



Marketing Responsibly

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Addressing the
ethical challenges

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report explains why a discipline of ethics and responsibility is essential for the marketing function of any company. Without such discipline, the marketer's objective of creating sales can be undermined by an erosion of trust between the customer and the vendor. Trust is necessary for marketing to succeed. Irresponsible marketing destroys it, as the case studies in this report illustrate. It considers how principles such as honesty, fairness, responsibility and transparency are viewed in the context of the modern marketplace, and how they are changing. The report is aimed at:

- business managers wanting to understand the challenges faced by the marketing team, and
- marketers concerned to ensure that their practice is in line with key principles identified for their profession, as well as with their own company's ethics policies.

Some of the issues, explored through actual case studies, are well known. For instance, one of the highest profile areas is that of false claims in adverts. Others, such as 'stealth marketing', get less exposure. Both rely on misleading customers.

Some ethical dilemmas that marketers face can be harder to resolve. Marketing across cultural boundaries or to vulnerable customers, products that are inherently controversial, products that have big environmental impacts, and pricing are some such issues. The changing agenda on responsible marketing means that it is no longer enough to talk about how marketers should strive to 'do no harm'. In addition to dealing with customers and consumers responsibly and with integrity, the term responsible marketing has also come to embrace product responsibility, considering value judgements around the positive and negative impacts of the products themselves.

Examples in this report can serve as important lessons for those wanting to avoid the damage to reputation and to market share that comes with bad practice. Every marketer should know these examples, understand why they happened and fear the possibility that they could be the cause of the next headline. Business ethics practitioners will want to ensure that their ethics programmes include guidance on how to avoid replicating such examples.

Included is a set of practical recommendations and a decision framework which provide a basis for support and internal dialogue around where to draw the ethical line.