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# **INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION — CONCEPTS, PRACTICE, NEW CHALLENGES**

## INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION — CONCEPTS, PRACTICE, NEW CHALLENGES

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### Summary

Integrated marketing communication evolves evidently with the development of today's markets, their participants and technology - in the light of contemporary research. The objectives of this article are: firstly, to show the evolution of the models of integrated marketing communication ICM in the light of current research; secondly, to analyse the configuration of various ICM tools (traditional and Internet) which constitute the level of operationalization of ICM models and thirdly, to formulate business and brand implications. The article is based on research-based secondary sources (scientific journals) and empirical (case study). The results of the discussion are: the concept of the strategic dimension of integrated marketing communications in the enterprise and the proposal of its operationalization in the form of a 360 degrees communication model.

**Keywords: integrated marketing communication, enterprise development strategy, internet technology, communication tools**



## Introduction

Marketing specialists keep following new trends, which in light of theoretical knowledge are often not well described and categorized yet. Talking about the most characteristic trends of the recent years, we can mention such streams of contemporary marketing as content marketing, digital marketing, social media marketing, buzz marketing, that is, phenomena closely associated with the development of new technologies and Internet marketing tools. The operational (instrumental) approach to marketing communication dominating research, currently cannot be justified from the point of view of requirements for efficient communication activities of a company, or brand. That's why the first part of this paper is devoted to the so-called Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), its role in the general strategy of a company's functioning and relations with other functions in an organization. Another aspect of deliberations is the operationalization of company's and brand's marketing communication model. We will also take into consideration the "360° communication model", understood as a possibility of fuller use of available channels of communication in marketing communication — both traditional channels (offline) and Internet channels (online). In practice it is hard and expensive for a company, especially when it means the utilization of all, or almost all channels and tools of communication. Thus, we will pay attention to the requirements of a practical approach to the 360-degree model.

The goals of this article are: first of all, showing the evolution of the models of integrated marketing communication IMC in light of the current research, second is analysing the configuration of various IMC tools (that is, traditional and Internet tools) which constitute a level of operationalization of IMC models and the third thing is formulating the implication for managers, also in the area of activities. The article is based on secondary sources related to research (scientific magazines) and empirical sources (case study).

## Integrated marketing communication — evolution of the concept

In light of theory marketing communication strongly relates to the rich work of social sciences, including the theory of communication. According to T. Goban-Klas, within the scope of science we can identify over 200 definitions of the term "communication" and a few dozen models of communication. Among the best-known ones are so-called "unilateral" models of H. Lasswell or C. Shannon and W. Weaver, as well as the so-called "bilateral" model of M.L. De Fleur<sup>1</sup>. Looking for a universal definition of communication, theorist B. Dobek-Ostrowska says that "*communicating is a process of dialogue between units, groups, or institutions and its purpose is exchange of thoughts, sharing knowledge, information, or ideas and the process takes place on various levels, using diversified means and causes particular effects*"<sup>2</sup>.

The concept of communication we are interested in was first used in 1980's, originally as another word for the term "promotion". It was only in the following years that it was noticed that promotion means a unilateral process of the seller's influence on the buyer and marketing communication is a more mature phenomenon — a bilateral process of mutual relations between the sender and the recipient<sup>3</sup>. This way promotion became one of the elements of marketing communication.

We can distinguish two important views of marketing communication: functional and instrumental. From the functional perspective marketing communication is defined as a "collection of signals emitted from various sources to the marketing environment and a collection of signals obtained by a company from this environment"<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, from the instrumental view marketing communication is regarded as a "collection of tools forming a complex composition with defined properties enabling coordination and carrying out the goals and functions of a company"<sup>5</sup>. Advertising, promotion of sales, direct sales and public relations are recognized as the leading tools of marketing communication. Each of these four tools often called "promotion-mix" (or "communications mix"), similarly to marketing-mix, has a series of detailed tools (resources), which evolve over time and are subject to various changes in association with the profile of a company, or its recipients. What's more, new tools are

being added to the set of marketing communication tools, which justifies further division of tools into the so-called "traditional" and "modern" instruments of promotion<sup>6</sup>.

Communication of a company with the environment is a bilateral process, in which also the recipient can provide feedback and have a real impact on the decisions of an organization. Growing interaction of an organization (or brand) with the recipients by means of social media enables ever more precise measurement and assessment of the efficiency of communication activities.

Currently, in association with the multitude of channels and communication tools what determines the success of a company is to a large extent whether both formal and informal marketing messages are integrated with each other<sup>7</sup>. Integration should take place not just on the level of promotion mix tools themselves, but also on the level of marketing mix and on the strategic level (like vision, mission, main strategic goals of a company). That's why we should investigate marketing communication in the aspect of the functioning of the whole organization, which leads to the adoption of the concept of integrated marketing communication.

The concept of integrated marketing communication (IMC) was established in the middle of 1990's, when it was noticed that to achieve effective marketing communication it is necessary to coordinate various tools and communication channels in such a way that the message sent by a company is coherent<sup>8</sup>. In the following years an evolution of the perception of IMC has been observed — from a narrow view, to a more holistic one. An example of a narrow view of the definition was provided by such researchers as K. Przybyłowski, S. Hartley, R.A. Kerin, W. Rudelius (1998), who concluded that IMC is a "concept of designing marketing communication programmes, which cover all elements of promotion: advertising, direct sales, sales promotion and public relations, making it possible to send a coherent message to all groups of recipients"<sup>9</sup>. A broader definition of IMC comes from Ch. Fill (1999), who claims that IMC means "managing the dialogue of an organization with its internal and external stakeholders, in which the used tools have to be coherent with the goals and strategy of an organization and the recipients have to recognize all signals coming from an organization as coordinated, coherent and harmonized"<sup>10</sup>. Reaching for more recent definitions, we should mention the proposal of three researchers: L.

Porcu, S. del Barrio-Garcia, Ph. Kitchen (2012), who claim that IMC means "coherent, transparent communication with various groups of stakeholders using the effect of synergy, so that both in the short term and the long term the organization can build beneficial relations with the environment"<sup>11</sup>.

The popularization of the concept of integrated marketing communication has been confirmed by both growing number of publications on the subject and examples from business practice showing the efficiency and effectiveness of IMC programmes. In this area it is in particular the interest in professionalization of communication activities for the benefit of brand that has grown. According to G. Hajduk (2010), properly designed and efficient IMC should assure that all forms of contacts with clients and other target groups of a brand will be dedicated to a particular recipient, comprehensible and coherent in terms of the content of message. The author himself defines IMC as a "strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and assess a coordinated, measurable, convincing programme of communication of a brand with consumers, potential clients and other target recipients, both internal and external ones"<sup>12</sup>.

Summing up, we can highlight three basis planes on which IMC issues are researched. They cover:

- 1) Managing integrated marketing communication of an organization (brand) — planning, implementation, control,
- 2) The process of integrated marketing communication — a series of planned, coherent actions leading to conveying the message efficiently and maintaining relations with the recipients of an organization (brand),
- 3) Integrated marketing communication tools used in purposefully chosen channels of communication with the environment (formal and informal communication)<sup>13</sup>.

### **Managing the integrated marketing communication of an organization (brand)**

Integrated marketing communication is a much more complex process than traditionally understood marketing communication of the "old type", which is also associated with the higher utilization of funds, time and

organizational resources. The features of integrated marketing communication "in opposition" to classic promotional activities are presented in a synthetic way in table 1.

Table 1. Integrated marketing communication (IMC) and traditional promotion

Compared features	Promotion — traditional definition	Integrated marketing communication — IMC
Starting point	Sender of messages (e.g. a company and its offer)	Recipients of messages and their needs, expectations and reasons for particular behaviours
Goals	Mainly information and persuasion, rather short time horizon, often situational	Building emotional and economic relations (ties) with the buyer in a longer time horizon
Knowledge about the recipient of messages	Rather limited, general	Broad, relying on databases and marketing research
Direction of the flow of messages	Messages go in one direction — from the company to the buyer	Bilateral communication between the company and the buyer
Spending on communication	Treated as costs of market activities	Regarded as an investment helping a company achieve marketing and financial effects
Utilized media and forms of communication	Mainly mass media	Media available for the company, selected especially for the assumed goals within the chosen groups of recipients
Level of coordination of activities and channels of communication	Low level of coordination or no coordination at all	Full integration of activities within particular communication tools and utilized channels of communication, the effect of synergy
Interaction of the sender with the recipients of messages	Limited significance, delayed in time	Broad, almost immediate, defining the character of the system

Source: T. Taranko, *Komunikacja marketingowa. Istota, uwarunkowania, efekty*, Oficyna Wolters Kluwer Business, Warszawa 2015, p. 45.

As mentioned earlier, integration of marketing communication should take place not just on the level of mix instruments themselves, but also on the level of marketing mix and such elements as vision, mission, or main strategic assumptions of a company. That's why we should discuss and investigate marketing communication in the aspect of functioning of the whole organization, on the level of strategic management.

Along with the development of research and practical experiences, we are currently dealing with the maturing of the concepts and models of marketing communication and the most important aspect, which has been noticed by almost all researchers is regarding it as an integrated process, which can be implemented in a company in many stages and at various levels of progress. The strategic perspective of IMC has been recognized by, among others, two researchers — D. Schulz and Ph. Kitchen, who have proposed a theoretical model consisting of four stages of implementation of IMC in a company:

- first stage (tactical) — focuses on the external promotion of an organization, which speaks in "one voice", without putting the recipient in the centre of attention,
- second stage (redefinition of marketing communication) choosing points of contact of a company (brand) with the environment, where the central point is the consumer,
- third stage — professional application of ICT for the purpose of complex collection and analysis of data about the recipient and his behaviours as well as for the purpose of stimulating the flow of information within the organization,
- fourth stage — strategic level of communication: planning activities, costs, the assessment of effects<sup>14</sup>.

Another researcher, G. Hajduk, has carried out an analysis of the rich scientific work concerning IMC and proposed a practical definition of the process of integrated marketing communication, in which he emphasized that it takes place on three levels in an organization:

1. internal — which involves the choice of appropriate communication activities and tools and coordinating them in time and space (the so-called communication mix),

2. external — concerning the integration of communication activities with other elements of marketing mix,
3. corporate — referring to such elements as vision, mission and strategy of a company<sup>15</sup>.

Integrated marketing communication is a more mature concept, allowing better consolidation of the elements forming it. In practice integration of communication activities in an organization requires:

- identifying all points of contact of the client with the company, its products and brands,
- diligent, comprehensive management of all communication channels and tools,
- adopting a long time perspective,
- creating in an organization a dedicated position (team) for the coordination and integration of all its communication activities.

In the following part we will discuss the issues of coordination of communication on the operational level — that is, communication-mix tools, highlighting new challenges in this area for organization and brand management.

## Contemporary IMC tools

In literature on the subject we will find many proposals of the classification of marketing communication tools, which are distinguished from each other not just by names, but also their internal structure. A comparison of the most important definitions of the system of marketing communication (so-called communication-mix) was made by J.W. Wiktor<sup>16</sup>. On the basis of 8 publications of such authors as: Meffert (1986), Bennett (1988), Kotler (1994), Thomas (1998), Nieschlag, Dichtl and Hörschgen, (1998), Garbarski, Rutkowski and Wrzosek (2000), Kotler and Keller (2012] and Bruhn (2013), he identified 41 different (or

differently called) detailed marketing communication tools consisting of 16 different forms of communication, which are listed below:

- 1) advertising,
- 2) promotion,
- 3) promotion of sales,
- 4) public relations,
- 5) public relations and publicity,
- 6) direct sales,
- 7) sales personnel,
- 8) personal communication,
- 9) direct marketing,
- 10) sponsoring,
- 11) event and experience marketing,
- 12) interactive marketing,
- 13) buzz marketing,
- 14) fairs and exhibitions,
- 15) communication in social media,
- 16) event marketing<sup>17</sup>.

The result of a visible dispersion and diversification of conceptual contents attributed to particular tools of communication is the emergence and operating a certain conceptual conglomerate of a rather incoherent and rather randomly interpreted internal structure<sup>18</sup>. We can notice this both in scientific publications and in practice. We should also notice that the mentioned forms of marketing communication are formal in character — they constitute a deliberate and planned activity of a company. However, there is also informal communication which takes place by means of information conveyed to the environment indirectly through various entities located in the surroundings of a company — clients, business partners, suppliers, media, or competition. We shouldn't skip this informal aspect of communication, especially that the development of social media channels strengthens its influence (in time and in space).

The instruments of marketing communication can be used in two essentially different communication environments: the traditional one which is linked to the model of interpersonal and mass communication and the environment of hypermedial marketing communication such as the

Internet. In the 21st century the development of the Internet and interactive media caused an expansion of the system of marketing communication and its instruments. Unprecedented possibilities of monitoring and collecting data about consumers, learning their expectations and shaping their purchasing behaviours have led to the creation of deepened, individualized relations between companies and consumers. On the other hand, also consumers — thanks to the popularization of technology — have received the possibility of influencing the market and its participants. Thus, companies use more complex (bilateral, interactive) models of communication, taking into consideration both mass media and individualized means of influence on the behaviours of consumers for the purpose of building and deepening relations. It is not just products and services, but also relations that determine the advantages perceived by consumers and are the sources of values delivered to them. A practical view of such an approach is the 360 degree communication model.

### **360 degree communication model**

Here we will look into the dilemmas of the configuration of traditional and modern IMC tools, including the proposal of a 360-degree communication model. Along with the dynamic development of Internet technology and in particular social media tools, integrating communication on the operational, that is, instrumental level requires professional actions.

What has become an example of full integration of marketing communication tools is the so-called 360-degree communication model.

The term "360 degrees" means complexity in the choice of media and channels of communication. A feature distinguishing 360-degree communication model is its multimediality — this means the presence of both traditional mass-media communication, as well as Internet and mobile communication in the process of communicating with the environment for the purpose of achieving the desired goals of an organization. 360-degree marketing communication model is most often used for a particular brand and advertising campaign, giving it a distinct, exceptional character and distinguishing it from other communication campaigns. Media which can

be taken into consideration in 360-degree marketing communication are diversified and evolve along with the development of technology and the creativity of creators. Skilful selection of the ways of reaching the recipients and the used communication tools should be characterized by mutual synergy and bring benefits in form of more efficient communication. The choice of communication channels and tools can cover:

- ATL activities, conducted in traditional mass media: advertising in television, radio, press, as well as outdoor advertising (posters, billboards), contests, samplings and inserts in press,
- BTL activities aimed at a particular group of recipients: promotions of sales, POS carriers, public relations tools,
- direct marketing activities: product presentations, e-mails, telemarketing,
- event activities — organizing exceptional events, meetings,
- interactive marketing activities: Internet advertising, social media tools, marketing in SEM search engines, mobile marketing and applications, advertising in games, viral marketing, Internet websites.

The name "360-degree communication" suggests the presence of all elements forming a coherent whole, which is well illustrated by the shape of the wheel. Consumer is in the middle of the wheel, as he receives advertising messages from all possible channels — online and offline channels.

It is worth emphasizing the fact that in practice of 360-degree communication the goal is not to use all possible media, but to achieve the effect of synergy. An example of this is the communication concept of Remington (a chosen line of products) brand shown below, as it built an advertising campaign with an effective reach relying on deep knowledge and contemporary media, their various properties and varied influence on the recipient.

### The application of the 360-degree communication model — an example

Remington brand belongs to the American manufacturing-trading holding Spectrum Brands, which is specialized in consumer home appliances. The company is, among others, a global supplier of hair styling,

shaving and depilation devices present in 160 countries. The company's offer includes 161 products in 5 categories and 21 subcategories. Remington products are targeted both at women and men who care about their looks and want to look good for themselves and for others. That's why the brand's leading slogan is "How the worlds gets ready", which reflects the assumption that regardless of the time of day, thanks to Remington products you are always ready to go out and on top of that you look great<sup>18</sup>

Remington brand conducts active marketing activities both in online channels and in points of sale. Within a year a few advertising campaigns targeted both at women and men, which are focused on a certain line of products, are conducted. Moreover, the brand participates in various events associated with beauty and hair styling. In order to achieve even better result the brand introduced the model of integrated 360-degree communication for the conducted advertising campaigns of its product lines.

One of campaigns prepared for Remington brand and in particular for the PROtect product line was the campaign titled "Prepare for Fashion Week with Remington", which was implemented in the autumn of 2015. Table 2 puts together online and offline communication tools used in an integrated way in course of the above-mentioned promotional campaign of Remington brand products.

Table 2. An example of IMC activities and tools used in case of a product line of Remington brand

Offline activities	Online activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Events</li> <li>● Activities in point of sale</li> <li>● POS materials (dispensers, posters)</li> <li>● Media relations (e.g. media sponsorship of <i>Elle</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Internet website of the company/product line</li> <li>● Own social media channels (<i>FB, Instagram</i>)</li> <li>● Dedicated pages of the campaign (<i>Landing pages</i>)</li> <li>● Fashion bloggers and their social media channels</li> <li>● Beauty portals</li> <li>● Online advertising (<i>Google AdWords, remarketing</i>)</li> <li>● Internet message boards</li> <li>● Mailing (<i>Newsletters</i>)</li> </ul>

Source: [www.spectrumbrands.com/aboutus](http://www.spectrumbrands.com/aboutus)

The diversity of applied tools in the advertising campaign of Remington brand products, as well as the fact that they were matched well with their

target group, combined with an attractive pre-holiday season contributed to the huge success of the campaign. Campaigns concerning similar subjects usually achieve a coverage of 9-25 million contacts with the message and in this case the campaign achieved 47 million contacts with the message. Advertising in online channels was exceptionally efficient and could be easily measured (for the assessment the following indicators were used: advertising CTR, number of likes for FB and Instagram posts and their reach, CTR of sponsored articles, the coverage of mailing — CTOR). Thus, what determines the success of brand promotion campaigns using IMC are such activities as: diversified channels for reaching the consumer, message contents contextually matched with the recipients, broad online campaigns in the search network and in the advertising network, support from offline activities (media relations, advertising in points of sales, contests).

Here, it is necessary to point out that combining Internet channels and traditional channels in brand communication is nothing that goes beyond the current standards. 360-degree communication to really reflect full involvement of the brand in "being" in all channels has to turn into full activation of the brand in the proper points of contact with the target client. Currently the goal is a real conversation with people, not just unilateral communication — this means that it is not enough to publish contents, as what is necessary is interaction with the recipients, which eventually leads to providing them with the expected values in offered products and services.

## Conclusion

In light of the proposed definitions of integrated marketing communication and the ongoing scientific discussion we can highlight the following characteristic features of IMC:

- highlighting the goals of IMC such as creating a coherent image of a company and building favourable relations with the environment and influencing the behaviour of consumers through communication,
- domination of the functional approach — integrated marketing communication is treated as a process,
- attributing a strategic character to integrated marketing

communication,

- emphasizing the effect of synergy that can be achieved through the integration of the elements of marketing communication,
- drawing attention to the fact that the effect of synergy of messages achieved through the utilization of IMC makes it possible to achieve a strong image of a brand.

Relating the above-mentioned features of integrated marketing communication to a specific area of science and research, it is worth emphasizing that also scientific-research institutions should go in this direction. Now the dominant strategy is the popularization of science and promotion of research supported by the application of personal communication tools (contacts and appearances of researchers), group communication (conferences, presentations, publications), mass communication, events, advertising) and Internet communication (company websites of scientific and research units, websites of research projects, activity of units in some social media networks)<sup>19</sup>. In practice what is often missing from the communication activities of scientific-research institutions is full integration in the area of the choice of tools, contents and channels of communication, as well as a strategic approach and clear support from the management of a unit (e.g. in the area of financing). We can note here that some entities have already reached the first, instrumental level of integration of communication, that is, the tactical level (according to the Schultz and Kitchen model), however, full integration of activities requires greater involvement of the whole organization, that is, the remaining functional units (apart from marketing and promotion) and building long-term relations with the environment (including clients, in particular). What should be an effect of the integration of marketing communication is a strong image of the scientific institution not just in the national, but also international environment.

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