

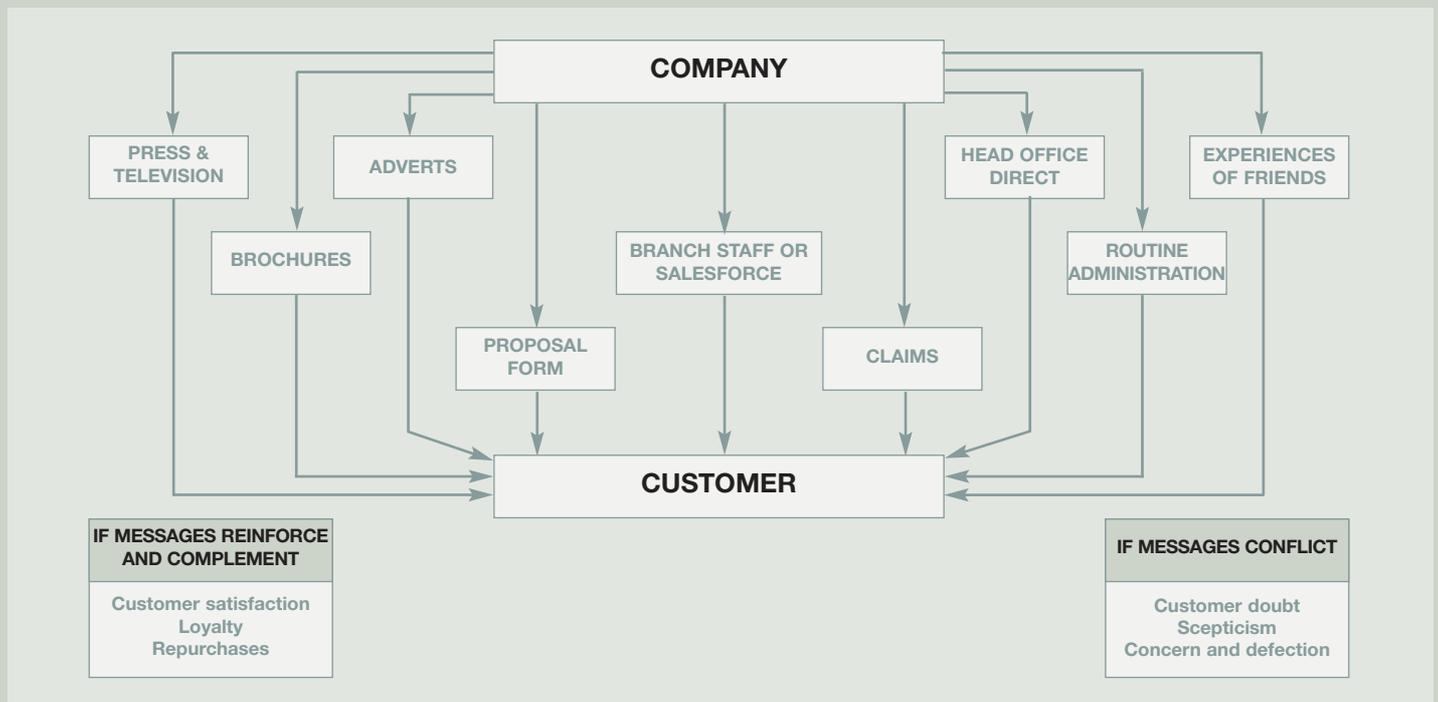
Editor's Briefing

Malcolm Oliver explains, briefly, the challenge of consistent communications.

Delivering lifetime value depends on understanding the customer's needs, and staying in effective contact with him as those needs emerge and develop. Clear and consistent communication is therefore absolutely crucial. Customers (and potential customers) receive countless messages and experiences, directly and indirectly, from any company with which they deal. If all of these messages are consistent and complementary, and the promises are delivered, then customer satisfaction and loyalty is the result. If not, customers will be likely to defect elsewhere.

organization will be actively and consistently supporting them, either directly in their functional line, or indirectly through a parallel customer interaction chain.

Communication is a two-way process, and it is vital that the company takes advantage of each interaction *with* the customer to add to its understanding *of* the customer, and of his viewpoint. Real and topical *information* and *intelligence* about individual customers, their needs and their aspirations, is far more valuable than the averaged and sanitized market research data that is typically available. This process



Consistency in such multi-channel communication is difficult even within a single office. In an organization with hundreds of offices and thousands of staff and millions of customers, it is arguably the dominant management issue. Consistency is not something that can be *trained* into an organization – customers expect immediate and efficient responses, and do not react well to the lack of spontaneity that arises with regimented approaches. It is in any case not possible to prescribe all the issues that may arise. So, rather than being trained, the company has to *learn* – learn the way in which any individual staff member should act, rather than the *detail* of what he should do. Staff have to be *empowered* to “do whatever they think is right for the customer and the company”, but they also need to be prepared for, and supported in, this responsibility. They need a clear, understandable and deliverable vision of the company's purpose, and they need the confidence of *knowing* that all their colleagues elsewhere within the

can be active, but database developments also offer increasing opportunities to pick up signals passively. Managed effectively, the listening power of a company can be a major source of strategic advantage.

It is also important to appreciate that much of the financial services industry offers essentially *intangible* products – there may be a promise to pay a possible sum of money at a date in the future, but the real benefit *today* is not financial, but reassurance and peace of mind. In these circumstances, effective management of the customer's experiences with the company, through a dedicated focus on service quality, is absolutely key and fundamental.

Copies of a more comprehensive paper by the Editor, from which this note has been extracted, are available on request.