



## **Call for Research Proposals on Modeling "Multichannel" Customer Behavior**

*Sponsored by the Marketing Science Institute and the Wharton Interactive Media Initiative*

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The Marketing Science Institute (MSI) and the Wharton Interactive Media Initiative (WIMI) are jointly sponsoring a research proposal competition intended to stimulate new thinking and impactful research on "Modeling 'Multichannel' Customer Behavior." We anticipate awarding 8-12 grants ranging from \$3,000-\$12,000 to support high-quality empirical research on critical questions in this area. Authors of winning proposals will be invited to present their work at a joint WIMI-MSI event at the Wharton School in December 2010.

For many business and academic researchers, the "Holy Grail" is the ability to tie a particular customer's behavior in one domain together with his/her actions in another domain. Investigations of behavior across multiple delivery channels and communications media are especially challenging because there has been a rapid proliferation of touch points connecting a firm and its customers, arising from the fragmentation of media and channels. Specifically, there are many customer-firm touch points within a single channel or communication medium (e.g., multiple television channels, multiple in-store shopping experiences), as well as many different channels or media. Hence, we adopt a broad definition of "channels" to include well-established distribution methods (e.g., retail stores, mail, e-commerce), new media (e.g., sponsored search, social media, and mobile communications), and other media/channels. By tracking individual-level behavior within channels and merging it with different but related individual level behavior in other channels, customer behavior across channels can be fruitfully connected to derive valuable insights regarding the effectiveness of marketing actions. Some examples of different but related customer behaviors are:

- On-line and off-line shopping behavior
- Sponsored search and product purchasing
- A consumer's media exposure across television, Internet, mobile, etc.
- Attendance at a cultural institution and donation behavior
- Purchase/consumption of digital and print publications

One feature which has stymied many efforts to fully understand cross-channel behavior is that it is difficult to link individual-level datasets that describe behavior in one channel with those that describe behavior in another one. There are several reasons: the data may be collected by different entities (e.g., manufacturers versus retailers, advertisers) or the data may have been collected by the same entity using entirely different technology platforms (e.g., online versus offline) or the data may have been collected at different levels of temporal aggregation (e.g., monthly for traditional media and more frequently

for new media) so that it is difficult to disentangle the dynamic contributions of each medium. At the same time, there is an enormous opportunity to derive new customer insights and (ultimately) value for the firm from integrating data sources and empirical approaches from different channels or domains.

## **RESEARCH COMPETITION**

We invite empirically-oriented research proposals that model “multichannel” customer behavior and derive insights that advance marketing science and practice. Proposals should demonstrate both rigor and relevance. Successful proposals will be financially supported via joint funds available from MSI and WIMI.

**Topics.** Managerial challenges that led to the decision to launch this research competition include the following:

- How can firms measure, understand and manage customer engagement, preferences and purchase behavior in a multichannel, multi-media environment?
- How can firms gain a “360” view of customers and understand the factors that affect search and purchase behavior in B2C and/or B2B markets?
- How can CPG manufacturers move beyond retailer-supplied data to incorporate other sources (e.g., social metrics, RFID) and thereby garner insights about how multi-media multichannel marketing activities influence purchase behavior?
- How can more granular information about consumer preferences and “addressable” social and mobile media enhance (or supplant) conventional market segmentation and targeting?
- How do mobile services influence consumer behavior—e.g., the sequencing and impact of consumer search behavior in one channel on their purchase behavior in another channel?
- How does the value (impact) of online advertising vary by context—e.g., whether placed in branded content sites such as WSJ or served up in response to search or tracking of consumers’ online activities?
- What are effective ways of integrating online and offline media/channel activities to enhance customer/shopper online and offline experiences?

**Evaluation.** Proposals will be evaluated by a special set of reviewers:

- Eric T. Bradlow, The University of Pennsylvania (Co-chair)
- Peter S. Fader, The University of Pennsylvania (Co-chair)
- Ruth N. Bolton, Marketing Science Institute
- Marnik G. Dekimpe, Tilburg University & Catholic University Leuven
- Venkatesh (Venky) Shankar, Texas A&M University
- Russell S. Winer, New York University

In cases where the appropriate data are unavailable to the researcher, MSI and WIMI will make every attempt to find suitable corporate “data donors”. We encourage researchers to make such requests, but we offer no guarantees that we can fulfill them.

## **SUBMISSIONS**

Research proposals are due by **May 15, 2010**, and funding decisions will be announced by June 30, 2010.

E-mail submissions to Ross Rizley, Research Director, Marketing Science Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA; Telephone: +1 (617).491.2060; E-mail: [Ross@msi.org](mailto:Ross@msi.org). Please indicate that your submission is in response to this call.

While there are no formal guidelines for formatting proposals, submissions should include:

1. A one-page summary
2. A clear statement of the expected contribution, such as a new framework or methodology, a better understanding of how key variables affect marketing processes, or new information to assist managers in making better marketing decisions
3. A background section giving a brief review of the relevant literature and a statement of how the proposed research is expected to contribute to knowledge and improve business practice
4. A list of research questions, models, or hypotheses describing the issues to be studied, the researchers' initial insights or beliefs, and what should be learned from the study
5. A detailed description of the proposed research design, methodology, model to be used, analysis plan, etc. (Methodological details will play a critical role in the evaluation process.)
6. A timetable, including dates for key research milestones, deliverables, and an expected completion date
7. Funding or support needs (typically, an itemized budget)
8. Vita(e) of the researcher(s), as well as a short biographical note and contact information for each author
9. **Proposals must be no more than 10 double-spaced pages; however the summary, vita(e), and appendices/exhibits will not be counted toward the page limit.**

Please feel free to include as appendices any additional materials that might be useful to the reviewers in evaluating your proposal (for example, drafts of research materials, questionnaires, more detailed explanations of statistical analysis, and/or modeling plans, lengthy literature review, detailed development of hypotheses, description of datasets to be used, etc.).

Information on the competition will be available in early March on the MSI website at [www.msi.org](http://www.msi.org) and on the WIMI site at <http://www.whartoninteractive.com>.