



Martin McEvoy

The Marketing Institute could set itself the target of becoming an educator of marketing executives across the globe, using web based technology and relying on Ireland's growing reputation as a centre for technological excellence. This is the view of Martin McEvoy, the incoming Chairman of the Marketing Institute. He succeeds Barbara Patton in this position. By Kyran Fitzgerald

Martin will be focusing on two main areas during the course of his one year term. His main priority will be to assist in the formulation of an educational strategy for the Institute going forward. This should involve a "genuine review of our educational strategy." The new Chairman also plans to support and underpin the work being done on the "development and delivery of a sophisticated communications and services infrastructure" for the membership.

In Martin's view, the increasingly breakneck pace of change in business poses important questions and presents new challenges and opportunities to organisations such as The Marketing Institute. The methods of delivery of educational services to students are already undergoing a major overhaul. "We have witnessed the emergence of distance learning and now e-based learning. An e-education strategy from a

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distribution perspective is being rolled out over the next few years." However, the actual content of courses will also have to be looked at closely. "The requirement, here, is much more fundamental. We are talking about a strategic review of education in terms of the relevance of what is delivered. We have very good course content, but we should continually question its relevance."

Students may no longer aspire to qualifications in the traditional sense.

"We have to ask ourselves the question: are our educational processes relevant? Do they deliver usable value to the marketers of Ireland? "Increasingly, because of competition and the constant changes in their markets, companies are looking for a flexible mindset as opposed to a "dead man's grip of older

existing models" from marketing executives. By a logical extension, a similar flexibility will be required of the educational institutions which are training the new generation of marketers.

The marketing profession has been undergoing a revolution. Take the traditional fast moving consumer goods sector which, not so long ago, provided employment for a large proportion of the profession. "In this area, a significant amount of the strategic marketing decisions made with respect to the Irish market are migrating out of this country. Many Irish organisations are now seen as regional satellites rather than as strategic centres in their own right."

In such cases, the role of the Irish based marketing executive has altered.

"A greater proportion of consumer marketing in Ireland is becoming more trade and promotion focused. More and more people are working on developing locally relevant promotions as opposed to overall brand and communications strategy. This is symptomatic of the globalisation of business and, in turn, of brands. Common brand identities are emerging." Those marketing executives operating in these sectors may have to consider migrating overseas if they want to be able to apply their energy and intellect to areas of strategy.

Of course, in other areas, such as high technology, Ireland now boasts more than its share of European headquarters and many bright marketers with flexible minds are being attracted into the high tech sector where they stand to benefit from significantly better packages, including very good stock option deals. Executives gaining experience in this field are usually more mobile as the job offers more scope for personal career development. Mind you, as with everything in life, the hi-tech sector has a reward profile that somewhat mirrors the risks associated with it.

Martin McEvoy speaks with some authority on this point.

After he qualified from the DIT College of Marketing & Design in Dublin, he commenced his career in the recruitment sector with the Dublin based company, Sales Placement. Martin spent

fifteen years with the business working for a number of years in the 1980s in the firm's London office. He built up extensive experience in the hiring game, particularly in the selection and recruitment of marketing executives at all levels.

He has since established his own "strategic search and selection" consultancy which, apart from sourcing senior managers, also offers advice to change-oriented client firms on how their organisation can be remoulded as part of the hiring process. Increasingly, companies must market themselves to their own staff in order to ensure that they are properly motivated and will remain with the company. "Businesses and their attitudes are totally different to what they were ten years ago". Inevitably, organisations supplying recruitment services to those businesses must also adapt.

"I would be concerned that, in the past, marketing education has tended to deliver a somewhat risk averse type of marketer." Younger Irish people, however, tend to be increasingly entrepreneurial in approach and the training provided to people entering areas such as marketing should ideally reflect this. "Traditionally, the idea was that a business proposition should be brought through various stages in deciding whether to invest time and money in it. There were so many hurdles to jump through that the idea was almost bound to fall at one of them." The resulting delay often also meant that the window of commercial opportunity might have closed by the time the idea received the thumbs up. While stressing that he is not an advocate of 'seat of the pants' thinking, Martin reckons that he himself was/is excessively risk averse in his approach to his own career.

Such risk aversity may also be attributable to personal upbringing. In Martin's case, his father died when he was less than one year old. Ireland's frequently cash strapped economic state in the late 70s, early and mid 80's also tended to breed caution among the population.

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The incoming Chairman accepts that he and his Council are only at the stage of posing the questions. He is, however, upbeat about the opportunities that are being created by the spread of web based technology and by Ireland's increased reputation. There may be real openings for the Institute in terms of virtual based course offerings aimed at communities on the other side of the world. "The great thing about web enabled systems is - there are no borders and English is a common, commercial language. There are, of course, a number of possible stumbling blocks. How many Argentinian students, to take one example, will have heard of Ireland? How relevant will our case study material be to them? The US has a head-start in terms of content and culture."

In "getting from there to here", in moving to actually put into practice some of the ideas expressed above, the first step will be

to carry out a "genuine review of the Institute's educational strategy. My aim is to have succeeded in defining a clear direction and time-scale of delivery by the end of my tenure as Chairman."

Aspirations must be tempered with realism. Much of the teaching work on the syllabus of the Institute is delivered by a range of outside institutions. Martin does not believe that there will be much, if any, resistance to reform from the outside lecturer group. "You have a lot of lecturers who are very committed to the idea of being contemporary in their approach to education."

Martin is also keen to address the ongoing requirements of the Institute's wider membership.

"My second goal is to work on and support the development and delivery of a sophisticated communications and services infrastructure for all the members (just under 3,000 in total.)" The Institute can ultimately become a central repository for marketing information with inter-active online seminars and training modules. These online facilities will be supplemental to the existing range of seminars and programme of events. The Institute's web site is up and running and a "huge development of its functionality is underway."

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Inevitably, our interview has concentrated on matters of function. However, Martin's own background would suggest that his tenure as Chairman is unlikely to be of the "all work and no play" variety. A bit of an extrovert, he once played guitar and sang in a student band called 'Fit Kilkenny and the Remoulds.' "We were a fun band, with no great star quality and, in any event, the guys all knew that they would do well. One member even ended up as a senior partner with Ernst & Young in Sydney, bless him."

Martin has built up a name in the lucrative field of strategic search and selection. He gained a lot of knowledge on survival techniques from his mother Mai, who sustained the family by getting into property and letting it out, while simultaneously operating as a fulltime mother. Martin emerged from the College of Marketing & Design with a B.Sc in Management (awarded by TCD) and he is married to Arlene Dowling. They have three children, Chloe (11), Niall (10) and Aoife (8).

Looking back, he readily acknowledges his debt to the College of Marketing. "Despite the possible perceptions of my lecturers at the time, it gave me a broad education in everything from corporate finance and business policy to sociology, psychology and economics and as a result I have to say that I have never felt out of my depth when it comes to understanding and appreciating my clients' business structures and related strategies."