

# PLANNING MARCOM CONTENT

Now that we have established an understanding of how the customer comes in contact with the brand and how brand networks influence behavior, it is time to apply these concepts as the building blocks for creating messages and incentives. Professor Lisa Fortini-Campbell, Northwestern University, coined the term *creating customer insights* to describe how the marcom planner uses an understanding of brand contacts and brand networks to develop marcom programs. This chapter explains how the planner progresses from customer insights to planning IMC messages and incentives.

## Defining Customer Insight

Lisa Fortini-Campbell has suggested that customer insight contains three primary elements<sup>1</sup>:

- Customer insight involves identifying the strongest motivational force in the mind of the customer or prospect.
- Customer insight is the identification of the psychological opportunity that offers the greatest opportunity for the marketer and the customer to intersect and connect.
- Customer insight is the “sweet spot,” that is, the perfect connection between the marketer and the customer in terms of

what the marketer wants to deliver and what the customer or prospect wants to acquire.

Finding customer insight allows the marketer to develop a relevant “whole-brand” framework that is then developed, delivered, and reinforced with every brand contact. (Recall the discussion of the whole-brand concept in Chapter 7.) Brands that achieve customer insight leave customers feeling that the firm knows them, respects them, and can anticipate their needs.

This type of understanding comes only from a respectful, empathic, comprehensive understanding of the customer as a person who has needs and requirements that the brand may be able to solve or who seeks benefits the brand may provide. That information comes from an insight into customers’ lives, that is, how the category fits in with the way they live and what distinguishes the brand from competition in terms of that fit. Most of all, customer insight is not a simple demographic description of a person or group of people nor is it an understanding based only on previous behavior. Instead, it is a deep, meaningful understanding of customers; their lives or businesses; their needs, wants, and desires; their history and background; their ambitions; and many other present-day and future factors. History and experience can help a great deal in developing customer insights, but it is the skill of the marcom manager in projecting that knowledge and information into the present and future that really distinguishes customer insight from traditional segmentation schemes, positioning approaches, or simple gut feelings.

### Developing and Testing Customer Insights

The question, of course, is how do marketers know when they have captured the insight that will help gain a new customer or bond an existing customer to the organization? One of the best methods we have found is the simple test outlined here. If the marketer can complete the parts of the following statement easily and completely, he or she is well on the way to developing effective messages or incentives using the IMC process.

- *For* (Who is the behavioral target our communication program is to impact?)
- *Who* (What is the customer insight that has been identified, and what is the category motivation that drives that customer or prospect?)
- *Our product is a . . .* (What is our product or service in the eyes of the customer or prospect, that is, what is our whole product or whole brand?)
- *That provides . . .* (What is the key benefit or value the customer wants and our brand or product can deliver based on our insight or insights?)
- *Unlike . . .* (Who is the relevant competitor or competitors?)
- *Our product . . .* (What is our key point of differentiating relevance?)

Look again at the example of a business airline traveler in the sidebar. Fortini-Campbell illustrates how the customer insight for this person can be put to the customer insight test:

- *For* businesspeople who travel 100,000 full fare miles per year
- *Who* take pride in the personal sacrifices they make for the business
- *Our product is a* “business preparation and recovery service”
- *That* sacrifices itself to make you more productive
- *Unlike* any other business travel experience
- *Our airline* will gladly adapt itself to create the travel you decide you want

Clearly, this description of what the customer wants the airline to deliver would be difficult for any airline to match. Yet the insight is important, because if this type of service could be delivered to customers and prospects on a regular basis by an airline and its personnel through practice and performance, one can imagine how easy it would be for that airline to maintain its customer base and how easy it would be to get other business travelers to switch preferred carriers.

### CUSTOMER INSIGHT IN ACTION

This example illustrates exactly what Fortini-Campbell means by a true customer insight. Based on research and experience, here is her description of a business traveler, an airline's key customer:

I'm the person at my company who sacrifices herself to make revenue happen. I do whatever needs to be done, wherever it needs to be done. When a customer needs me, I go. When there's a problem with a supplier relationship, I'm on it. If we're having trouble internally working together, I'm there to mediate. I do 120 percent every day. I'm one of those people who's willing to pay the personal price to see us all succeed. But there are great rewards, too. Helping make this company a success is one of my greatest achievements and a huge source of personal pride.

The insight continues:

If I'm going to put myself out for customers, suppliers, and the company, I need support. I need to focus myself on my objectives and I can't be accommodating myself to the people I'm paying to make life easier for me. An airline trip has everything to do with my success. It affects me personally. An airline trip can put me in a good mood or a bad one. It can make me feel rested and ready to go or exhausted. My airline is part of my support infrastructure, like my staff or my computer system.

With a description like this, most marcom managers can begin to understand and relate to the business traveler as a segment of the airline's customer base. Obviously, they should recognize that this is just one type of airline customer. Vacationers are quite different, as are overseas travelers and family groups. But this type of customer insight statement is tremendously helpful in developing relevant messages and incentives for these types of customers.<sup>2</sup>

At this point, it might be useful to ask whether this customer description and insight fit you or someone you know. How many airlines have this much customer insight? If an airline could deliver on this type of customer insight, how relevant would its marcom messages be? How much loyalty could the airline generate? How important would the ticket price be to the customers who chose that airline? Or how important would the price of the ticket be to those flying competitive airlines? How many advocates would the airline likely generate? By addressing each of these questions, one can see that insights help build brand relationships and help develop effective marcom programs.

With a firm understanding of the concept of customer insights, we are ready to begin applying this knowledge to the development of IMC messages and incentives. Since, as guiding principle 4 says, IMC goals must always align with overall corporate goals in order to be effective, the first step is to make sure that the customer insights the marketer has developed are in line with what the organization wants to and is able to deliver. That is the topic of the next section.

### Matching Organizational Capability with Consumer Insights

A harsh criticism of marketers delivered by today's customers is this: "Marketers don't do what they say they will do!" As we discussed in the previous chapter, marketing communication typically makes promises to customers and prospects. Ads woo them with promises like "quick return policy," "friendly tellers," "easy to assemble," "no-hassle guarantee," and hundreds of similar statements. The trouble is that the customer experience is often quite different from the promises made. Returns are not just difficult; they are baffling and often impossible. And they take time—lots of time. Tellers and salesclerks could care less about customer problems or providing customer assistance. Salespeople don't return telephone calls. And products come with undecipherable instructions and inaccurate directions. In short, too many organizations don't deliver on what they promise customers and prospects in their marketing and communication programs.

Tackling the problem of unmet promises involves what we call *internal integration*. Quite simply, this is the internal alignment of external promises with internal capability.

Recall from guiding principle 1 in Chapter 3 that for IMC programs to work, the company must become customer centric. We suggested that it is critical for each and every part of the organization—external suppliers as well as internal employees—to focus on customers and be dedicated to helping customers meet their goals. This means that when developing and using customer insights, the goals of the organization must sometimes be subordinated to the goals of the customer. Customer insights help marketers understand the customer's goals and align organizational goals with what the customer is trying to achieve. Where there is conflict or a difference in corporate and customer goals, customer insights can often help bring the two objectives together so that each side finds satisfaction with the product, service, and marketing activities they share.

## Developing a Message and Incentive Strategy

Exhibit 8.1 recaps the concept of messages and incentives first introduced in Chapter 3, where we reviewed guiding principle 7. Simply stated, IMC streamlines the many elements that marcom managers have created over the years as separate functions (advertising, public relations, and so on) into two groups:

- Those that deliver brand messages (brand concepts, ideas, associations, values, and other perceptions the firm wants customers to store away in memory for the long term)
- Those that deliver brand incentives (short-term offers or rewards for doing something the marketer believes will be of value to both the organization and the customer)

Exhibit 8.1 acts as a useful starting point for developing communication strategies around specific messages and incentives. The illustration looks at strategy development from the perspective of overall

**Exhibit 8.1 Typical Goals/Tools of Messages and Incentives**

Brand messages	Brand incentives
<b>Typical goals</b> Enhance brand Outline benefits Build preference Differentiate from competitors	<b>Typical goals</b> Gain trial Increase usage Encourage stockpiling Promote cross purchase
<b>Typical tools</b> Media press coverage Events Literature Website	<b>Typical tools</b> Price reductions Coupons Sampling Contests/sweepstakes Gifts and free offers

program goals. Typical goals for brand messages are to enhance the brand, to outline specific benefits the customer or prospect might obtain from using the brand, to build preference for the brand, to clearly differentiate the brand from competitors, and so on. The tools the marcom manager can use to deliver messages include paid messages in various forms of media, public relations, events, sponsorships, product placements, and so forth. Messages can be delivered in almost any form and through almost any medium, but the goal is always the same: to leave some type of imprint or impression for the brand or product or organization in the mind of the customer or prospect.

For brand incentives, typical goals might be to generate trial of the product or service among nonusers, to increase usage among present users, or to get the customer or prospect to stockpile the product for future use. An offer might, for example, combine the brand with another product to encourage cross purchase or cross usage. In terms of tools, brand incentives might include price reductions for a limited time; coupons in all different sizes, forms, and values; or various free offers where the marketer provides additional volume or content or even gives free goods to the purchaser as a reward. Electronic media offer a wide variety of new incentives such as white papers, chat rooms, electronic coupons, and other E-mail offers.

It should be noted here that, while we have combined all the traditional marcom specialty functions such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and the like into just two basic communication tools (messages and incentives), it is understood that the line distinguishing them is not always clear-cut. In fact, that line often blurs in practice. Thus, while the primary focus of the IMC activity may be to deliver a message, that does not prevent the marketer from including an incentive as well. For instance, a cents-off coupon might be added to a message-dominated print ad to generate first-time trial by a new customer or to reward a present customer for past behavior. Similarly, high-impact promotional events often have a residual effect that may add to a long-term brand memory. Nevertheless, in spite of this modest overlapping of outcomes, we believe the IMC manager can, with some discipline and judgment about the primary objective of a communication effort, reasonably categorize almost any activity as predominantly focused on one purpose or the other.

Another complicating factor is the period in which market response is anticipated. Some programs are very short term in nature, while others seek to establish long-term brand identity and preference. The issue of time frame is critical to IMC planning and is addressed in future chapters.

Exhibit 8.1 makes it clear that the type of messages or incentives that can be used are limited only by the imagination of the marcom manager. How those messages and incentives are developed is discussed next.

### Strategy Development: A New Methodology

The best way to understand any methodology is to look at an example of how it works. With this in mind, this section is based on a case developed by Stanley Tannenbaum,<sup>3</sup> a long-time ad agency executive, who enjoyed a distinguished second career in academia at Northwestern University. The strategy development form that follows the example also originated with Tannenbaum. Here's how the example begins.

It's a cold winter evening in Philadelphia. You're on Calumet Street between 13th and 14th. There are eight houses on the block. You're a

door-to-door salesman. Your job? Knock on each door and sell each homeowner a bottle of aspirin. *You need a communication strategy.*

To be successful today, you obviously can't write the same strategy for all eight homeowners. A single strategy might lead you to say something like this: "Hey there, person, if you have stress, I have relief. And my product relieves stress faster." Of course, you would need a visual to accompany these words, so you would stand there with a pained look on your face, perhaps tightly twisting a rope to dramatize "stress."

One strategy for all eight homeowners? Of course not. But that's the kind of thinking taking place for many products and services. One strategy—and one commercial spun off that strategy—aimed at 100 million people.

This "massification" of the consumer has led to communication that is—like the aspirin salesman's pitch—vague, meaningless, and irrelevant. Marketers spend most of their time communicating about themselves and spend very little time figuring out how their product can solve consumer problems. The dilemma is further compounded by the fact that most marketers unintentionally send out a communication hodgepodge to the consumer. Mass market advertising might say one thing, while a price promotion creates a different signal. A product label creates still another message; sales literature uses an entirely different vocabulary; and the sales force does nothing but pitch price, price, price to the retailer. Mixed-up, mass-directed, incompatible communication stems from the manufacturer's wishes rather than from customer needs. This is why IMC is so necessary in a marketplace where the consumer calls the shots and the marketer listens.

### A Different Way of Thinking

Good communication, like good selling, is personal. An effective salesperson would never ever use the same strategy to sell all eight people on that block in Philadelphia. A good salesperson would find out all he or she could about each customer and custom-tailor the communication strategy to that individual. In other words, the salesperson would get to know the customer! The better the marketer knows the customer, the sharper the selling message. Find out, for instance, how the people

on the block experience stress. When? Is the stress job-related? Lifestyle-related? Is it real? Imaginary? Which products does the customer use to solve the problem? Is he or she satisfied? Does the customer enjoy using the products? Why? Would he or she recommend them to friends?

Think how much easier it would be to communicate with potential customers if you knew them as individuals rather than as merely other guys on the block. Today's technologies, as described in steps 1 and 2 of the IMC process, have the capability to make the marketer intimate with each and every customer. It's possible to get to know each customer's needs, behavior, and requirements so thoroughly that one can address each individual on a more personal basis than ever before.

This new way of thinking requires an almost evangelical dedication to the creation of a disciplined communication strategy. If marketers do their homework properly in the development of that strategy, the result will be a sharper, more persuasive, and fully integrated message or incentive directed to the most likely prospect. This, in turn, will result in the creation of a unique brand or service personality, one that separates their product or service from its competition. When done correctly, the use of an integrated selling message leads to personal communication, the kind of communication people want to listen to and act on.

The strategy form in Exhibit 8.2 is specifically created for IMC programs. It can be used by blue-chip marketers or small entrepreneurs. It doesn't matter whether the organization is selling packaged goods, services, or business-to-business products; whether it is in retailing; whether it is developing a corporate image program or selling aspirin door-to-door.

While at first glance, the strategy form may seem daunting, a closer look shows that all it does is bring together the material the marketer has already gathered and thought through during the first three steps of the IMC process. The greatest benefit of the form is that working through it forces the marcom manager into a disciplined thinking process that will result in a workable communication strategy. The strategy form brings all stakeholders together, since it forces everyone to sign off on who the customer is, what the customer wants, and how the

### Exhibit 8.2 Communication Strategy Development Form

- I. Who is the consumer?
  - A. What is the customer's target buying incentive?  
What is the general product category: \_\_\_\_\_
    1. How do members of this group perceive the products or services in this category?
    2. What do they buy now? How do they buy and use the product(s)?
    3. What are their lifestyles, psychographics, and attitudes toward the category?
  - B. What is the key customer insight?
  - C. What do these customers want from the product category that they are not now getting?  
Target buying incentive: "I will buy a product that \_\_\_\_\_ than any other product in the category."
  - D. Which would best achieve the IMC goal: message, incentive, or combination of the two?
- II. Does the product or service fit the group?
  - A. What is the reality of the product or service?
    1. What's in it?
    2. What does it do?
    3. Why is it different?
  - B. How does the customer perceive the product or service?
  - C. How does it look, feel, taste, work, and so on?
  - D. How does the customer perceive the company behind the product?
  - E. What is the "naked truth"?
  - F. Does the product or service fit the group?  
Recommendation: \_\_\_\_\_
- III. How will the competition affect our objectives?
  - A. What is the brand network, the competitive frame? Why?
  - B. What do competitors now communicate to customers or prospects?
  - C. How will the competition retaliate against our program?
  - D. How vulnerable is the competition? From whom will we take business?
- IV. What is the competitive consumer benefit?
  - Must be a true benefit (solve a consumer problem, better the consumer's way of life, etc.)
  - Must focus on one benefit for each group
  - Must be competitive (that is, "better than" the competitive frame)
  - Must not be a slogan or an ad phrase
  - Must be one sentence (e.g., "Sanka tastes better than any other instant coffee." "Holiday Inn gives you a better night's sleep than any other hotel.")
- V. How will marketing communication pertaining to each of the following make the benefit believable to the customer or prospect?
  - A. Product or service itself: \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Perceptual support: \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Communication support: \_\_\_\_\_
- VI. What should the personality of the brand, company, or product be? What unique personality will help further define the product or service and discretely differentiate it from the competitive frame?

(continued)

**Exhibit 8.2 Communication Strategy Development Form (continued)**

- VII. What main message do we want the consumer to take away from the communication?
- What main incentive will be offered?
  - What action do we want the consumer to take as a result of the communication:
    - Try the product or service
    - Send for more information
    - Use the product more often
    - Try other products in the line
    - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- VIII. What will the perceptual or promotional effect of the communication be?
- If the communication is successful, how will the customer perceive the product as compared to the competition in (months/years)?
  - If the incentive is successful, what customer or prospect action will occur?
- IX. What are the consumer brand contact points? To most effectively reach the consumer with a believable persuasive message or incentive, what consumer contact points should be considered? Why?
- X. How will we handle future research? (List the types of future research needed to further develop the IMC strategy and your reasons for each.)

brand or product will meet those expectations. The strategy defines the position of the product, its personality, its competitive reason for being, and the benefits the consumer will derive from it. The form also captures how the marketer thinks customers will be influenced by competitive forces. Importantly, it provides behavioral criteria for which the marketing department will be held accountable. The strategy includes the best media contact points where the customer can be reached. It also answers the need for future research to further refine and update the strategy.

In this new IMC approach, the communication strategy is a critically important element in the communication process for all departments within the organization. It forces every aspect of the communication process to reach the consumer clearly and consistently. Every communication tactic that flows from an integrated strategy reinforces the reason why the consumer should believe in the product or service.

If you are selling aspirin, for example, all communication for the aspirin should be driven by the basic consumer need and should lead to the creation of one unified personality for the brand. The overall strategy can be broken down to allow the marketer to reach subgroups of

consumers, such as loyal users, occasional users, and so on. Also there can be specific strategies against wholesalers, distributors, retailers, trade groups, and all other peripheral stakeholders that can affect the sale. Each of these segments has their own buying incentive, and as a result, the communication strategy offers each group a distinct competitive benefit. This is true integration because your analysis of the customers leads to well-founded conclusions regarding which group to target and how to reach each group.

It is easy to see the importance of the strategy. It is the key to integrating all communication about the product—elements that affect everybody and everything that has to do with the sale and repeat sale of the product. When done correctly, the development of a communication strategy creates a bond within a company and a stronger bond between the company and the various communication agents that serve it.

**Strategy Development: An Example**

To illustrate the strategy development form at work, let's revisit the Philadelphia aspirin salesperson and show how a strategy might be developed to reach each distinct customer.

**Who Is the Consumer?**

To create a powerful IMC strategy, each of the eight aspirin prospects must be investigated. The target buying incentive (TBI) statement tells the marketer what people think about a product category and why they think that way. It shows what problems they have with the category (or brand) and what it would take for a product to overcome those problems and thus make a sale. The TBI analysis provides insights into the consumer's behavior and thought process. How does the consumer define the quality of aspirin? How does the consumer evaluate brand names? What does the consumer define as "value" in the aspirin category? Why does one group only buy a certain brand occasionally?

The TBI analysis further forces the marketer to develop key insights into the way the consumer lives, works, and plays; the stress the con-

sumer is under at work, in social situations, or at home with children. Does the consumer get uptight when going to a dinner party? When making a business presentation? When going shopping at a fancy store? Is the consumer in management at work? Does her boss put her under extreme pressure? Does her husband? Does her mother-in-law? How does she use aspirin? How many does she take at one time? How often? What brand does she take? Does she switch brands? Does she have confidence in her doctor? In prescription drugs? Does she buy generic brands? Is she an educated consumer? Does she buy on evaluation rather than on reputation? Which does the consumer have more confidence in, the product itself, where he or she buys the product, or the person who sells the product? How is the consumer affected by news stories? By word of mouth? By parents? By price of products?

This investigation of the consumer should result in a one-sentence summary that succinctly states the TBI. It will say clearly what incentive or product benefit will get this particular customer to consider switching from the brand he or she is currently using or reconfirm why he or she should continue buying your brand.

In the case of the eight people in Philadelphia, you may have found that the members of the group buying generic aspirin are terribly insecure about the entire category. They may think aspirin is aspirin and, with great trepidation, choose the lower price, no-name brand. They may be uncertain of this decision and really wish there was a brand they could have confidence in—even if they had to pay a little more for it. This group's buying incentive would be simply, "I would buy another brand of aspirin if it gave me more confidence it was working better than the brand I am now using."

Of course, TBI sheets should be developed for each similar consumer group in the marketplace. The information to construct the profiles could come from behavioral data; primary research; or hypotheses based on the marketer's personal interviews, observations, or experiences. After a TBI sheet is made up for each discrete consumer group, a decision must be made on which group or groups would be most profitable for the aspirin manufacturer to pursue.

To properly plan the communication strategy, each group that can affect the sale of the product must be considered a potential opportu-

nity. It is likely that separate TBI sheets would be constructed for retailers, medical professionals, the company sales force, corporate health offices, and so on.

For the purposes of this example, let's assume the company has decided to develop a communication campaign directed at people who are now buying generic aspirin but are looking for a brand in which they could have more confidence. This brings up a key question: Can your product—real or perceived—satisfy the needs and wants of the selected TBI group? This raises two issues.

- Is the current reality of the product good enough to satisfy the confidence needs of the consumers? Is there "news" in the product itself—facts never heard before—that would convince the targeted consumers that this brand is one about which they can feel more confident? Even pay more money for?
- What are the current perceptions of the product by the consumer group? Do they inspire confidence? If not, can new perceptions be created through communication in order to build a strong, unique, positive perception of confidence in the minds of the consumers? Or are the existing perceptions of the product so ingrained in the minds of the consumers that they are impossible to change?

These issues can only be answered by conducting objective examinations of both the reality of the product and the potential consumer's current perceptions of the product. This leads directly to the second section of the communication strategy form.

### **Does the Product or Service Fit the Group?**

Too often communication people are satisfied with the superficial ingredients of the product. They rarely dig for news and find the surprises that exist in every product. Sure, all types of aspirin have common ingredients. But this thinking leads to complacency. Look for information beyond ingredients, for surprises about the product that can affect perception. That is the purpose of this section of the strategy form.

Consider, for instance, how the product is made. Who invented it? Why? How? In how many seconds does it dissolve? How does it actu-



ally work? Does it work faster on smaller people? Does it work faster if the user thinks it's going to work? Why does it work? Why are most aspirin bottles colored? How long can bottles safely remain in the medicine chest? What happens if the user takes aspirin with orange juice? How about in a space capsule or gulping them down with a Pepsi? Where are the aspirin tablets made? Does the manufacturing process need certain light or heat conditions? Who are the people on the production line? Do they care about the user? Is the manufacturing process supervised by doctors, nurses, or epidemiologists? Who is president of the company? Who does the research on effectiveness? Do aspirins work differently on different symptoms? Why? Can consumers determine how many aspirins should be taken in a given situation? Should they be able to? Should aspirin be taken prior to stressful situations?

All these questions—and scores more about the reality of the product—must be answered. Everyone in the marcom department should contribute questions. What you are looking for are insights that deliver facts that are instrumental in affecting consumer perceptions, facts that could conceivably dispel the perception that all aspirin brands are alike.

As important as the issue of product reality is the issue of how the product and product category are perceived by the consumer. Although you have gotten information about this in the TBI section, more detail is needed here because perception is a vital part of the product. It is what creates the real value of the product. How does the prospect perceive the quality of the product? Does it do a good job for its cost? Does the brand name offer confidence? What does the consumer think of competitive brands? How is the consumer affected by news stories in the papers? By word of mouth? By retailer recommendation? By price points? Is the brand seemingly always on sale? Is it old-looking? Does the prospect trust the retailer? How close is the brand to what is perceived as the category generic? What does the label say about the user? Most importantly, has the potential customer positioned the brand so definitely as a “me-too” parity product that he or she is unable to accept new information and thus make a change?

Now back to the strategic issues that were stated earlier: Is the reality of the product good enough to inspire confidence? Can this sense

of confidence be persuasively communicated to the potential customer? If research and good judgment determine that the consumer's perceptions of the product will never allow it to be accepted on the basis of confidence, then most likely other promotional tactics should be considered, such as price promotions or incentive purchases. If, however, it seems that the consumer's judgment system can accept the brand's confidence stance, a repositioning of communication strategy may be called for. Of course, there are other consumer segments to which marketing could appeal profitably. These also must be investigated to determine which type of communication will be most effective.

In the aspirin example, let's say research has truly uncovered a group of people whose needs are not being fully satisfied with products on the market. These people have stressful jobs—office managers, TV repairmen, door-to-door salespeople, purchasing agents, bus drivers. They get bad headaches and dread the thought of getting them. They buy generic aspirin but they wish there were something better, different—something they could have confidence in and enjoy the secure feeling of knowing it would work. They would be willing to pay a premium price, as they do when they choose brand name prescription drugs over generic. These customers rely on their doctors' and pharmacists' recommendations. They think their headaches are special and they need something special to relieve them.

If you are successful in directing your brand to this group of consumers, your product is no longer mere aspirin. It is a unique solution to a unique problem. If this solution is communicated effectively, it will add to the perceived value of the brand in the mind of the user. It will separate your brand from all others. It will allow you to establish a long-term, profitable relationship with the customer.

### **How Will the Competition Affect Our Objectives?**

Knowing the competition means a lot more than merely knowing about competitive market share and ad spending. First of all, the company must determine against whom it is competing. What network of brands and brand alternatives are in the consumer's mind? Are Hallmark greeting cards competing against American or Gibson? Or, in the mind of

the consumer, are they competing against the telephone, fax machines, E-mail, or the U.S. Postal Service? Or are Hallmark cards competing against short bus or automobile trips to Mom's house on Mother's Day?

Returning to the aspirin example, consider whether you are competing only against other brands. Might you, perhaps, also be competing against tranquilizers? Alcohol? Cigarettes? Vacations? Or special kinds of analgesics such as aspirin with antacid, baby aspirin, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen?

Remember that the determination of the competitive frame must come from the consumer's mind. What do consumers think about the various pain relievers on the market? What do they consider a pain reliever? What are the alternatives to aspirin, as well as their pluses and minuses? Where are the consumers' loyalties? How are consumers affected by messages? The conclusion of the competitive analysis should lead to the determination of which brand is most vulnerable in the marketplace, from which company your brand will most likely take business, and the new customers who can most likely be acquired.

### **What Is the Competitive Consumer Benefit?**

You know your customer, your product, and your competition. Now, what is the one key benefit that can motivate the customer to buy your product rather than a competitor's?

In the aspirin example, the TBI group has given their buying incentive: "I would buy another brand of aspirin if it gave me more confidence it was working better than the brand I am now using." At this point in the strategy, the competitive consumer benefit should reflect the TBI's buying incentive. In other words, the competitive benefit should read, "Brand A aspirin gives you more confidence it's working than any other brand of aspirin."

This statement of benefit—or promise—is what consumers have told you they want from a brand. The statement is directional. It is in no way intended to be the words in a communication message. The determination of the benefit must stem from the consumer. Is this what the consumer needs and wants? It is vital to remember that the key to effective IMC strategy is the solution of consumer problems—a consumer benefit that's presented in every brand contact in a way that's unique to your brand.

### **How Will Marketing Communication Make the Benefit Believable?**

Once marketing managers have come up with a viable consumer benefit, how do they give the consumer a reason to believe that their brand can be trusted to deliver on its promise? This is the point where mere communication is insufficient. What is needed is persuasive communication integrated into every piece of marketing; persuasive communication that gently, subtly, credibly convinces the consumer that the marketer's product is superior to every other product in the field. This necessitates building a rapport with the consumer that is the result of a deep understanding and a communication that reflects such understanding. In other words, the marketer must convince the customer that the product will produce the benefit paid for. The real genius in communication is to figure out how best to persuade the selected group that a product will solve a specific problem. Should a traditional demonstration message be used? What about a money-back guarantee incentive? Can the way communication reaches the target—the contact—create the reason to believe? Will the persuasion be greater if the message comes through a personal letter from the president of the company rather than a generic radio commercial? Would the persuasion be greater if marketing talked about specific solutions to specific problems rather than vague solutions to general problems? Would the persuasion be more powerful if the communication offered "news" about the product in a way the consumer has never heard before?

Whatever method is used to persuade—to present the reason to believe—it must be consistent in every type of communication used. The thinking behind IMC is that every communication—price, label, logo, promotion, distribution—should be created to help persuade the selected group of the competitive benefit. The greater the consistency, the greater the impact and the greater the persuasion.

### **What Should the Personality of the Brand, Company, or Product Be?**

The meat of the message and the language—verbal and visual—with which it's delivered are important in building the reason to believe. However, the tone and personality that are created for the brand are equally important.

Devising a brand personality is not, as some critics believe, a creative exercise for creativity's sake. It is a process that gives the brand a life and soul with which the consumer can easily identify. It differentiates the brand from competition. It gives the consumer a feeling of familiarity and kinship. The personality created must fit the brand's competitive positioning. It must fit the consumer's perception and expectation of the brand. It must be credible. For example, if you are trying to build confidence in your brand of aspirin, the tone of every type of communication must exude confidence in its look, words, and attitude.

### **What Main Message Do We Want the Consumer to Take Away?**

An IMC strategy sets out goals for which the marcom manager will be held accountable. But what goals should be set, and what goals are truly measurable? One element that must be evaluated is the main message or the primary incentive the customer takes away. Goals should be clearly spelled out and agreed to by all the participants in the strategy. They should be monitored constantly. Obviously, if the goals are not attained, the content of the strategy and the various tactical components should be reviewed and, perhaps, revised. It could be that the marketer is not in touch with the consumer.

### **What Will the Perceptual or Promotional Effect Be?**

A key evaluation of the strategy and its implementation is the competitive perceptual value it creates for the product in the minds of prospects. In this section of the strategy form, it is necessary to state the desired perceptual value, along with a time frame for establishing that value. The desired perceptual effect should be measured over specific intervals with the target consumer. This is a practical way of telling if the strategy is working or should be amended.

In the case of your aspirin brand, the desired perceptual effect should be to have the consumer think of the brand as a more dependable form of relief because it is closer to a prescription-strength drug.

### **What Are the Consumer Brand Contact Points?**

Another key element of the communication strategy is how or through what contact points to reach the desired TBI group. The TBI definition at the start of the strategy gives the marketer a lot of information about his or her audience. This type of information should be used as a brand contact plan to reach potential customers. Where are they when they need this product? Where are they when they are most likely to accept a "selling" message? Where are they when the communication can be of greatest benefit to them?

The beauty of the integrated strategy statement is that it leads to tactics that may not be traditional but are certainly more persuasive because they speak to individuals as individuals. It's almost back to personal selling—like a salesperson facing eight customers on that lonely block in Philadelphia.

### **How Will We Handle Future Research?**

The strategy should end up planning for the future. What research should be conducted in the future in order to build a more perfect strategy? One year on, for instance, how have consumers reacted? Have they accepted the change in communication? Have they bought the promise of the product? Are they buying the product?

The answers to these types of questions will provide behavioral feedback that will aid in refining the strategy over the years. A sound IMC strategy is constantly being revised because the consumer is constantly changing. The marketer's communication, the competition's communication, noncommercial communication, new products, and changing lifestyles all make it imperative to continually update the strategy and tactics used to execute it. It cannot be overstated that the consumer drives the strategy. The marketer must establish a customer relationship—a friend rather than a conquest. As with the aspirin, always remember that you are not trying to sell a pill; you are trying to solve a problem.

Establishing a relationship, showing this knowledge of and caring for the customer, is the essence of what effective marketing is all about. Unlike traditional marketing, which paid lip service to terms like

*customer-driven*, the core principle of IMC is that the strength of the product begins and endures with the confidence the consumer has in it. However, since the product is virtually the same as the competition's products, the marketer cannot depend on the product alone to build that confidence.

It's the rapport, the empathy, the dialogue, the relationship, the communication he or she establishes with customers and prospects that makes the difference. These separate the IMC marketer from the pack. Quite simply, one cannot set down an effective IMC strategy unless one starts and ends with the consumer's point of view.

## Developing Message and Incentive Tactics

The challenge of developing effective messages and incentives that can influence customer behaviors flows directly from the customer insights the planner is able to identify. These are then matched up with the values, benefits, and solutions the product or service can provide and the organization can deliver. All of these are based on developing a sound IMC strategy as has just been explained. Effective messages and incentives are not bound up in clever slogans, brilliant illustrations, memorable music, or the myriad other tools available to the marcom department or its support agencies. While various tactics might enhance the message or incentive being developed, they are primarily elements that make a solid, value-based IMC strategy more effective. They do not replace the heart of the IMC proposition nor the customer insights. In short, effective messages and incentives come more from the mundane and often more difficult challenges of learning about customers and prospects. How do they think? How do they feel? What they are trying to accomplish? What do they enjoy? Messages and incentives derive from customer insights that help the marketer become more relevant to individual customers or prospects.

Alongside that customer insight must be an understanding of the organization's culture and capabilities. Unless the entire firm is in sync with the customer or prospect, there can be no ongoing relationship. Too often, in our experience, marketing organizations talk about what

they know best. This leads them to focus not on customers and prospects, but on brands and products. And that focus typically has little or nothing to do with creating effective messages and incentives.

## Moving On

By now, it should be clear that to develop effective messages and incentives, the IMC manager must start with the customer. The next step is to relate an understanding of the customer back to the marketing group and the company as a whole. For, discussed in the next chapter, it is that combination—value to both the customer and the company—that really makes the difference in the value-based IMC environment.