7 Integrated Marketing Communications

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If a brand like Apple supported a campaign about the impact on society of people spending too much time on their laptops and phones, or launched a very basic mobile phone would you think this was strange? This is because Apple has a very clear market positioning based on providing cutting edge technology products, which enhance people's lives. This positioning is evident in everything from its sleek product design to all of its marketing and customer communications across multiple channels. All of their communications are integrated to support their market positioning and brand values. This chapter discusses integrated marketing communications, why it is important for businesses and how to go about delivering an integrated approach. The chapter also looks at the challenges of doing so and the future of integration. It links to the case study on Standard Life plc, which is included in Chapter 12.

Integrated Marketing Communications is commonly abbreviated to IMC and this chapter will use this shorthand.

Defining Integrated Marketing Communications

The term 'integrated marketing communications' was first coined in the 1990s and captured the need for marketers to co-ordinate their communications better, both across their different audiences or stakeholder groups, and their communications channels and promotional tools. Organisations may have worked with a number of specialist creative agencies or intermediaries for different elements of their promotional mix, including advertising, direct mailings, public relations and sponsorship, while customer service communications were handled by another part of the organisation. IMC is about ensuring that all of these elements are joined up and present a unified positioning and image across all communications – both internal and external.

However, IMC is about more than the tactical alignment of messages and colour schemes across different communications channels, media and audiences. It is a strategic management process, driven by corporate and marketing strategy. IMC involves all of the organisation's communications being driven by and supporting corporate and marketing objectives. Kotler (2000: 542) defines IMC as "*the concept under which a company carefully integrates and co-ordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organization and its products.*" Kotler's definition highlights the objective of IMC – to deliver clear and compelling messages, through whichever communications channels and media the organisation uses, across its multiple audiences.

IMC does not mean that exactly the same messages, images and so on have to be used across all audiences, channel and media, but that all communications support and reinforce the same messages about the organisation, its products and services. From a customer perspective this means that the organisation needs to consider all of the touch-points a customer might have with the organisation and its products and services, and ensure that it delivers consistent positioning through all of these. Figure 7.1 illustrates the broad range of touch-points a consumer might have with an organisation such as Standard Life, and the multiple opportunities or threats that these present to the organisations planned messaging and positioning. IMC is about ensuring that the organisation does everything it can to ensure that each of these touch-points is an opportunity rather than a threat to the organisation.
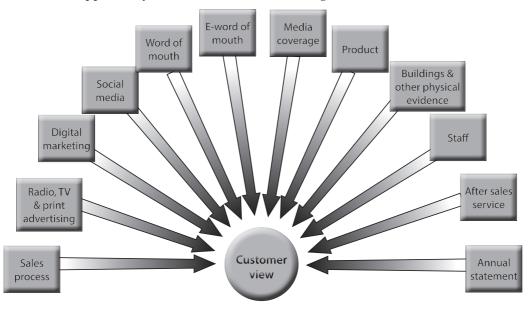

Figure 7.1: Customer touch-points

An important skill in managing IMC, is understanding the needs of each of the organisation's multiple key audiences and being able to translate the positioning and messaging derived from marketing strategy into communications, which are meaningful for each audience. In this way, the IMC approach is linked to the extent to which organisations are market-driven, as those organisations which are most focused on responding to the needs and developments of the outside world and their external stakeholders are best able to produce IMC (Reid, 2005). For any communications initiative, the company must determine which are its key audiences and develop messaging relevant to them through the channels and media which are appropriate and effective for reaching that particular group.

The following definition from the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) emphasises the role of IMC in building relationships with the organisations various audiences.

> "IMC can represent both a strategic and tactical approach to the planned management of an organisation's communications. IMC requires that organisations coordinate their various strategies, resources and messages in order that they enable meaningful engagement with target audiences. The main purposes are to develop a clear positioning and encourage stakeholder relationships that are of mutual value." (CIM, 2015)

This definition stresses the role of IMC in providing a clear positioning for the organisation to help customers to understand what the business stands for.

IMC involves managing the organisation's communications across all of its communications tools. These might include some of those shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: The tools of IMC. Adapted from Keller, 2001:820

Advertising	Print, TV, radio, cinema, outdoor
Direct marketing	Hardcopy, email and social media
Sales promotions	Email, in store,
Public relations	Communications with media, regulators and other stakeholders
Point of sale	Livery, staff appearance, look and feel
Sponsorship & event marketing	Celebrities, sports, arts and cause related
Personal selling	Face to face, telephone, email
Customer communications	Post sale servicing and information
Web presence	Website, social media activity, content marketing