
A Conceptual Definition of Direct Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Direct marketing has come to mean more than direct/mail mail order by using other media and by incorporating such concepts as "database marketing" (7) and "relational marketing" (12). However, the addition of these concepts still does not clarify what is or is not direct marketing.

INTRODUCTION

As practitioners who also teach direct marketing and serve as consultants, we are often asked, "What is direct marketing?" The current definition adopted by the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) and published in each issue of *Direct Marketing* magazine has not eliminated the confusion of what is and is not direct marketing, nor does it effectively communicate what direct marketing is all about. Direct marketing has come to mean more than direct/mail mail order by using other media and by incorporating such concepts as "database marketing" (7) and "relational marketing" (12). However, the addition of these concepts still does not clarify what is or is not direct marketing. In addition, several practitioners recently have called public attention to the need for redefining the term direct marketing (5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13).

There are several reasons why the definition of direct marketing is important. First, the definition of a business area contributes to its professional image among the consumer and business sectors. Second, the definition of a business area is used to delineate the area for academic purposes of research and teaching, diagnostic applied research purposes, and for identification and communication among the practitioners and consultants of the area. For these reasons, this article presents a new conceptual definition of direct marketing.

The basic purpose of this article is to inspire critical thinking by academics and practitioners about what constitutes direct marketing. To accomplish this, the article is divided into three parts. The first part presents the general criteria for a conceptual definition and discusses the problems with the current definition. The second part presents a new definition of direct marketing for consideration, and the third part discusses the implications of the new definition.

Any conceptual definition of a business area is an abstraction of techniques and practices that contain limitations related to the use of the definition. It is probable that no one definition will perfectly describe the concept of direct marketing, as different definitions are used for different purposes. Even the definition of "marketing" in general, and the boundaries of the marketing discipline, have been debated and changed over the past 29 years (3). As recently as 1985, the American Marketing Association adopted a new definition of marketing. While our optimistic intent is to propose a clearer and more useful definition of direct marketing, our realistic hope is that this article will serve as a foundation for further critical thought and discussion on this topic to appear in this journal.

PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT DEFINITION

A conceptual definition should distinguish the concept from other concepts and clearly define what is meant by the term (11:128). The criteria for a "good" conceptual definition are that it is clear, precise, and complete (11:128-129). The benefits of a "good" definition of direct marketing are: 1) it distinguishes direct marketing from other types of marketing and selling, 2) focuses theory development and testing on direct marketing as a particular area of marketing, and 3) effectively communicates what is direct marketing to a variety of audiences.

Currently, the most accepted definition of direct marketing, and that which has been adopted by the Direct Marketing Association, is "an interactive system of marketing that uses one or more advertising media to

effect a measurable response and/or transaction at any location" (14). Hoke (6:30) extends the definition further by stating that, ... "Direct Marketing requires the existence and maintenance of [a] database."

There are several problems with the DMA's definition. The first problem involves the reference to an "interactive system of marketing." "Interact" means to act on one another or to act reciprocally. An "interactive system" implies at least two or more components which are independent and interact. *All* advertising and sales promotions can be viewed as an "interactive system of marketing." Both advertising and sales promotion are designed and intended to act on the targeted consumers. Consumers tended to react in terms of brand recognition, advertisement recall, purchase intent, and purchase. All of these reactions can be measured and subsequently used by the marketer. Since all advertising and sales promotions can be viewed as interactive, defining direct marketing as an "interactive system of marketing" does not distinguish direct marketing from general advertising.

To say that direct marketing is an "interactive system" between marketer and consumer is misleading. It is more appropriate to think of personal selling, direct selling, and over-the-counter selling as interactive systems. That is, the salesperson "interacts" with the prospect or customer in a person-to-person (face-to-face or via the telephone) situation. Both parties communicate back and forth with one another within a *single* communication transaction. The consumer's response can and often does have an immediate effect on the salesperson, who may modify the remainder of his/her sales presentation within the immediate interaction event. Therefore, it appears more appropriate to refer to person-to-person selling rather than direct marketing as an interactive system.

In the same way, we make the distinction between "interactive" and "batch" processing with computers. Batch processing groups a set of computer instructions to run together. Interactive processing allows one instruction to be processed at a time with feedback about the processing, so that a person can modify subsequent instructions. Direct marketing is interactive only in the sense of consumers responding in a limited way by an order or inquiry to a mass-communicated (mail or space ad) direct response message. Then at some later time the direct marketer will remail customers, usually with the same message (e.g., same catalog but often a different cover). However, the basic selling message is not changed or modified for each individual based on the individual's particular recent reply. In other words, the direct marketer's initial message and response message are the same for a large group of people and more like "batch" rather than "interactive" computer processing.

Calling direct marketing "an interactive system" is probably meant to refer to the regular repeat contact with customers and repeat orders from customers. A more appropriate term for repeat contact with customers is "relational marketing."

A second problem with the DMA's definition involves the terminology "a measurable response and/or transaction." Most consumer reactions to advertising can be measured in terms of recognition, recall, or purchase intent, along with actual purchase. All businesses measure purchase in terms of dollar sales. Thus, this part of the definition does not help us to distinguish direct marketing from general marketing and advertising. However, to distinguish direct marketing from general marketing we can say that direct marketing measures response at the *individual* level by use of direct response advertising.

The last part of the definition, "at any location," only means that the response can occur in the home, at place of work, or *at a store*. To say that the response can occur at any location simply means that the consumer is not required to travel to a fixed store location. However, it does not help us to distinguish direct marketing from direct selling (person-to-person selling usually in the home) and telemarketing (selling via the telephone), both of which can also occur at any location. "At any location" is meant to imply that the consumer can *directly* order from or inquire via mail or telephone to the marketer, based on the direct response ad.

To say that direct marketing "requires the existence and maintenance of [a] database" (6), comes closer to an *operational* definition of direct marketing by extending our focus from direct response advertising alone to include the recording and storing of individual responses in a computer. One key characteristic of direct marketing is the use of a customer or house file. This file contains not only the names and addresses (and/or telephone numbers) of people who have responded to direct response advertising, but also all of the transaction information (e.g., products purchased, dollar value of purchases, date of transaction, etc.). The file can also contain demographic and psychographic information if the marketer is willing to spend time and money to gather the information on individual customers via survey research, or to purchase "overlay" data based on geographic area in which a customer lives. Thus, direct marketers can know who their customers are and are not. However, the use of advances in computer technology and the acquisition and analysis of more information alone still does not tell us what direct marketers do, i.e., they gather, record, and analyze a lot of data. Yet, so do general marketers, especially consumer goods marketers who often gather far more survey data on consumers than do direct marketers. The key here for direct marketing is the consumer file with data at the *individual* level, which direct marketers use for determining future marketing tactics and strategies.

Lastly, and most importantly, direct marketing is a special type of marketing. The American Marketing Association presently defines marketing as:

...the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives (3:15).

The key to this definition of marketing is defining it as a *process* of marketing activities and identifying and satisfying consumers' needs and wants. However, the current definition of direct marketing focuses attention primarily on *using* a particular type of advertising to effect a measurable response (i.e., direct response advertising). Thus, the emphasis of the current direct marketing definition is on a particular type of selling and advertising method rather than on a particular type of marketing. This approach is reflected by most books on direct marketing and articles in the direct marketing trade journals, which spend a great deal of time and space on discussing direct response advertising techniques and very little discussion on marketing activities designed to identify and satisfy customers' needs and wants. In fact, many direct marketing firms are more selling oriented rather than marketing oriented.

Because of the problems discussed above, there is a need for a clearer, more precise and complete conceptual definition of direct marketing which still allows the variety of techniques and methods that direct marketers employ. However, the definition should distinguish direct marketing from selling alone and from other areas of marketing commonly confused with direct marketing.

DIRECT MARKETING REDEFINED

Direct marketing, like marketing, selling, and advertising, is a non-variable. Non-variables are usually harder to define than variables and, therefore, usually require a long and complicated definition. The general procedures for specifying the definitions of non-variables are to include a number of properties in the definition and to specify only one cutting point for each property or for the index of properties as a whole (4:81-82). Thus, our definition of direct marketing will include several properties which will need to be explained.

Based on our critique of the current definition, we propose the following conceptual definition of direct marketing:

Direct marketing is a relational and marketing process of prospecting, conversion, and maintenance that involves information feedback and control at the individual level by using direct response advertising with tracking codes.

This definition consists of four properties:

- * relational marketing,
- * process of prospecting, conversion, and maintenance,
- * information feedback and control at the individual level, and
- * direct response advertising with tracking codes.

The four properties in the definition move from general to specific characteristics in describing what we think constitutes direct marketing. To explain these properties and our rationale for including them, we will start with the most specific one (direct response advertising with tracking codes) and work up to the most general (relational marketing).

Direct Response Advertising with Tracking Codes

Direct response advertising is a key characteristic of direct marketing. Typing direct response advertisements to tracking codes is the basis for developing a customer file of transaction information for future marketing decisions. The use of direct response advertising is one of several characteristics which distinguish direct marketing from general marketing and advertising. However, as we define direct marketing, it is *more* than direct response advertising alone. Thus, direct response advertising is a necessary but not solely sufficient property of direct marketing.

Stone (14) states that the characteristics that distinguish direct response advertising from general advertising are: 1) a definite offer, 2) a response device (i.e., a mail-in coupon or telephone number to call), and 3) all the information necessary to make a decision.

A "definite offer" means that in the ad a specific product or service with a stated price is offered - i.e., the conditions for a sales transaction. This differs from general advertising, which usually does not specify the

sales conditions for a particular product or service. A definite offer is a *necessary* condition for an ad to be considered a direct response ad.

The second characteristic, a response device, is also a necessary one. While "mail-in coupon" or order form is not a must, the address for mailing an order or inquiry, or a telephone (or FAX) number to call for placing an order/inquiry directly with the marketer, is a *necessary* characteristic for an advertisement to be direct response advertising.

The third characteristic - that the ad includes all the information necessary for a consumer to make a decision (inquiry or purchase) - is most desirable, but it is not a necessary condition for considering an ad to be direct response advertising. This characteristic simply signifies one difference between an effective and an ineffective direct response ad in terms of generating orders or inquiries. Thus, this characteristic is not a necessary one in distinguishing a direct response ad from a general advertisement.

We add a fourth characteristic: a direct response ad should contain a tracking code. The tracking code should be unique for each direct response ad, in order to identify the source of the response. For space ads (magazines or newspapers), the tracking code is usually an alpha and/or numeric code printed in the mail-in coupon that identifies the specific ad to which a consumer is responding (i.e., the specific ad in a specific media vehicle issue). For direct mail, the tracking code is printed on the removable address label and/or on the order form which identifies the specific advertising package mailed to a specific list of names on a particular date. For telephone numbers, the tracking code can be the telephone number itself or the order-taker assigns a code after asking the caller to which ad the person is responding. In any case, some kind of tracking code is necessary for tracking, measuring, and analyzing responses to a particular direct response ad, and a set of direct response ads for a back-end and customer lifetime value analyses. While a tracking code is not a necessary characteristic for a direct response ad, it is a *necessary* component for direct response advertising to be a part of *direct marketing*. This will subsequently be explained in more detail.

Thus, the necessary and sufficient requirements for an ad to be considered a direct response ad *and* part of direct marketing are: 1) a definite offer (specified product/service and price); 2) a response mechanism (address or phone number of the marketer); and 3) a tracking code for fully identifying the ad and relating each response to a particular ad.

Information Feedback and Control at the Individual Level

Information feedback and control at the *individual* consumer or organization level is a second *necessary* characteristic of direct marketing. Information at the individual consumer level is made possible by direct response advertising with tracking codes. "Consumer" is used here in a broad sense to mean the individual consumer in consumer goods direct marketing and/or an organization in business-to-business direct marketing.

Information feedback at the individual (micro) level refers to the detailed customer information and transaction data that make up the house file of direct marketers. When the transaction data is analyzed and used in marketing decisions, it becomes information feedback. Based on information at the individual level, direct marketers can develop customer segmentation models for selecting *particular* customers for various

types of special mailings or contacts (e.g., frequency of mailings to "old" customers). Thus, a direct marketer can control which customers will receive a particular direct response ad.

Information at the individual (micro) level from a particular direct response ad can be aggregated for the overall (macro) results of a particular ad (e.g., percent response, average order size, and sales per thousand sent), to be compared with the forecasted results (goals). It is the discrepancy between the actual and expected overall results that influence future direct marketing promotion decisions. This is why a tracking code is necessary for each direct response ad for direct response advertising to be considered part of direct marketing.

Also, on the macro-level, the information about each direct response ad can be integrated to provide total weekly orders and sales for the firm. The macro-level of information and control focuses the direct marketer's attention on the prospecting, conversion, and maintenance marketing activities; and on identifying the optimum contact strategy (e.g., number and timing of mailings per year) for various segments of the customer file (usually based on profitability segments).

Another aspect of control in direct marketing is the ability to use true experimental research designs in field experiments (testing) via direct mail or outbound telemarketing. True experimental research designs involve the random assignment of subjects (prospects from rented lists and/or customers) to treatment groups (test cells, each with a different tracking code) *and* a control group (often the "roll out" condition). The advantage of true experimental designs is that they control for all sources of internal invalidity (history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, selection, and mortality). Also, field experiments using a true experimental design can control for the sources of external invalidity (testing, selection, and setting interactions). While testing is not required for direct marketing, it is regularly used by many direct marketers to enhance their information about direct response advertising tactics.

Process of Prospecting, Conversion, and Maintenance

Direct marketing can be viewed in its broader perspective as a marketing process which entails three major ongoing marketing activities (i.e., subprocesses). These three major activities in direct marketing are prospecting, conversion, and maintenance. All three activities are *necessary* conditions for our definition of direct marketing.

Prospecting. Prospecting, or name acquisition, is an ongoing activity of finding new customers for building the customer file. Customers of a particular direct marketing firm do not remain active buyers forever. Thus, to maintain or increase the customer file size, prospecting must be an ongoing activity of direct marketing. Prospecting includes direct advertising via magazines, newspapers, direct mail or telephone calling to rented lists, direct mail co-ops, package inserts, television, and radio, along with trade shows and public relations. A prospect ad can be designed to generate inquiries for more information (brochure, catalog, or salesperson call), samplers who purchase one unit of the product at a substantial discount (similar to trial purchase), or new customers who make a purchase at the direct marketer's regular price or at a minimum dollar order size.

Conversion. The second major ongoing activity is conversion that focuses on changing the status or upgrading a respondent and it is partially dependent upon the specific type of prospecting. That is, if a prospecting direct response ad has generated respondents as inquirers or samplers, then direct marketers typically will send from one to several direct mailings to the individuals in an attempt to convert them to customers (i.e., purchasers of a minimum order size). Industrial marketers with a sales force will often use direct response advertising to generate leads (inquirers) which are then qualified, usually by telemarketing, for the sales force.

Once a direct marketer has a new customer, the next conversion activity is to convert the new customer who is a single-buyer into a multi-buyer (i.e., repeat purchaser). The majority of direct marketing businesses' profitability is dependent upon repeat customer purchase. This is because prospecting for new customers can be very expensive (space ads, list rental, and so forth), compared to direct mail offers to customers. Other conversion activities include converting single-product to multi-product buyers and converting inactive customers (i.e., reactivation).

Maintenance. The third ongoing direct marketing activity, maintenance, is based on maintaining the behavioral pattern of customers (e.g., repeat purchase of multi-buyers), or inquirer interest. Thus, this activity is not restricted to customers only. This category of direct marketing activity includes the regular contact with customers, new product selection and testing, profitability analysis (e.g., front-end and back-end analysis and lifetime value analysis), and other marketing and marketing research activities that will help to increase the profitability of the customer file.

In a general sense, most marketers can be said to engage in prospecting, conversion, and maintenance. However, in direct marketing *all* three of these activities "involve information feedback and control at the individual level by using direct response advertising with tracking codes." Thus, the activities are restricted for direct marketing. The implication of this is that a firm which uses direct response advertising only for lead generation would not be considered a direct marketer by our definition. Also, consumer goods telemarketing involved in one-shot selling would not be considered direct marketing because of the lack of conversion (a second contact) and maintenance marketing activities.

The ongoing marketing process of prospecting, conversion, and maintenance now leads into the "relational marketing" property of direct marketing.

Relational Marketing

Defining direct marketing as "relational marketing" means broadly focusing on developing and maintaining an ongoing relationship between the marketer and his/her customers. In direct marketing practice, this means some minimum of *regular* repeat contact with customers by direct response advertising mailings (or telephone calls) *to* customers, and repeat orders *from* customers. Thus, the marketing activities (subprocesses) of prospecting, conversion, and maintenance by direct response advertising contribute to establishing an ongoing relationship with customers.

Additional methods of encouraging and improving the relationship with customers could include survey (mail or telephone) market research on customers to find out what they want, like, and dislike, and mailing newsletters to customers. This also would include what Erickson (2:9) calls "frequency marketing," which consists of building loyalty by frequently "rewarding customers for their cumulative purchases through targeted communication, incentives, and performance tracking." This direct ongoing relationship with customers is possible only if a customer file is created and maintained. Thus, any one-shot selling program with no intent of a second contact would not be considered direct marketing by our definition.

One example of relational marketing that goes beyond repeat direct response ads and repeat orders, by a consumer goods direct marketer, is Lands' End. In each catalog, Lands' End includes a several-page article on how their clothing is manufactured, profiles on the country and people that produce the product or material, or tips on how to care for or use the products. Each catalog issue also contains one page of "Letters to Lands' End" which consists of letters from customers. Thus, Lands' End encourages communication other than orders from customers. To enhance their customer relationship even further, Lands' End has established a customer service called Lands' End Specialty Shopper. A "Specialty Shopper" will help customers select items as gifts for family or friends and even keep a file of the sizes and other information upon request. This service is provided with a toll-free telephone number. Thus, Lands' End is actively maintaining and enhancing its relationship with customers.

In business-to-business direct marketing, the relationship usually begins with the lead generation process. A company announces a new product or service via direct response advertising and people respond for more information. Almost immediately, additional information is sent via the mail. A sales representative then calls or visits the inquirer to follow up and attempts to schedule a sales visit. The sales representative often makes several calls or visits to evaluate the potential of the company and in hopes of making a sale. This information is returned for data entry.

On the basis of the initial sale and/or projected potential, future contact frequency is determined. Accounts with high potential receive repeated field contact, supplemented with some phone calls and mail. Accounts with lower potential receive primarily phone calls and mail contact with some field support. Through the corporate database, phone and field sales representatives are kept up to date on sales and contact information.

Because each business account tends to be much more valuable than an individual customer, more effort can be expended in prospecting, conversion, and maintenance of the account. A top customer may be mailed to between 30 and 50 times per year, called 12 to 20 times, and visited by a field sales representative 4 to 12 times.

Regular communication between a firm and its customers is a *necessary* characteristic for our definition of direct marketing. This characteristic helps to distinguish "direct marketing" from one-shot selling such as a private individual's classified ad in the newspaper or a firm selling a single product with no intent of repeat contact with the customer. Jackson, a direct marketing consultant, claims that relational marketing is "the very essence of the direct marketing concept" (8:62). Thus, for us to call a business' activities "direct marketing," it must establish a relationship with customers by prospecting, conversion, and maintenance that involves information feedback and control at the individual level, by using direct response advertising with tracking codes.

IMPLICATIONS

There are several areas commonly confused with direct marketing. In this section we will show how our definition distinguishes direct marketing from direct mail only, as well as from direct selling and telemarketing.

The general process of direct marketing is illustrated in Figure 1A. A direct marketing firm transmits an advertising/sales message (direct response ad) to the consumer (prospects or customers). The advertising message is usually transmitted via a mass medium (magazines, newspapers, TV, radio, computers with modems, or mail). However, it is possible for the advertising/sales message to be transmitted by person-to-person (face-to-face or over the telephone). The new definition does not require that the advertising/sales message use the mass media. This does not mean that person-to-person selling alone is direct marketing any more than direct response advertising alone is direct marketing according to our definition. It means that direct marketing may use *any* channel of communication to transmit the direct response advertising message.

Once consumers have received the particular advertising message, the consumers who decide to respond will usually transmit their response by mail or by telephone directly to the marketer/advertiser. However, if the direct response message was transmitted by person-to-person, the response is usually immediate (i.e., within the communication transaction) and no delay is incurred. At the time of ordering, a tracking code is captured as part of the transaction to identify the specific sales message and source of the customer name. Thus, direct response advertising can be conducted on a person-to-person basis. In other words, under certain conditions personal selling and direct response advertising can overlap.

Once the direct marketer has received the response, she then sends the merchandise directly to the consumer via UPS, mail, or rail (i.e., the fulfillment channel). However, there are exceptions such as Penney's and Sears, where the customer must go to the retail store to pick up his/her merchandise ordered from the catalog. In the case of face-to-face selling, the salesperson may personally deliver the merchandise. In addition to the merchandise, the fulfillment channel can carry another direct response advertisement along with the merchandise. This method is referred to as a bounceback (direct response ad from the same marketer) or a package insert (direct response ad from a different direct marketer than the one fulfilling the order).

Many direct marketing firms do not manufacture the products they sell. For catalog companies, products are purchased from a variety of manufacturers or vendors. In Figure 1A, the direct marketer may be a separate firm or the manufacturer of the products. The focus for direct marketing is on the firm that is marketing the products directly to consumers (individuals or organizations).

Direct Mail

The term "direct mail" is a mass *medium* used by a variety of marketers/advertisers and refers to any kind of advertisement or information mailed to a target audience. It includes direct response advertisements and advertisements sent by manufacturers and retailers encouraging consumers to shop at a particular store (e.g., sale ads), and cents-off coupons to be used at any store carrying the product. Direct mail also includes general advertisements from service organizations. Thus, a direct response advertisement sent by mail is a very specific type of direct mail advertising.

While the most commonly used mass medium for direct response advertising is direct mail, direct marketers also place direct response ads in magazines and newspapers, and on television. Therefore, direct mail is not synonymous with direct marketing or direct response advertisements.

Direct Selling

Direct Selling is often confused with direct marketing because of the word "direct." Direct selling firms include such companies as Avon and Mary Kay Cosmetics. However, most direct selling firms usually do not sell directly to consumers and they usually do not know who their end consumers are -- nor can they track responses of consumers. Instead, they sell their products to sales agents who are independent contractors. These salespeople are the ones that sell "direct" to consumers (see Figure 1B). In most cases, the sales message and response are transmitted on a person-to-person basis and no permanent record is kept by the firm about the transaction. The double-headed arrow in Figure 1B indicates the "interactiveness" of the communication transaction between the salesperson and the consumer. An individual salesperson may be using direct marketing if a complete history of transactions is maintained on each of her/his customers and prospects. Direct selling from the salesperson's perspective has the most potential for being truly relational marketing because quite often the salesperson either already has an established relationship (family, friends, or co-workers) with the consumer, or often develops one via the repeated person-to-person interaction.

Thus, direct selling from the perspective of the originating firm is not "direct" nor is it direct marketing. However, there is opportunity for direct selling firms to integrate direct marketing and still allow, and even encourage, person-to-person selling. For example, Mary Kay Cosmetics now collects customers' names and addresses from the sales agents. To announce new products, the firm mails an advertisement to the list of customers and the sales agents. The direct mail ad is direct response advertising because it informs the customer that s/he must call her/his sales agent (the agent's name, phone, and address are printed in the ad) to order the product.

Telemarketing

Another area of confusion in marketing is the distinction between telemarketing (outbound calling) and direct marketing. In the consumer goods area, most "telemarketing" is just a fancy word for person-to-person selling over the telephone (see Figure 1C). This is not marketing nor is it direct marketing. Rarely is the sales transaction permanently recorded and used as an input for future telemarketing decisions and activities. That is, no customer file is developed, no conversion and maintenance marketing activities and, thus, no ongoing relationship develops between the telemarketer and customer. Therefore, much of consumer telemarketing is not direct marketing but simply "cold call" selling in the old tradition of door-to-door selling.

Alternatively, business-to-business telemarketing is often a part of direct marketing. Business-to-business marketing firms which use a telephone to contact prospects and customers can be using direct marketing if they: 1) use a tracking code for relating the sales message to the sales transaction; 2) permanently record the transaction information; and 3) use it for future marketing activities (i.e., conversion and maintenance). However, only using direct response advertising via the mail to generate leads is not direct marketing, but simply direct response advertising.

SUMMARY

Our definition of direct marketing focuses on *conceptually* defining direct marketing rather than citing all of the possible specific techniques and methods that marketers may use to do direct marketing. Although direct response advertising is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient for being direct marketing -, i.e., they are not synonymous terms. In addition to direct response advertising, our definition presents direct marketing as a relational marketing process. That is, it is a marketing process of prospecting, conversion, and maintenance that establishes and maintains an ongoing relationship with customers, and one where there is specific information feedback at the individual level for control and direction of future marketing activity. Our definition helps conceptually to distinguish direct marketing from other types of marketing and selling (i.e., direct mail, direct selling, and telemarketing).

Direct marketers can enhance their relationship with their customers (i.e., relational marketing) by obtaining more information about their customers and information about how the customers perceive the relationship via survey (mail or telephone) research (e.g., 1, 15). Direct marketers have the unique potential of obtaining descriptive information from surveys which can be directly related to their testing. The power of the combined methods would provide information on *why* variables manipulated in tests did or did not increase response (percent response, average order size, and/or certain products purchased). Thus, testing could become strategically oriented rather than just tactical by providing information about opportunities for strengthening and controlling the marketer-customer relationship.

In summary, we hope that our critique of the current definition and our proposed new definition will inspire other direct marketers and academics to think critically about and discuss what constitutes "direct marketing" as a distinctive substantive area of marketing. At a minimum, we hope we have provided a foundation for future formal discourse on this topic.