

## **Exploring Marketing to Marketers – A Content Analysis of Advertisements in Marketing News over 15 years**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores advertising to marketers within Marketing News over four periods 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007. The results identified the types of advertisements, in terms of appeal; products (most of which were for marketing research related activities) and coverage were relatively stable over time. There were increases in the number of advertisements, the appearance of web related services and a slight increase in products with a global focus and a reduction of a regional focus were evident.

Key Words, Business to Business, Industrial, Advertising, Content Analysis

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### **Introduction**

Marketers have long examined the strategic tools and approaches that have been used by marketers to advertise their goods and services to consumers. This research has frequently been perused within many consumer contexts (Al-Olayan and Karande 2000), but has also been explored within a business to business context (Lohtia, Johnson and Aab, 1995) and to compare types of advertising (Turley and Kelley 1990). The research has tended to follow two variants; some type of experimental design, where characteristics of advertisements are manipulated and the effect on consumers is assessed (whether it be recall, preference, purchase intention attitudes towards the advertisement, etc). A second stream of research has sought to examine how marketers actually undertake their advertising activities, through content analysis. This stream of research too has been widely varied considering issues such as the use of certain types of appeals – comparative (Stevenson, Swayne, 1988), environmental (Polonsky, Carlson, Grove and Kangun (1997), sexist (LaTour, Henthorne, Williams, 1998), etc. In the business-to-business and consumer literature there has also been an exploration of whether there are differences between advertising strategies employed in different countries (Cutler, Javalgi 1994) or whether there have been changes to activities overtime (LaTour, Henthorne, Williams, 1998). One would anticipate that advertising will change overtime to adopt to new market needs, as well as to integrate new strategic tools, and in certain instances to adapt to changing social norms (LaTour, Henthorne, Williams, 1998).

While extensive research on how marketers advertise their goods and services have taken place, it is surprising that there has not been an exploration of how marketing related organisations in fact market to marketers. There are a substantial range of services that marketer's consume, whether it be advertising services, marketing research, strategy services, promotional activities or consultancy services. This paper seeks to examine how firms advertise to marketers and whether there have been changes over four time periods- 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007.

### **Background**

A large body of literature is available on business to business advertising focusing largely on the advertising content and its effectiveness (Lohtia et al, 1995, Clarke and Honeycutt, 2000, Lehmann and Steckel, 1985, Korgaonkar et al, 1986), comparisons and variations in advertising and promotional expenditures in consumer, industrial and service markets (Balasubramanian and Kumar, 1990), the type of advertising such as copy length and readership (Soley, 1986). Other works have reported on business to business advertising can be improved (Korgaonker, Bellenger and Smith 1986; Lohtia, Johnson Aab 1995), documenting the state of a given type of practices (Stevenson, and Swayne 1988) or making comparisons between practices in different media or markets (Albers-Miller and Gelb 1996, Cutler and Javalgi 1994). In the more generalised advertising research works have explored the above mentioned topics but also has also explored whether there have been changes in regards to practices over time (Ursic, Ursic and Ursic 1986). Changes in industrial (or business to business) advertising practices over time have been less examined.

Changes to advertising practice can occur in several ways. First and foremost it may be that the types of goods and services available to meet consumers' needs have changed (i.e. through stages of the product life cycle). These can be the results of changes in technology, for example there has been an increased use of complex marketing research techniques that previously were unavailable (Green, Johnson, and Neal 2003). There are also social cultural changes that impact on what is marketed, for example there has been an increase in the use of environmental marketing appeals resulting from the increased importance placed on environmental issues (Polonsky, Carlson, Grove and Kangun 1997). Of course, in the business to business context new marketing technology has also resulted in new goods and services, for example web design services are something that may be of interest to most organisations, but did not exist 15 years ago.

Marketers are interested in purchasing a range of services, whether it is advertising, market research, distribution services or consulting, additionally there are many publications and journals that target marketing professionals. In many cases these professional publications are also designed to keep marketers informed in regards to the latest developments and issues facing their specific industry. This exploratory research seeks to identify what products and services have been being marketed to marketers within one such publication, Marketing News. The research also seeks to examine whether there have been changes in what has been marketed overtime, as well as in terms of the broad appeals communicated within ads.

### **Method**

The research uses a content analysis of advertisements within one generalist marketing trade journal- Marketing News. Trade journals have been examined in the past when researchers are exploring advertising in a business context (Cutler and Javalgi 1994). In the US there are a number of marketing related trade journals, although many focus on more narrowly defined areas, such as advertising, events, packaging, and logistics. Marketing News a bi-monthly US based trade magazine that purported to be a generalist publication covering the full spectrum of marketing issues. It is distributed to over 23,000 subscribers and over 80,000 readers.

In this study we have examined the advertising content over four periods: 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007. The rationale was somewhat arbitrary as the researchers had access to hard copies of the Marketing News starting in 1992 and thus selected other years to study differences at 5 year intervals. Rather than select all 20 issues within the year, the authors selected 12 issues per year and an attempt was made to include one issue per month. The researchers focused on identifying advertisements that were at least half a page or larger for examination.

The researchers focused on three main issues; 1) where advertisements promoting specific products or where they focused on corporate advertising, or some combination; 2) what types of good or service were being advertised and 3) were the services being marketed focusing on US, Regional or Global markets. In all categories it was possible that multiple attributes were present within one advertisement. The advertising content analysis process involved a sample of advertisements being identified and then classified by one of the researchers. This was followed by a

second researcher validating the classifications for a sample of the advertisements. Minimal differences were identified and these were discussed before the final evaluation of advertisements was undertaken. All advertisements over .5 pages, within the selected issues of Marketing News, were then assessed.

### Results and Discussion

The results identify that in the first three periods the number of ads (.5 pages or larger) within the magazine were relatively stable 124 in 1992, 123 in 1997, 125 in 2002 (see Table 1). However these increased substantially in 2007 up to 290, with overall increases in the numbers of all types of ads. This may be attributable to the change in Marketing News' format during this period. These 662 advertisements then formed the data examined in the remainder of the analysis.

Table 1. Frequency and Size of Advertisements

| Year  | Size 0.5   | Size 0.75  | Size 1     | Size >1  | Total Ads Over .5 pages |
|-------|------------|------------|------------|----------|-------------------------|
| 1992  | 77         | 9          | 37         | 1        | 124                     |
| 1997  | 55         | 10         | 58         | 0        | 123                     |
| 2002  | 34         | 37         | 53         | 1        | 125                     |
| 2007  | 92         | 59         | 128        | 1        | 290                     |
| Total | <b>258</b> | <b>115</b> | <b>286</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>662</b>              |

The second phase of the research examined the content of the advertisements. This involved firstly examining whether advertisements were promoted brands or focused on specific goods and services. Of course it was also possible that both brands and services were included within the individual advertisements. As can be seen in table 2, the specific allocation between the corporate and product advertising varied each period, the generally ordering of activities remained consistent across periods. That is, most advertising was focused on the products or services. This was followed by advertisements that focused both on brand building and promoting specific goods and services, followed by advertisements that focused purely on branding activities. Of course it is most likely that variations within specific type of promotion were based on the organisations objectives. For example, new organisations may have focused more on brand building than established organisations; the research did not examine this issue, as one would need to survey organisations in regards to their particular motives. It does seem that the majority of advertisements have a product or service focus, but also may have some brand building component. Research indicates that brand building in B2B marketing has been comparatively slower than in consumer marketing (Bendixen et al, 2007) though its objective remains same as in consumer marketing to achieve product differentiation through developing brand equity (Lang and Keh, 2003).

The specific products and services advertised are summarised in table 3. What is clear is that the majority of categories relate to marketing research providers and their services. The largest categories seem to be quantitative and qualitative research services, as well as research training. The consultancy and strategy services also related to marketing research, as this included a discussion of data gathering and analysis, brand management, product concept and testing.

Table 2: Advertisements' Focus

|                               | 1992       | 1997       | 2002       | 2007       | Total            |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| <b>Corporate promotion</b>    | 25 (20%)   | 30 (24%)   | 18 (14%)   | 78 (27%)   | <b>151 (23%)</b> |
| <b>Product promotion</b>      | 63 (51%)   | 47 (38%)   | 73 (58%)   | 107 (37%)  | <b>291 (44%)</b> |
| <b>Corp/Product promotion</b> | 36 (29 %)  | 46 (37%)   | 34 (27%)   | 105 (36%)  | <b>220 (33%)</b> |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>124</b> | <b>123</b> | <b>125</b> | <b>290</b> | <b>662</b>       |

Not surprising there was a significant growth in the number of firms advertising online services as well, going from zero in 1992 and 1997 to 4.9% in 2002 and then to 19.9% in 2007. There was also a significant growth in conferences, which general were focused around the AMA's activities (who are the publishers of Marketing news), rather than on other for-profit organisations.

Interestingly, while Green et al (2003) suggested that the complexity of marketing research had increased in the 1990s and beyond, this has not necessarily resulted in an increased amount of advertising for these services. It may however, be that the specifics of the products and services being promoted by marketing research firms have changed from those in the past, which would only be captured in looking at the specific tools being promoted.

Table 3: Services and Products being advertised

|                          | 1992              | 1997              | 2002              | 2007             | Total             |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Research training        | 12 (7.01%)        | 43 (20.09%)       | 14 (6.8%)         | 63 (16.3%)       | 132 (13.5)        |
| Conferences              | 0 (0%)            | 0 (0%)            | 7 (3.4%)          | 21 (5.4%)        | 28 (2.9%)         |
| Publications             | 24 (14.04%)       | 5 (2.34%)         | 7 (3.4%)          | 0                | 36 (3.7%)         |
| Directory services       | 4 (2.40%)         | 2 (0.93%)         | 11 (5.4%)         | 5 (1.3%)         | 22 (2.3%)         |
| Special hotel rates      | 14 (8.19%)        | 0 (0%)            | 0 (0.0%)          | 0 (0.0%)         | 14 (1.4%)         |
| Quantitative Research    | 62 (36.26%)       | 71 (33.18%)       | 71 (34.6%)        | 128 (31.2%)      | 332 (34.0%)       |
| Qualitative research     | 8 (4.68%)         | 38 (17.76%)       | 26 (12.7%)        | 41 (10.6%)       | 113 (11.6%)       |
| CS/D measurement         | 18 (10.53%)       | 3 (1.40%)         | 0 (0.0%)          | 4 (1.0%)         | 25 (2.6%)         |
| Use of software packages | 13 (7.60%)        | 25 (11.68%)       | 17 (8.3%)         | 33 (8.5%)        | 88 (9.0%)         |
| Online Research          | 0 (0%)            | 0 (0%)            | 10 (4.9%)         | 77 (19.9%)       | 87 (8.9%)         |
| Strategy and Consultancy | 16 (9.36%)        | 27 (12.62%)       | 42 (20.5%)        | 14 (3.6%)        | 99 (10.1%)        |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>171 (100%)</b> | <b>214 (100%)</b> | <b>205 (100%)</b> | <b>386 (100)</b> | <b>976 (100%)</b> |

While Marketing News is a publication of the American Marketing Association, the marketers in the US have increasingly been focused on broadening their scope and better penetrating segments of consumers outside the US. As such, it would be expected that marketing research organisations would promote their ability to serve wider markets. Table 4 identifies the regions that advertisers indicated that they targeted, which related extensively in regards to market research companies.

In many instances no location was suggested, which we attributed being US based activities. In other instances multiple locations were identified, for example US and South America. While there was a consistent heavy focuses on the US market, early advertisements also focused on regional markets (this tended to focus on South

America), however, this dropped-off significantly over time. One may have anticipated that this would have been replaced by advertising with a global coverage. While there was an increase in products marketed as being global (which tripled over the period), it still occurred less frequently than a mention of specific regional coverage.

Table 4 Regional Services

|                 | 1992       | 1997       | 2002       | 2007       |
|-----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Global</b>   | 6 (5%)     | 10 (8%)    | 14 (11%)   | 43 (15%)   |
| <b>Regional</b> | 111 (90%)  | 63 (51%)   | 13 (10%)   | 49 (17%)   |
| <b>USA</b>      | 124 (100%) | 119 (97%)  | 121 (97%)  | 259 (89%)  |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>124</b> | <b>123</b> | <b>125</b> | <b>290</b> |

### Implications

The results of the research suggest that there has been an increase in the amount of advertising to marketers, within Marketing News. It is not clear if this necessarily relates to the changed Marketing News format or suggests an increased competition within the marketing research industry (which dominated the advertising). However, the amount of advertising focusing on corporate branding of advertisers has in fact stayed relatively constant over the 4 time periods, which might have not been expected to increase if there is increased competition within the market.

While Green et al (2003) suggest that marketing research has increased in complexity, it is not clear that this has translated into increased promotion of these new activities, at least not more than has occurred in the past. Interestingly, there seems to have been a slight increase in qualitative research, rather than quantitative research. Future research should look into the specifics of the marketing research products being promoted, as there may have been a change in the complexity of the products, without advertising increasing. Thus, while there was not a significant change into what was being promoting (i.e. types of services) the specifics methodologies may have varied.

It was also interesting to note that much of the firms were advertising US focused products. Given that the increased globalisation and the fact that professional services have generally become more global (say in the advertising or management consulting industries) one would have anticipated that US marketers would be more interested in global products and services. While one may have anticipated that in times of economic turbulence, such as today, there would be more focus on home markets, during the rapid growth of the 1990s and early 2000's one would have anticipated that there would be more global emphasis in activities.

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