The Guest Editor's Comments 1998

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It is my pleasure to present this special issue of the *Journal of Interactive Marketing* on international interactive marketing. Although this is the first special issue of this new journal, it represents a continuation of a tradition that began with the *Journal of Direct Marketing* in Winter, 1994, when the first special issue on international direct marketing came out. Two years later, the second international issue was published. It has been two years and we are back with this special issue, but this time under a new title—international interactive marketing—and in a new journal, the *Journal of Interactive Marketing*.

In the inaugural Winter 1998 edition of the new *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, editors John Deighton and Rashi Glazer noted that they hoped to build on the major intellectual achievements of JDM. This will also be the guiding philosophy of special issues. Our goal is to provide a scholarly avenue for the presentation, discussion, and refinement of ideas and concepts that have a bearing on international interactive marketing. As such, both theoretical and practical articles will grace the pages of these special issues. Keep in mind, though, that we use the term *international* in a generic sense to refer to the conduct and management of exchange activities across countries, and not to the process of standardization or adaptation of marketing mix strategies.

In many ways, international interactive marketing reflects the potential inherent in the new information technology (IT) and geoeconomic environments. The rapidly evolving IT environment, shaped by innovations in computers, consumer electronics, electronic media, and telecommunications industries, and developments in software programming, has made
one-to-one exchange of value between market-
ers and customers possible as well as feasible. On the other hand, the currently more open geoeconomic environment, influenced by declining trade barriers, decreasing governmental control over the flow of information, and increasing globalization, has enhanced the potential of intercountry exchange of products, services, and data.

The infrastructure needed for the take off of international interactive marketing activities is well in place in the developed economies. The developing economies are also making significant progress in this direction. With new technological developments in the IT area and more openness in the geoeconomic environment, the line between local and international exchange is blurring. These developments have created an anomaly in the geopolitical world. In contrast to the political reality of a world divided into countries with defined borders, the economic reality today is that of a border-free world connected by communications satellites, linked by supersonic jets, and united by economic interdependence.

The trend in the current data suggests that interactive marketing will increasingly be used in the future to establish intercountry exchange relationships with suppliers, intermediaries, facilitators, and customers. These relationships will form the basis for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in the global marketplace. To take advantage of this new situation, many businesses have already taken a major step by declaring themselves a global company or a federation of companies. This reflects their awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependency of the global economy.

Marketing has always been influenced by the two important dimensions of time and space, with space separating producers from consumers and time separating production from consumption. In the international context, these two dimensions increase the separation, affecting what is exchanged and the level and frequency of interactions between marketers and consumers. And this is about to change. Interactivity will shape how firms enter a country market, how they develop and implement the exchange model, and how they service their customers. The possibility of interacting with suppliers, intermediaries, facilitators, and customers in real time has important implications for the conceptualization and conduct of marketing.

The walls separating customers and marketers are slowly collapsing, bringing about a change in their roles and behavior as well. In this new marketing environment, not only businesses but also customers will compete to deliver and receive value in the exchange process. As such, along with products, information will be exchanged for the mutual benefit of each party. And trust, understanding, and commitment will play an important role in this relationship. For managing the exchange process across countries, these developments raise interesting questions. We intend to address these and other What, Why, When, and Where questions of international interactive marketing in the special issues of this Journal. And we hope that you find the results both interesting and enlightening.

A PREVIEW AND OVERVIEW OF THIS ISSUE

This special issue presents four articles. Two articles focus on the internet, one on market segmentation, and one on transaction and relationship marketing. A brief synopsis of the articles is presented next.

Saeed Samiee, in his article, “The Internet and International Marketing: Is There a Fit?” explores the role of the internet in the conduct of marketing across national boundaries. The potential of the internet for this purpose is examined within the framework of structural and functional constraints. His conclusions, based on the analysis of the two types of con-
straints, challenge some of the prevailing perceptions of the Internet.

Stef Nicovich and T. Bettina Cornwell, in their article, “An Internet Culture?: Implications for International Marketing,” show the potential of the internet for facilitating exchanges between different nationalities. The study of the internet as a social mechanism leads to some very interesting conclusions with implications for interactive international communications.

The article by Kenneth Gehrt and Soyeon Shim, “A Shopping Orientation Segmentation of French Consumers: Implications for Catalog Marketing,” focuses on psychographic characteristics to examine shopping orientations. Their findings point to the need for tailoring marketing strategies to the behavior of the target markets. They find that French customers, are motivated by different interests from American customers.

The fourth article, “Relationship Marketing in Three Dimensions,” by M. J. Baker, E. A. Buttery, and E. M. Richter-Buttery, focuses on a topic that has bearing on the conduct of international interactive marketing. Their article adds to the academic debate currently in progress on the state of the marketing paradigm. The authors focus on two important concepts, transaction marketing and relationship marketing, and show that the latter is the third dimension of the former.

I present this special issue with great pleasure. I take this opportunity to thank John Deighton and Rashi Glazer, the two editors of the Journal, for dedicating this issue to international interactive marketing. My thanks to John Murray, the Publications Manager, and Kristine Batey, Managing Editor. And my thanks to all who submitted papers. Their contributions have made this special issue a reality.

Syed H. Akhter
Guest Editor