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TRULY INTEGRATED MARCOMM INEVITABLE IN NEW MILLENNIUM.

(Brief Article) *ROBERT F. LAUTERBORN.*

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First, let me share with you my current definition of integrated marketing communications: an outside-in, results-oriented, strategic approach to marketing that manages a timed array of internal and external communication resources to produce specific behavior among specific groups, leading to a predictable return on investment.

When Don Schultz, Stanley Tannenbaum and I wrote the first book on the subject, "Integrated Marketing Communications" (NTC, 1992), people who heard about it often said: "We've always integrated our communications. You guys just thought up a word for it." But they were talking about tactical integration; we were talking about strategic integration.

We included under "marketing communications" a lot of functions not traditionally considered in that scope: the whole gamut of brand contacts. And we thought about the process from the outside in, from the customer's or prospect's point of view, rather than from inside the company looking out.

Agency challenges

The second major difference between our approach and then-common wisdom was that we focused on changing behavior, not just increasing awareness and brand preference.

This, in turn, led to the third major difference: positioning integrated marketing communications as an investment activity, not a column of cost items. That is, true practitioners of integrated marketing communications cannot only demonstrate ROI, but predict it.

However, instituting the concept still presents formidable challenges for agencies and clients.

Although nearly every agency now claims to be an integrated marketing communications agency, the agencies have generally missed the point. Most of them interpret integrated marketing communications to mean what they used to call "collateral" or below-the-line activities.

Advertising is still the big dog, and TV advertising is still perceived as the primary business of most large consumer agencies. Organizationally, they may appoint a director of integrated marketing communications, but his or her role too often is merely to add the other stuff after the advertising plan has been developed.

Indeed, most agencies offer only public relations, promotion, direct marketing and so on because their clients started to shift dollars into those activities. To stem this tide of money leaking out, agencies went on a buying spree in the '80s and early '90s and acquired specialized agencies for each function.

But these agencies were rarely integrated. They simply were enabled to proclaim themselves one-stop marketing communications shops.

Agencies shouldn't have been surprised when clients saw no benefit in buying all these separate functions from one source, choosing instead to cherry pick the best providers of each. That's one reason integrated marketing communications needs to be driven by the client.

Clients exposed to an in-depth explanation of integrated marketing communications "get it" quickly, in theory. But formidable barriers challenge their ability to institute the concept. Clients are as handicapped organizationally as agencies, because the responsibility for communication is functionally siloed.

Despite these challenges, the forces that will continue to affect marketing in the new millennium will continue to force marketers and their agencies to change not only their structures, but their attitudes in ways that make integrated marketing communication inevitable.

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