

Are these lists really necessary?

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While visiting Australia, I was seeing cars that seemed like they did not have a driver inside (Australians drive on the left side of the road and sit on the right). Store clerks thought my wife's Georgia accent and my Chicago tones sounded the same, and the popular textbooks for many upper-level marketing classes were the same as those in the U.S. None of these often-repeated discoveries was a surprise, yet I nearly killed myself looking the wrong way for traffic when crossing the street, I visibly jumped when someone said I was an "American Southerner" (at another point, my wife was called a Yankee), and the Australian students and faculty often complained about the narrow and ill-serving nature of the U.S.-oriented textbooks.

Swinburne University's Colin Jevons points out that, "International Marketing" often means little more than how Americans sell their [unaltered] products in other countries." And his favorite example is some of these books for advanced marketing classes. Of course, many books are "Australianized" and in some topics there are Australian authors, but for others the only available books are tailored for the American reader.

Basics not unique

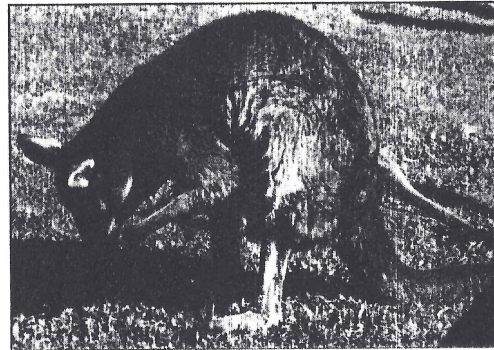
Yet on closer inspection, the real problem with the books was not the apparent misplaced marketing by publishers, but rather the statement it made about our discipline. In textbooks covering the academic discipline of marketing theory and research, basic concerns of advertising, retailing or sales management should not

require their own unique schools of thought for every country in which the subjects are taught.

Granted, countries have their own languages. The U.S. and Britain have been described as "nations divided by a common language," a perspective that could also apply to Australia. Yet with these textbooks, the complaints did not seem to stem from failures of the English-to-English translations of spelling, terminology, or colloquial expressions, though it is intuitively obvious that such deviations are a tad disconcerting for any local reader. As I know from personal experience, regional dialects and pronunciations are sometimes distracting even for U.S. faculty lecturing in different parts of North America.

Another source of "translation error" could be that common business relations will always have their own unique variant at every border. Not every marketing organization is standardized from nation to nation; it isn't very uniform within any nation. But intuitively, this can't be a major stumbling block for cross-border scholarship, considering that many American marketing scholars cross the Atlantic or Pacific for successful careers as educators in other countries. And the textbook problems did not seem to focus on this area either, since the basic forms are fairly consistent—explanations of the different organization structures are such a small part of the popular textbooks on international marketing—and marketing organizations are (unfortunately) a small part of most books anyway.

Yet, when going through the criticized books one finds page after page of material that anyone would find tedious, even U.S. students: numerous detailed lists of psychological data on consumers, plus demographic compilations and trends.



Why these lists are a major part of the books is a mystery because they are probably not a major part of lecture material for anyone. The classes present theories and ideas. The textbooks give lists. While teachers give perspectives, the textbooks try to provide factual recipes or "cook-books" for solving marketing problems. Yet, as Janet Hoek noted, there aren't any clear-cut recipes in marketing.

Trends change

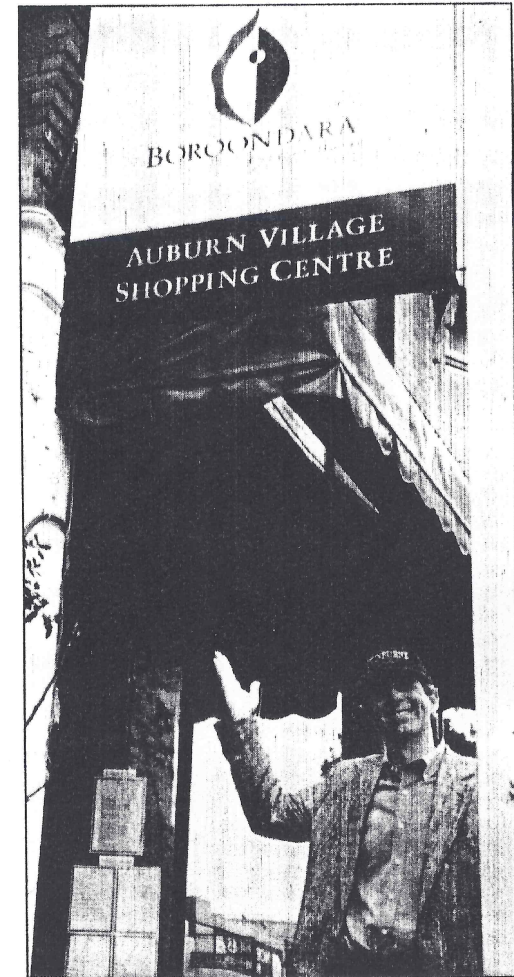
While the textbooks should provide insight gained from the latest research, chapters full of "trends" and consumer profiles are really quite meaningless. The trend is not destiny, as Bill Moyers has said, so the demographic trend or "marketing opportunity" a student reads will be different by the time he or she graduates. This is especially true because the trends or "opportunities" were drawn from data several years earlier when the book was first written or revised. So the tons of data are not just distracting, they are filler and apparently unnecessary beyond their use in multiple-choice exams.

Yet the problem is more basic than that.

Marketing is an academic discipline, or so I believe. That is why it exists on a campus. Yet to go by the textbooks, the discipline is merely a collection of consumer profiles, demographic data statements, and statements about "marketing opportunities."

And therein lies the problem with the textbooks. It is not just a difficulty that makes them less usable in other countries, but a very basic statement about our

Herb Rotfeld (right) and Aussie friend (above). Marketing should transcend all boundaries.



academic work.

In the extreme situations (of which there are many), these books' contents offer little more than compendia of every conceivable item of trivia that potential adopters might wish to see included. Many chapters could be cut and tossed into any order; lists of data or conclusions from journal articles supplant analysis. The marketing concept is usually repeated in an early chapter and then ignored. Goals are stated as important, then not used as the basis for marketing decisions. Students are informed that almost everyone in the U.S. owns a television or radio, while they are confused about just how different television or advertising

vehicles are used as marketing communications tools.

If marketing were really an academic discipline, lack of Australian-oriented upper-level books would be a minor problem, since concepts and approaches to making decisions should transcend the place where the decisions are made. Word use would be a distraction, and each country's unique organizations would need expansion and explanation by the instructor, but data descriptions of a nation's consumers would almost be beside the point.

Oh my, I said, "If marketing really were an academic discipline." Dangerous question, that, especially if the answer depends on the content of our basic textbooks. ■