Direct Marketing: Passages, Definitions, and Déjà Vu

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ABSTRACT
As a prelude to offering a new definition of the term direct marketing, the recent debates on broadening the domain of marketing and broadening the domain of direct marketing are examined and the current definitions of direct marketing are compared. After a new definition of direct marketing is proposed and evaluated, direct marketers are cautioned about the problems concomitant with efforts to redefine direct marketing.
INTRODUCTION

The official 1981 Direct Marketing Association definition aside, many practitioners and scholars of direct marketing (henceforth direct marketers) continue to call for a new definition of direct marketing. Why? Some direct marketers, such as Richard Hodgson (12), argue that the official definition is too broad and ambiguous because “Some of the books on direct marketing have had to devote several pages just to clarification of its meaning” (12:3). Others, such as Don Schultz, observe that there is “still continuing debate over what direct marketing is, what it should be, and even what it is today, and that debate is likely to continue” (35:4). Still others, such as Connie Bauer and John Miglautsch (3), critique the recent definitions of direct marketing and offer a new definition that “distinguishes direct marketing from direct mail, direct response advertising alone, direct selling, and consumer goods telemarketing” (5:10).

What benefits might follow from a redefinition of direct marketing? Admittedly, a new definition could disrupt immediate progress by redirecting current research agendas and/or prove divisive (i.e., split direct marketers into those who accept and those who reject any official or widely recognized definition). However, by easing communication among direct marketers, a new definition should lead to improved practice and theory. By establishing the domain of direct marketing, a new definition could: 1) contribute to the professional image of direct marketing among consumers and business people; and 2) delineate the areas of research and teaching that can affect the development of direct marketing (5).

Self-conscious re-examination and self-definition mark the development of people and their social systems. The constant redefinition of who (what) I (we/they) am (are) is endemic to the human condition. Clearly, social, psychological, and physical changes mark each person’s passage from birth to death. For example, Shakespeare recognized that people redefine their roles as they pass through the seven stages of life (as in the “All the World’s a Stage” soliloquy of As You Like It). Erikson (10) argued that life unfolds by crisis, that is, points of decision between progress and regression. In Passages, Sheehy (41) chronicled the stages of life through which modern American adults must progress. Gerontologists study the dramatic changes induced by the aging process (26,27,32).

Periodic redefinition also characterizes the social sciences. For example, the yet-unresolved decision to include or exclude mind from the domain of psychology marks that discipline’s current efforts to explain human behavior. Although cognitivists such as Bandura (2) embrace the notion of mind as an independent decisionmaker, behaviorists such as Skinner (43) reject the notion of mind; for behaviorists, cognition follows action in that the consequences of earlier experiences cause noncognitive responses to stimuli. Cognitivists also claim that cognitive therapy subsumes behavior theory, yet Wolpe (46), the founder of behavior therapy, argues the opposite: that behavior theory subsumes cognitive theory because cognition is central to the relationship between therapist and subject.

Seneca observed that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. New definitions are inevitable; history suggests that efforts to redefine the sciences recur routinely (13). Marketing, a discipline begotten of economics, experienced its own series of passages on the path to scientism. In the current effort to redefine direct marketing, a discipline begotten of marketing, the passages of the progeny may be mirrored in the passages of the parent. Accordingly, rather than ignore the lessons of history, direct marketers should consider the recent history of marketing and try to avoid errors similar to those made by earlier marketers.

We proceed here as follows. First, we briefly review the recent debates on broadening the domain of marketing and broadening the domain of direct marketing. Second, we profile seven current definitions of direct marketing. Third, we propose and evaluate a new definition of direct marketing. Finally, we caution direct marketers about the problems concomitant with efforts to redefine direct marketing.

THE DEBATE ON BROADENING THE DOMAIN OF MARKETING

Redefinitional efforts similar to those in direct marketing once pervaded marketing itself. One of the most controversial efforts to redefine marketing concerned the debate over the proper domain of marketing. The goal of this debate was to answer
questions of the type posed by Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett (42), such as: 1) What is or should be the proper domain of marketing theory? (p. 191); or 2) What is or should be the dominant perspective in marketing? (p. 195).

Many scholars argued for an expanded domain of marketing. Kotler and Levy (16) proposed that marketing include noneconomic transactions such as love, politics, and religion; Lazer (19) argued for the inclusion of social considerations. Later, Kotler expanded his definition of marketing to include transactions in general; “Marketing is specifically concerned with how transactions are created, stimulated, facilitated” (14: 49). The inclusion of noneconomic, social, and other considerations represents a significant change from the earlier, more restrictive conceptions of marketing.

Scholars who argued against a broader domain for marketing, such as Luck (20), proposed that marketing be limited to the business processes and activities that precede a market transaction. Carman (9) argued that political processes (among others) do not involve an exchange of value and thus should be excluded from the scope of marketing. Bartels posited that broadening the domain of marketing caused the following disadvantages (3: 76):

1. turning the attention of marketing researchers away from important problems about physical distribution;
2. emphasizing methodology rather than substance as the content of marketing knowledge and;
3. developing an increasingly esoteric and abstract marketing literature that is unintelligible to many business practitioners.

Laczniak and Micheie (18) argued that the principles of social order are violated by marketers who wish to include all human transactions within the domain of marketing. [Laczniak and Micheie define social order as the “Long run homeostasis which must exist between social phenomena—ideas, practices, organizations—and the society of which they are part” (18: 41).]

The broadened concept of marketing, however, as noted by Hunt (13), is an accomplished fact among marketing educators; most marketers now accept exchange as the central notion of marketing (13: 8). Lusch, Brown, and Brunswick (22) echo this sentiment.

In the most recent decade, the debate over the nature and scope of marketing has been put aside as marketing scholars freely pursue research in profit and nonprofit settings, on goods, services and social causes and on the marketing of people, places and things. (22: 119)

THE DEBATE ON BROADENING THE DOMAIN OF DIRECT MARKETING

The definition of direct marketing cited most often in marketing texts (e.g., refs. 14, 21, 37) is the official definition of the Direct Marketing Association (henceforth DMA). The DMA definition states:

Direct marketing is an interactive system of marketing which uses one or more advertising media to affect a measurable response and/or transaction at any location.

The DMA Statistical Subcommittee proposed this definition in 1981. In a recent telephone conversation with the first author of this article, one subcommittee member, Martin Baier, explained that the DMA definition implied database usage because an interactive system requires a database. He acknowledged that the subcommittee actively discussed the overt mention of database usage, but that list familiarity and database unfamiliarity precluded this overt mention.

Although many authors cite the DMA definition, it is unacceptable to many direct marketers. Several examples of their alternative definitions are listed and characterized in Tables 1 and 2 (5, 7, 11, 17, 24, 25). These tables show widespread disagreement about the components of a good definition of direct marketing; some authors limit their definitions to direct mail, others include telephone marketing, and still others include advertising and database usage.

In fact, some direct marketers believe that the domain of direct marketing should be expanded even further—to include all marketing. In closing his recent Journal of Direct Marketing editorial, Schulz states, “In my view . . . all marketing in the future will likely use direct marketing concepts such as databases and customer valuing and . . . ., so in fact, direct marketing will become mainstream marketing” (35: 7). In the telephone conversation alluded to previously, Martin Baier mentioned that
TABLE 1
Selected Definitions of Direct Marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kobs (1979, 1988)</td>
<td>&quot;Direct marketing is getting your ad message direct to the customer or prospect to produce some type of immediate action&quot; [17: 2].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Direct marketers have . . . made the transition to a multimedia environment and to think of what we do as a database-driven marketing concept&quot; [in preface to Roman [31]].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMA (1981)</td>
<td>&quot;Direct marketing is an interactive system of marketing which uses one or more advertising media to affect a measurable response and/or transaction at any location.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passavant (1984)</td>
<td>&quot;Direct marketing is a form of marketing in which an organization seeks to generate a direct and measurable response to advertising which offers goods or services or information about them&quot; [in Nash [25: 134]].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gosden (1985)</td>
<td>&quot;Direct marketing is an all-encompassing catchall that covers direct mail, telephone marketing, and mail order&quot; [11: 7].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nash (1986)</td>
<td>&quot;The mailing list is the means . . .&quot; [24: xvii].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bovee and Ahrens (1989)</td>
<td>&quot;[Direct marketing] is a marketing system in which the advertiser uses the media to build a database of customers. . . . The objective of direct marketing is to get inquiries, to sell merchandise or services direct, to provide support for sales people and distributors, to encourage feedback, to get contributions, or to get people to visit stores. Underlying all direct marketing success is the ability to trigger a direct, measurable action that is cost-effective&quot; [7:485].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bauer and Miglautsch (1992)</td>
<td>&quot;Direct marketing is a relational marketing process of prospecting, conversion, and maintenance that involves information, feedback, and control at the individual level by using direct response advertising with tracking codes&quot; [5: 10].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed definition</td>
<td>Direct marketing is a form of marketing in which push-only promotional efforts are supported by an evolving database that will ultimately include demographic and longitudinal response [i.e., query and/or sales] data for targeted entities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2
Characteristics of Selected Definitions of Direct Marketing, by Implicit and Explicit Allusion to Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Ads</th>
<th>Direct Mail</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Direct Response:</th>
<th>Direct Response:</th>
<th>Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobs (1979; 1988)</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMA (1981)</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nash (1986)</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bauer and Miglautsch (1992)</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed here</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Ads = the nonpersonal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods and services) or ideas by identified sponsors through various media [7].

Direct Mail = all forms of advertising sent directly to prospects through U.S. or private postal services [7].

Telephone = selling products and services by using the telephone to contact prospective customers [7].

Direct sales = product sold direct to consumer without middlemen.

Database = tracking and analyzing the purchasing patterns of specific customers . . . and then targeting . . . their needs [using various media] [7].

Direct Response = a direct reaction by a prospect/customer/agent to an entity making a push-only promotional effort.

Domain = a field of action, thought, influence, etc [45].

E = explicitly stated in definition.

I = implied by definition.
the University of Missouri at Kansas City is dropping the word "direct" from his courses because "direct marketing is marketing." Rapp posits that "the wall between direct and mass marketers is breaking down" (29: 74), a theme he continues in his bestselling book Maxi-Marketing: The New Direction in Advertising, Promotion, and Marketing Strategy (30). Mozur (23), in his assessment of the past and future changes in direct marketing, forecasts an eventual blending of marketing subdisciplines. Addressing the chasm between direct marketers and other marketers, Mozur argued that

I don't believe this will continue. The dynamic forces of change in computers, in databases, in desktop publishing, in media segmentation, and unaccountability—will force us all to work toward the same goals. At that point, we’ll all be working together. (23: 44)

Yet other (and sometimes the same) direct marketers argue against broadening the domain of direct marketing. For example, Rapp argues that, "For most of the past decade, we have been pundits of direct marketing putting an ever expanding list of marketing activities under the direct marketing banner" (28: 44). He goes on to state, "By claiming to be anything and everything to everybody, direct marketing is in danger of losing its identity of a discipline worth studying, practicing, and applying in its proper role" (28: 44).

**PREVIOUS DEFINITIONS OF DIRECT MARKETING**

Previous definers of direct marketing focused on different aspects of direct marketing. Some definers, such as Bovee and Ahrens (7) and Goshen (11), covered the tactics (e.g., get inquiries) but ignored the strategies (e.g., build continuing relationships) of direct marketing. However, as textbook authors, their goal was to explain direct marketing to students rather than to define direct marketing for practitioners and scholars, so pedagogical considerations dictated their definition. Other definers, such as Kobs (17 in ref. 31) and Bauer and Micali (5), offered definitions that reflected their agendas for the domain of direct marketing and thus ignored one or more aspects for a good definition of direct marketing (e.g., telephone).

Table 2 profiles the characteristics of selected definitions of direct marketing. Specifically, Table 2 shows whether seven current definitions implicitly or explicitly allude to advertising, direct mail, telephone, database, direct response, and the domain of direct marketing. A good definition of direct marketing should include advertising and direct mail because both are dominant direct marketing tools; all seven earlier definitions explicitly mention either advertising or direct mail. A good definition should also include direct response because direct response is the *sine qua non* of direct marketing; five of seven earlier definitions imply or stipulate direct response.

Unlike most of these earlier definitions, a good definition of direct marketing should also allude to telephone and the domain of direct marketing. First, a good definition of a discipline should allude to all the tools of that discipline; for example, the current American Marketing Association definition of marketing alludes to the marketing mix and to marketing research. The telephone is increasingly used by direct marketers because it is faster, more flexible, and more attention-getting than either advertising or direct mail; thus, as an established tool of direct marketing, a good definition of direct marketing should include the telephone. Second, a good definition of a discipline should delimit the domain of that discipline; the earlier discussion about the history and domain of marketing strongly suggests this definitional component.

The greatest controversy surrounding the definition of direct marketing concerns database usage. Many direct marketers accept database usage as within the domain of direct marketing. For example, Rapp wrote that, "Some of the confusion about direct marketing comes from the fact that it has two faces: One looks to direct marketing's mail order past and the other to its database-driven future" (29: 74). Rapp and Collins noted that, "The new direction in advertising, promotion, and marketing strategy state that database marketing development provides extraordinary new opportunities" (30: 8). In his preface to Roman (31), Kobs stated, "Direct marketers have made the transition to a multimedia environment and to think of what we do as a database-driven marketing concept" (p. vii). Brown and Buskirk noted that "Database marketing increasingly reflects the direction in which the field is evolving . . ." (8: xii). Each issue of the *Journal*
of Direct Marketing (henceforth JDM) or Direct Marketing includes articles and editorials about database usage as an integral part of today's direct marketing. Perhaps the strongest evidence for this claim is the subtitle of Direct Marketing: "Using Direct Response Advertising to Enhance Marketing Database." However, despite this seeming consensus, only two of seven current definitions stipulate database and another two of seven definitions imply database.

In general, five of the seven current definitions—those provided by Kobs (17 in ref. 31), Passavant (in ref. 31), Bovee and Ahrens (7), Bauer and Miglautsch (5), and the DMA—typically include advertising, direct mail, database, and direct response, and typically exclude the telephone and the domain of direct marketing. The remaining two definitions—Gosden (11) and Nash (24)—are limited to telephone and/or direct mail.

**Evaluating the Previous Definitions of Direct Marketing**

Table 3 summarizes the requisite domain-specific criteria and general criteria for evaluating the previous definitions of direct marketing. The domain-specific criteria concern marketing-related dimensions [i.e., implies exchange, the accepted central notion of marketing (13); implies the marketing concept through long-term buyer–seller relationships; specifies elements of promotional mix]; database-related dimensions (i.e., specifies the minimum contents of databases and the use of noncomputerized databases), and the need for a domain-based rather than system/process-based definition. The comprehensiveness of a definition, a criterion for a good definition that follows from Hunt (13), can only be judged against such domain-specific criteria. Given the previous discussion, these domain-specific criteria seem reasonable. The general criteria—such as parsimonious, unambiguous, and useful to practitioners or academicians—also follow from Hunt (13).

Although five of the earlier seven definitions claim that direct marketing is a form of marketing (which implies that exchange is also the central notion of direct marketing), only three of these definitions imply a long-term relationship between buyers and sellers. A definition of direct marketing that implies relationship marketing can help ethical direct marketers to divorce themselves from the few unscrupulous practitioners who poison the image of direct marketing; thus, a good definition of direct marketing should imply a long-term relationship between buyers and sellers.

Only three of the seven definitions include non-advertising elements of the promotional mix. Bovee and Ahrens (7) define advertising as "the nonpersonal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods and services) or ideas by identified sponsors through various media." Unfortunately, by limiting the definition of direct marketing to advertising media, telephone, a personal way to communicate information, is needlessly excluded from the scope of direct marketing.

Regarding the form of customer databases, none of the earlier definitions specifies the minimum contents of these databases, and only three of the seven definitions allow noncomputerized databases. Given the consensus that today's direct marketing requires a customer database, the earlier definitions are incomplete.

Under the general criteria, we judge five of the seven definitions to be parsimonious and unambiguous. With the phrase "all encompassing catch-all," the Gosden (11) definition fails both criteria; the micro-level Bovee and Ahrens (7) definition is needlessly detailed, and thus far from parsimonious; the incompleteness of the Nash (24) definition makes it ambiguous. Furthermore, we judged only two of the seven definitions to be very useful to practitioners and none of the seven to be very useful to academicians; these judgments largely rested on the absence of a clearly stated domain for direct marketing. Thus, none of the earlier seven definitions passed all the Hunt-inspired (13) general criteria.

**THE PROPOSED DEFINITION**

The proposed definition of direct marketing is as follows:

Direct marketing is a form of marketing in which push-only promotional efforts are supported by an evolving database that ultimately will include demographic and longitudinal response (i.e., query and/or sales) data for targeted entities.

Why define direct marketing as a form of marketing? First, direct marketing concerns exchange,
TABLE 3
Comparison of Definitions of Direct Marketing

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain-specific criteria</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies exchange (as form of marketing)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies long-term buyer-seller relationship</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes nonadvertising elements of the promotional mix</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum contents of database</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncomputerized database possible</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines domain rather than system/process</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General criteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsimonious</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unambiguous</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful to practitioners</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful to academicians</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Yes = definition passes on this criterion. No = definition fails on this criterion. N/A = criterion is not applicable. Very = very useful to practitioners/academicians. Somewhat = somewhat useful to practitioners/academicians. Not = not useful to practitioners/academicians.

and exchange is the central notion of marketing [e.g., Hunt (13)]. Second, much of the theory and practice of marketing apply to direct marketing, so acknowledging direct marketing's parent discipline should reduce interdisciplinary duplication of efforts.

Why define direct marketing in terms of "push-only promotional efforts . . . for targeted entities?" First, such push-only efforts imply direct, one-step interactions between buyers and sellers. Because marketing is indirect once intermediate steps or intermediate parties are involved, a good definition of direct marketing should exclude parties such as retailers and agents. (Under this definition, for example, selling goods on the QVC shopping network is not direct marketing because QVC serves as an agent for producers of goods.) Second, because a good definition is inclusive (13: 34), a good definition of direct marketing should allude to all elements of the promotional mix, such as the telephone. Third, because a good definition is exclusive (13: 34), a good definition should establish distinct domains for direct marketing and marketing. Under the proposed definition of direct marketing, such push-only efforts are within the domain of direct marketing, and, by implication, all pull promotional efforts are within the domain of marketing.

Why define direct marketing in terms of evolving databases and their contents? Consider a new company that will market its first product through cold telephone calls. Its initial database may be sophisticated; for example, the company may start with a carefully qualified list of prospects purchased from Survey Sampling or SDR. Alternatively, its initial database may be primitive; for example, the company may start with several prospects mentioned by friends or a list of carefully selected telephone exchanges (to be used with random-digit dialing). Regardless of its database's initial sophistication, the company will update and augment its database as individuals or companies are called; ultimately, the company will possess a rich database. However, because a good definition is comprehensive (13: 34), a good database-oriented definition of direct mar-
marketing should specify minimum target contents for direct marketing databases. Under the proposed definition, such databases should eventually contain information about each targeted entity's demographics, product queries (i.e., requests for additional information), and purchases, although such databases may contain any profile data (e.g., psychographics). Also, because a good definition is exclusive (13: 34), a good definition of direct marketing should establish distinct information requirements for direct marketing and marketing. Under the proposed definition, longitudinal response data on single entities are within the domain of direct marketing, and, by implication, cross-sectional and aggregate data are within the domain of marketing. Thus, the proposed definition: 1) considers the contents and the dynamic nature of direct marketing databases regardless of their initial or current sophistication; and 2) differentiates the information requirements for direct marketing and marketing.

Why define direct marketing in terms of targeted entities? Again, a good definition is inclusive (13: 34); by considering targeted entities, business-to-business marketing is included in direct marketing.

In summary, the proposed definition dominates most or all of the earlier definitions in that it includes: 1) nonadvertising elements of the promotional mix, such as the telephone; 2) the domain of direct marketing; 3) the evolving nature and minimum target contents of databases for targeted entities; and 4) the use of noncomputerized databases. Thus, the proposed definition is more comprehensive and less restrictive than earlier definitions.

**Does the Proposed Definition Address the Right Questions?**

What, if any, are the problems associated with broadening the domain of direct marketing? To address this question, we apply Bartels' (3) concerns about broadening the domain of marketing. These concerns address the focus of marketing and the results, or the lack of results, of this focus. Bartels' concerns suggest that we ask the following three questions about direct marketing:

1. Does the direct marketing literature leave important questions unanswered?
2. Does the direct marketing literature emphasize methodology rather than substance?
3. Is the direct marketing literature becoming inaccessible to practitioners?

Table 4 summarizes the content of editorials that appeared in *JDM* from 1988 to 1992. By examining the concerns of direct marketers as voiced by editor Don Schultz, it is possible to compare the Bartels concerns for marketing with the concerns of some direct marketers. Table 4 suggests that some direct marketers share concerns similar to those expressed by Bartels.

Regarding important yet unanswered questions, Schultz argues that current successes may blind direct marketers to the need for basic research.

But there's a hazard to all this success ... we might lose sight of the research tasks before us ... we still need basic research. Good, solid, enlightening, knowledge-expanding research and study ... (40: 4)

In an editorial about the need for business-to-business direct marketing research, he argued

The real solid pieces of evidence of how business-to-business direct marketing works or perhaps doesn't work are few. ... Most disturbing though is that there are few ... who have even recognized the past problems which have existed in business-to-business direct marketing ... [and] even fewer who recognize what new problems lie ahead. (39: 5)

About consumer resistance to direct marketing, Schultz bemoans the

... lack of effort on the part of direct marketers to learn or understand why only 50 percent of the U.S. population is willing to purchase direct. While there is a major concern voiced by top executives ... there seems to be little action at the bottom, where direct marketing really gets done. (38: 3-4)

He raises the same issue in a subsequent editorial (36: 4). Finally, in his editorial about relationship marketing, he wrote

In the five years that I have been Editor ... I don't recall ever having received a paper, an essay or even a case on the subject of customer service. ... Quite honestly, I don't believe we really know very much about customer service. (34: 4)

Thus, Schultz's editorial comments suggest that di-
### Table 4


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Editorial</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unanswered questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1988</td>
<td>How can direct marketing be integrated with other marketing and marketing communication elements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1988</td>
<td>Why is business-to-business direct marketing research so limited?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn 1988</td>
<td>Why do 50% of consumers never buy direct?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1988</td>
<td>How do direct marketers maintain consumer privacy and thus avoid government regulation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 1989</td>
<td>What privacy issues concern direct marketing? Why don't some consumers buy direct?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1991</td>
<td>What is good customer service?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1992</td>
<td>How can direct marketing fulfill its potential?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodological overemphasis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Autumn 1988</td>
<td>JDM submissions about direct marketing methods rather than about why customers do or do not buy direct.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 1989</td>
<td>In the last year, four or five JDM submissions about why rollouts and tests don't match, but none about why customers do or do not buy direct.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 1991</td>
<td>Most direct marketers are more concerned about the mechanics of database management than a better understanding of relationship marketing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 1992</td>
<td>Direct marketers have changed the way they &quot;do,&quot; but not way that they &quot;think,&quot; about direct marketing.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Increasingly esoteric literature</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 1991</td>
<td>Articles rely on increasingly sophisticated methods such as conjoint analysis, tree structure, and logistic regression.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 1992</td>
<td>Article recommends the Pareto Prediction Criterion over the adjusted or unadjusted $R^2$ to select regression equations for list segmentation.</td>
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Direct marketers have left many questions unanswered.

Regarding the emphasis of methodology over substance, Schultz argues:

> In the last year or so...I have received at least four or five manuscripts dealing with why test and rollout results don't match...[but not] even one manuscript which dealt with why consumers do or don't buy direct. We've had several manuscripts on how or why...fashion telemarketing is used or not used. ...[but] we've not had anyone submit a paper that deals with privacy or regulation. (36: 4)

In a subsequent editorial about relationship marketing, he claims:

> ...most direct marketers leap directly into the mechanics of database...There is talk of scoring models and response matrices...[However], there's not much discussion or even information on the critical area of customer service. (34: 4)

Finally, in his Winter 1992 editorial, Schultz argues that direct marketers have developed new and more sophisticated ways to capture all kinds of data, to aggregate diverse lists of information; to develop massive databases...and to build and test sophisticated models of all descriptions. In short, to improve the "doing" of direct marketing. While all this work has been going on, there has been little if any change in the "thinking" or "planning" or "strategy" on which all this "doing" is based. (33: 4)

Thus, Schultz's editorial comments suggest that direct marketers now emphasize methodology at the expense of substance.

Regarding the accessibility of the direct marketing literature to practitioners, several recent JDM articles assume a high level of technical sophistication by readers. For example, Bauer (4) compares the decaying exponential equation to the logistic equation as a way to describe the accumulated mail survey response curve. Arora (1) uses terms such as fractional factorial designs, orthogonal array, decompositional method, goodness-of-fit index, and utilities, to explain how direct marketers can use conjoint analysis. Thrasher (44) compares the use of CART (i.e., Classification and Regression Trees)
REFERENCES


21. Lumpkin, James R., Caballero, Marjorie J., and Chonko, Law-

FINAL COMMENT

The battle over expanding the domain of direct marketing mirrors similar battles in social sciences such as marketing and psychology. Although the process of intradisciplinary introspection is normal, and the open-mindedness of scholarly inquiry is beneficial, the histories of other social sciences suggest that the proper redefinition of a discipline requires a proper perspective of its theory and practice. We suggest that direct marketing and its literature should remain useful to those who practice direct marketing. While setting the scope of direct marketing, our proposed definition does not preclude such an outcome.