

Barriers to Successful Adoption of IMC Program

Suparna Roy

Asst. Prof.

Shri L. P. Raval College of Mass Media and Management Studies, Mira-Bhayandar, Maharashtra
suparnaroy2507@gmail.com

Abstract: *“The Old Order Changeth Yielding Place to New.” While the adoption of an Integrated Marketing Communication Program perspective makes sense, the fact remains that this may be easier said than done. Instituting a successful IMC program will necessitate overcoming many of the following challenges.*

Keywords: Challenges, Barriers to IMC

I. INTRODUCTION

It has become well established throughout business and industry, there is no longer a need to debate the merits of IMC. Prior arguments concerning whether IMC is a marketing fad or a viable management strategy have given way to its acceptance as a required means of developing effective communication programs. As consumers' needs and media habits continue to change, media continue to proliferate and evolve, and clients continue to demand accountability, the need for an integrated approach will increase accordingly. The degree to which IMC advances, however, will depend on the degree of acceptance by those involved in communications. This acceptance will be predicated on changes in internal and external management thinking, the development of new metrics for assessing the effectiveness of communication, and continual adaptation to changing marketing conditions.

II. FINDINGS

Lack of IMC trained personnel - While the integrated approach has been adopted by more and more companies and agencies as well as in academia, the number of persons with the broad perspective and skills needed to make IMC work effectively is still very limited. As noted above, even in those organizations that undertake an integrated approach, silos continue to exist. While a growing number of the larger corporations are creating positions such as manager of IMC or vice president for IMC, at this point in time they are in the minority. Furthermore, many of these executives are not really trained in IMC but rather may have expertise in only one or a few of the communication areas. A search for university programs in IMC indicates that there are only a handful of such programs in existence. Thus, the pool of individuals that are academically trained or that have actually practiced integration is very limited.

Turf battles - Since communication silos are still prevalent in companies and agencies. The adoption of an IMC orientation will lead to changes beyond mere job requirements. As monies are moved from one communication area to another—for example, to new media at the expense of broadcast media, budget increases and decreases will create more opportunities for some and losses for others. The battle for turf can also be a battle for existence as roles and positions are created or eliminated. At the same time, it is a battle of egos in both agencies and corporations as various roles increase and decrease in perceived importance.

Determination of leadership - A question arises: Who will assume leadership of the IMC program? Will the responsibilities lie with the agency or the firm? Will it be a top management position or the equivalent of a brand manager role? Some agencies and corporations currently employ committees for making such decisions, though this would not seem to be the optimal approach.

Agency compensation - In many existing situations, compensation for traditional and non traditional media purchases is not equivalent. In the past, agency fees were often determined on a commission basis as a percentage of the media budget for print and broadcast media, with a different payment method employed for collateral services. If larger agencies do not have the capabilities for or expertise in, for example, new media or if additional agencies must be



employed for this purpose, how will compensation take place? Will all be paid at the same rate—a break from tradition? Furthermore, reviewing the issues of leadership and turf wars, how will compensation systems differ if integration is not the responsibility of one agency only? Will the lead agency in charge of integration be compensated additionally for this responsibility?

Measurement

As noted throughout this research paper, metrics and communication effectiveness measurement have always been a controversial area. This issue became even more complicated when the Internet arrived: The online community employed different means and metrics for determining media costs as well as effectiveness. Now we are experiencing product placements and integration, wireless, and other media that have no established metrics or measures of effectiveness in place. Comparing media efficiencies as well as effectiveness now becomes even more a matter of apples and oranges—not to mention a few other fruits thrown in! A second issue in this regard is that of determining the effectiveness of the IMC program. As noted previously, while research is ongoing, the ability to measure the individual and combined contributions of media in an IMC program has not been established. Thus, some managers may be reluctant to invest in a strategy that (they believe) has no proven success (though the same can be—and has been—said about advertising in general).

III. CONCLUSION

Indubitably, IMC is here to stay. There is also no doubt that those who adopt this approach will achieve a competitive advantage over those pursuing a more traditional approach. It is now time to prepare future employees for these tasks.

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