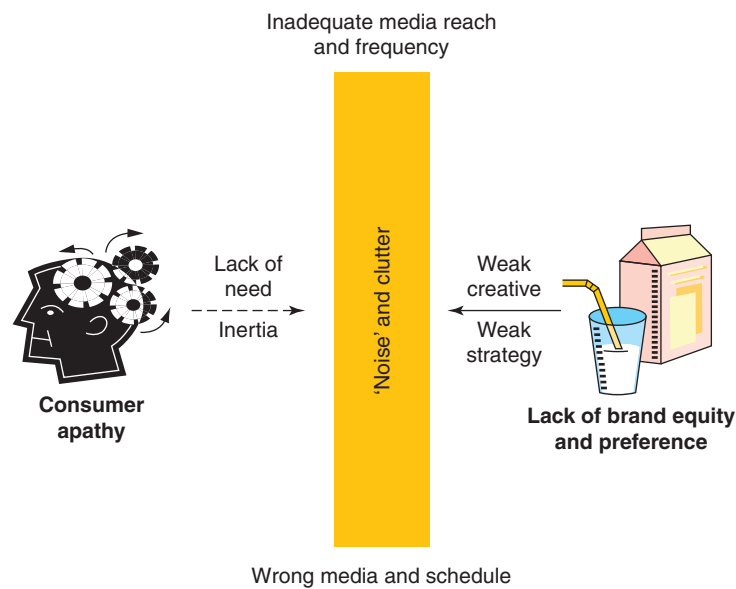
reactions to the message (for example, attention to, liking, comprehension and acceptance of the branded message), while the black areas represent the managerial steps we can take to communicate that message (for example, coordinating the right communication disciplines, crafting the creative idea and integrating it across different medium, and deciding on media weight and schedule).

Although the figure represents a very general model of communications, its application should not be too rigid. For instance, the crafting of a creative idea may be essential for advertising and marketing-oriented PR (see chapter 9) but not needed for sales promotion or personal selling. Similarly, acceptance of the message may be more important for a high-risk purchase, but less so for a low-risk one. In social media, the focus may be on generating and spreading excitement about the brand, and not necessarily closing a sale.

## Communication barriers

A communications campaign may fail for many reasons. Communication barriers may impede our acceptance of the message (implicitly or explicitly) and so decrease the probability that we will buy the brand. Figure 1.5 shows some of the major barriers we need to overcome.

**Figure 1.5**  
Barriers to marketing communications



### 'Noise' and 'clutter'

The terms 'noise' and 'clutter' refer to two major communication barriers. Noise is any ambient stimulus (for example, a radio playing or people chatting) that distracts our