There is an abundance of evidence that traditional approaches to organizational strategy and subsequent e-business systems development is more dependent on inspiration than information from technology adoption. This may be reflected in the fact that the “best pen does not guarantee a winning novel” and an over emphasis and reliance on technology, through formal systems methods and design, is both inappropriate and counterproductive in environments of increasing uncertainty and complexity. There is a long tradition toward developing those methodologies where the opportunity to enable a learning culture through human experience and a continuous process of innovation is not apparent (Hackney, Burn & Salazar, 2004). The underlying view that a global e-business strategy can be simply programmed and customers merely involved in the activity as rational agents ignores the value of seasoned judgment and ultimately critical thinking.

Ongoing research within customer relationship management goes some way to address these issues (Berry, 1995). These studies frequently demonstrate the obvious importance of building long-term partnerships through product and service consistency, interaction, intelligence, and customization. The essential objective is clearly to engage in producing a value-added customer portfolio. However, it is critical to gain customer attention prior to these strategies. Clearly, if the client is unaware of available services, then any approach for securing the business is significantly reduced. It is argued therefore that gaining customer attention is equally, or indeed, more important than a rational focus on customer relationship management. It is certainly worth the effort, relative to their further engagement, to devise mechanisms which ensure their willingness to participate in a business activity.

What is required is a strategic focus on the real complexity of the relationship which organizations are initially able to establish with customers. This is a core activity which transgresses, most significantly, current approaches beyond knowledge management. The nature and extent of gaining customer attention is central to this fundamental objective (Davenport & Beck, 2001). Consider, for example, the concepts articulated through Goode’s Chart as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 (Goode’s chart) presents a conceptual view of perhaps how organizations may be mapped according to their visibility to customers. This is potentially a critical aspect of customer relationship man-
agement given the diversity and uncertainty associated with global markets. For example, the basis of this approach is to identify the position of (say?) the family. In this instance, close relatives are readily positioned as front of mind and voluntary. This is self-explanatory, where we are not forced to consider this relationship and our families are always at the forefront of our thinking and therefore attention. This may be extended to consider (say?) one of our business clients. Here, the relationship is slightly different, where a client is not a close family member and therefore some additional effort is required to formulate attention toward them. In this case, clients are still front of mind, due to their importance as business associates, but we have to work at capturing, that is, focusing our attention toward them. The value of Good’s chart therefore requires far more than a formal methodology and prescriptive systems design. The ideal is to replicate the activities of Competitor A who have been able to capture customer attention which may result in added value to their markets. The opportunities for an e-business infrastructure here are clearly obvious.

**FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA**

The core objective is to engage customer attention to realize product or service value which results in improved business performance (Amit & Zott, 2001; Timmers, 1999). These notions have been analyzed through Social Presence Theory where the extent of e-business communication is its ability to enable a superior level of interaction with customers (Rice & Love, 1987). What is required is a personal connection to facilitate demand-side awareness factors of a particular organization. This is an area
where the use of different media affects how customers view, think, and relate to their perceived relationship within the business and represents a critical issue relative to the nature and extent of the customer interface. Organizations need to form effective partnerships with customers, to develop elite frontline staff, to engage customers in their strategic intentions, provide timely and adequate feedback, to relate to environmental considerations, and to engage in pervasive knowledge sharing. These activities clearly challenge current notions for customer relationship management.

It is conceivable, for example, that marketers will need to utilize psychological concepts and develop models through social marketing which are more realistic to these demand-side factors (Currie, 2003). The bold utopia of the exploitation of Internet technologies requires more imaginative approaches which extend beyond our current fascination and investment in technology alone. Attention allows us to select from a myriad of external factors, to engage in mental processing, to link with our consciousness, and to base our decisions on (product/service) relevance (Eysenck & Keane, 1999). Within contemporary marketing strategies, these factors require critical analysis.

Empirical research therefore should focus on concepts associated with A-commerce and interpreted through qualitative methodologies in an attempt to surface the rich complexities of customer attention. This is encouraged through adopting longitudinal analysis that would enable investigators to understand these factors evolving over time. Customer attention has usually been attained through disruptive advertising on television, billboards, bold banners, and pop-ups on the Internet. However, with new technologies and the ubiquity of their reach, we should recognize the softer underlying issues, for example, emotions, trust, reciprocity, awareness, and so forth. The opportunity for more adaptive theories (psychology, etc.), as applied to marketing, should also be considered in an attempt to provide useful insights into the nebulous phenomena associated with customer attention – the challenge is clearly how to operationalize these constructs.

More effort is required to exploit these avenues of research where we can understand a “new currency of global e-business”. This requires more imaginative thinking for systems design, technology exploitation, and customer receptivity. The essence of this approach is to formulate a deeper recognition of what drives customer motivations to engage in certain attention behavior. A central theme is to develop mechanisms, through e-business electronic media, which focuses their attention on the product or service offered. Clearly, this is more inspirational than normally provided by systems designers but increasingly essential in exploiting global markets.

REFERENCES


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