THE MARKETING–ENTREPRENEURSHIP INTERFACE: A CRITIQUE AND SOME PRAGMATIC ALTERNATIVES FOR MARKETING MANAGERS

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The issue of how marketing should be taught and researched is a constant in marketing circles today. In essence the debate centres around the degree to which educators should take the practical world as their focus. On the basis of the author's combined experiences a comprehensive alternative is provided. This paper begins by reviewing the central tenets of teaching and research materials in the areas of marketing management and entrepeneurship. It then presents its core proposition, that there is a substantial gap between these areas when examined from the theoretical and practical perspectives. Finally, a number of typical teaching scenarios are presented and the limitations of literature-based solutions are identified. The paper concludes by asking all educators to identify for themselves alternatives to resolve this problem.

Introduction

This paper offers a critique of traditional literature foundations of the marketing/entrepreneurship interface. The discussion considers whether many of the approaches and theories advocated by the literature are wholly appropriate. The paper presents conceptual thinking which attempts to address some of the change and adaptation dimensions required for the teaching of marketing/entrepeneurship as an interface function.

Initially the discussion considers decision making in SMEs with regard to issues of marketing, and in doing so raises some questions and implications in relation to what is appropriate in the understanding of 'interface' marketing. The inherent characteristics surrounding such decision making are reviewed. This acknowledges that decision making in SMEs is underpinned by the characteristics of entrepreneurship, management and marketing frameworks.

To this end, the accepted literature descriptions of characteristics and frameworks of management decision making, entrepreneurship and marketing decision making are examined in relation to their similarities and differences. In particular, consideration is given to comparing entrepreneurship, management and marketing decision making literatures in terms of their descriptions of inherent characteristics and motivations. These literature characteristics and motivations are compared with entrepreneurship and marketing in practice; specifically, the 'actual' practices of entrepreneurs and marketers in SMEs. It is contended that entrepreneurial activity and motivations combined with marketing activity as practised by marketing managers are inherently divergent from the conventional literatures. As an illustration of this divergence, the discussion presents some 'pragmatic alternatives' of marketing decision making in SMEs which can be termed the 'essence' of marketing in SMEs.

Literature Descriptions of Marketing and Entrepeneurial Decision Making and Motivations

An examination of the various literatures reveals some interesting insights into dichotomies between the research streams. Indeed, it might be argued that comparison of these literatures reveals practices which are different to theoretical frameworks. It is these issues which are examined below.

Marketing Management

In large organisations decision making is made within a highly structured and ordered framework. Decision making has a clear hierarchy depending upon the scope and focus of a decision. There are clear boundaries of responsibility whereby decisions can be taken. In such a decision making structure there will be close co-ordination and co-operation between the various decision making domains. In addition, because of the diversity of decision making and the number of decision makers, time scales for decision making are likely

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to be long. This inevitably introduces a planning element in large company decision making.

The above is sufficient to highlight the context in which decisions are made and, indeed, the essence of such decision making. However, a review of an even larger literature reveals clear and distinctive characteristics pertaining to management, for example Drucker (1954), Stewart (1967), Mintzberg (1973), Kotter (1982). Typical managerial tasks are based upon strong theoretical foundations. For example, there are well founded managerial activities that have been developed and internalised in line with organisational structures and standard practices in terms of organising for business (Mintzberg, 1973). Thus managers work to known and practised procedures, using appropriate and accepted analysis and evaluation criteria (Kotter, 1982). Decision making processes are based on order and form, and customs and practice (Sayles, 1964). Leadership is often derived from hierarchical power and authority (Yuki, 1989; Hunt, 1991; Wright, 1996). From this it can clearly be deduced that management decision making is a distinct discipline.

Much of the literature surrounding decision making in marketing is derived from the management literature in its style and frameworks. Naturally, marketing management should adhere to conventional management principles and structures (Cravens et al., 1987; Webster, 1988; McDonald, 1989). In broad terms, conventional marketing management decision making is inherently formal, sequential, structured and disciplined. It is also systems oriented and considers issues in both short and long term time scales (Greenley, 1986; Carson, 1993).

In the literature in relation to marketing motivations, there is a general commonality that the customer is the primary motivator for much of marketing's activity (Konopa and Clabro, 1971; Houston, 1986; Webster, 1988; Witcher, 1990). And indeed, just about every conventional marketing textbook (Dibb et al., 1994, Kotler et al., 1996) is clear in stating that marketing should have a customer focus and that marketers should strive to create customer satisfaction and well-being. Marketers are expected to meet customer desires and expectations and to develop customer relations through good customer service.

Entrepeneurship

SME decision making processes are different to that of large companies (Hofer and Bygrave, 1992). Most decisions originate with and flow through the entrepreneur or owner manager who is likely to be involved in all aspects of his/her firm's activities. As the direction and control of the enterprise rests with this one individual, it is the individual's personality and style which shapes the nature of decision making. The individual owner/manager does not need structures and frameworks but will instead intuitively co-ordinate and perform decision making in a way that is 'natural' to him or her. Whilst much of what has been stated can be intuitively accepted, is there evidence to corroborate such a contention?

A substantial literature over the past thirty years and more has attempted to define entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in terms of inherent characteristics. Definitional attempts stem from an intuitive perception that entrepreneurs are different in some way to managers, or at least perform tasks in a way that distinguishes them from managers. Obviously entrepreneurs must take decisions beyond a functional domain and their decisions involve the firm's survival and well-being as a whole. It is this dimension that dictates elements of entrepreneurship behaviour as opposed to simply taking decisions within known and defined frameworks and operational tasks.

Therefore, the conventional literature descriptions of entrepreneurship can be characterised by aspects such as follows:

- *Risk taking* – in that they must take risks in order to be competitive or to grow the business (McClelland, 1965; Palmer, 1971; Timmons 1978; Welsh & White, 1981)

- *Opportunistic* – in terms of seeking and identifying opportunities for future survival and success (Meredith et al., 1982; Peterson, 1985)

- *Innovative/creative* – because they need to do things differently in order to differentiate themselves from competitors or to develop something new (Schumpeter, 1934; Harwood, 1982; Carland et al., 1984; Drucker, 1985; Gibb, 1987)

- *Adaptive and change oriented* – because they are small and flexible and must react to and antici-

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Table 1	**Differences between Entrepreneurs and Management Decision Making**
Entrepreneur characteristics	*Manager characteristics*
Perception of opportunity	Need to control resources
Commitment: revolutionary, with short duration	Commitment: evolutionary, with long duration
Directive with colleagues	Negotiates with colleagues
Lacks control over environment – risk taker	Seeks control over environment – risk reducer
Management: flat, with multiple informal networks	Management: works to budgeting and formal planning systems
Challenge to authority	Seeks power, status, authority and responsibility

Adapted from Hisrich and Peters (1995), pp. 34–7.

pate changes in their environment (Wilken, 1979; Drucker, 1986)

- *Visionary* – because of much of the above, they more than most need to see into the future (Kao, 1989)

- *Individualistic* – because they are constantly thinking about issues which are inherently personal, for example, it is their own business (McClelland, 1961).

The literature on the motivations of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship largely agrees that such individuals have strong motivations for being in business. Indeed, such motivations are often founded in a need for growth (Stanworth and Curran, 1976). However there are a number of widely recognised motivations for being in business. For example:

- *Independence* – such individuals prefer to be their own boss and like the freedom of taking their own decisions (Birley and Westhead, 1994)

- *Personal satisfaction* – derived from the above, such individuals gain satisfaction from doing business for themselves and the challenges that this presents (Arens, 1990)

- *Employee well-being* – entrepreneurs are concerned with the well-being of their employees almost in a paternal sense;

- *Satisfying customers* – entrepreneurs are concerned with satisfying customers and devote considerable effort to ensuring that their customers get good service. They might often perceive this as part of their competitive advantage (Osborne, 1995; Arlow & Ackelsberg, 1991);

- *Integrity, morality, ethics* – such individuals perceive themselves as possessing all these charac-

teristics when doing business (Birley and Norburn, 1987; Ackoff, 1987; Longenecker et al., 1988; Timmons, 1989).

There are of course many other characteristics and motivations describing entrepreneurs (see below), but these lists are sufficient to make the point that entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are distinguished from managers and management by these and other characteristics. It must also be acknowledged that there are significant similarities between entrepreneurs and managers in performing tasks, and it is easy to find a few: both are task oriented, both are judgemental, both are directive, both are cost control conscious, and so on. However, it is the differences which are most striking. Hisrich and Peters (1995) offer a meaningful discussion of the 'differences' between entrepreneurs and managers, as illustrated by Table 1.

In considering Hisrich and Peters, it is reasonable to deduce that on a continuum of differences to similarities, there is a bias towards differences in characteristics in terms of a general style and emphasis in decision making. If this is so, then there are significant implications for understanding the essence of interface marketing.

Entrepreneurship and Marketing Practice in SMEs
Entrepreneurs in Practice in SMEs
Whilst all of the above may indeed be important motivations for entrepreneurs, it must be recognised that there are several other immensely strong motivations which will drive entrepreneurs (Storey, 1982; Binks and Jennings, 1986; Curran, 1988).

There is a long held view that entrepreneurs' primary motivation is 'profit', (Scitovsky, 1943). This view is supported here. Entrepreneurs are in business to make money; they strive to achieve security through having enough money to do

business and to make profit. Allied to this motivation is a constant constraint and therefore concern surrounding lack of cash and cash flow.

If this notion is accepted then it is interesting to compare this primary 'in-practice' motivation with some of the literature characteristics and motivations supposedly possessed by entrepreneurs. For example:

- *Literature characteristic – innovation/creativity.* In practice, entrepreneurs will only display these characteristics if they have a need for new sources of money. They will often take on new work in the hope of success: if this is forthcoming then good; if not, then innovation stops.

- *Literature characteristic – opportunistic.* In practice this characteristic is displayed in similar circumstances to the previous item, but only until a barrier occurs and risk is involved.

- *Literature characteristic – risk taker.* In practice, as above, but will only take risk until money is threatened.

- *Literature characteristic – change oriented.* In practice, only because the business is likely to be small and as it will always have to grow, change is unavoidable.

Marketing in Practice in SMEs

The literature descriptions of marketing decision making, alluded to earlier, may not actually happen in practice. This notion is reinforced by a number of more recent studies. Greenley and Bayus (1994) reviewed the results of several studies on the nature of marketing planning and found that '... the general tenor of these results is that few companies seem to adopt the prescriptions of marketing planning that are advocated in the literature'. Piercy's (1990) studies also revealed that managers did not adhere to the textbook descriptions of 'rational' decision making.

The views of Greenley and Bayus and Piercy are reinforced by Carson (1993) when considering this issue in relation to marketing decision making in SMEs. Carson identified various characteristics of marketing decision making in practice. He argues that much of marketing decision making in practice resembles aspects of entrepreneurship. For example, marketing decision making in practice is:

- *Simplistic and haphazard* – in that it is immediate and reactive to circumstances

- *Undisciplined and spontaneous* – perhaps because it is predominantly intuitive

- *Unstructured* – mainly because of the above

- *Irrational* – partly because of the above and also because it is individualistic in nature

- *Short term* – because of all of the above (Carson 1993).

As with management and entrepreneurship characteristics, there are differences between marketing decision making characteristics as depicted by the literature and what happens in practice.

This divergence can be found also in the 'motivations' for doing business. Marketers' primary motivation in practice is to gain increased sales and to make profit from increasing sales. This practical motivation is compounded by a marketer's greatest concerns: declining sales and stronger competition. Of course, it can be argued that by being customer focused enterprises can achieve sales and profit even against strong competition. However, in reality, marketers will be customer focused *only* if it leads to sales increases and profits. The incompatibility between the theoretical literature and marketing in practice can be detected with regard to quality, price and customer service in particular. Customers expect 'best' quality whereas marketers will equate quality with profit; customers expect lowest prices whereas marketers hope for higher prices. Consequently, good customer service and care often championed as having a customer focus may in fact provide a clandestine stimulation and exploitation of customers by marketers. These issues are revisited in more detail later in this discussion.

In this debate it easy to appreciate that a significant commonality can be found between marketers and entrepreneurs, in that both have a primary focus on sales and money (cash), and the greatest concern of both is a decline in sales which will result in a reduction in money, cash and profits. Secondary to these factors will be a customer focus, although in a public sense, the customer will always be championed as being most important to a company. That is to say, both entrepreneurs and marketers will extol the virtues of a cus-

tomer focus and the importance of customer satisfaction when asked the question, 'What is the most important factor in your business?', but privately they will raise issues of cash and money, sales and profits before concerning themselves with customers services/satisfaction.

So what impact does all this have on *understanding* how SME owner managers, entrepreneurs and marketing practitioners perform marketing? In addition, how can researchers at the interface better understand issues such as 'real' characteristics and motivations behind entrepreneurial decision making? This understanding is an imperative for teachers at the interface. If the textbook literatures are as flawed as this discussion suggests, then better teaching frameworks must be found.

Some examples of what can be termed 'the essence of marketing in SMEs' are given below, as 'pragmatic alternatives'. These 'alternatives' reflect the thrust of the above arguments and take a positive outlook towards how educators at the interface might address the implicit problem raised by this discussion.

Pragmatic Alternatives for Interface Marketing Education

This section addresses some of the problems of teaching marketing to diverse groups in a circumstance of limited time and resources. The 'pragmatic alternatives' described here are based on experiential knowledge of the UK, Ireland, and other countries' higher education systems. They are a discussion of key issues deemed to be important to interface marketing education. They represent a conceptual view of future learning approaches and appropriate topics for teaching marketing in general and SME marketing in particular. The central focus of this discussion lies in the question as to whether marketing and entrepreneurship education is appropriate to both disciplines in terms of subject topics and how these topics are taught. A critique of some key issues is made and speculations on possible alternatives offered for discussion. These alternatives focus on teaching the issues arising out of the discussion so far; specifically, that literature based frameworks are not those that are practised. Thus, what should be taught? Three scenarios covering important aspects of marketing are presented as a 'refocus' of teaching emphasis. The scenarios are 'The

marketing plan', 'Customer focus versus profit orientation' and 'Marketing research'.

Scenario 1. The Marketing Plan

'Students have been asked to do a situation analysis on a company and make recommendations on future marketing. The company has a desire to expand and grow and is currently coming under increasing competition. Students are required to present to company executives. The presentation will last one hour.'

This assignment is common throughout marketing education. Generally, students are assessed both on their adherence to the textbook process and the quality of recommendations. Often, company executives/entrepreneurs are asked to give feedback as part of this assessment. As a result of theoretical foundation stemming from conventional learning based on the textbook literature, students will:

- carry out a situation analysis;
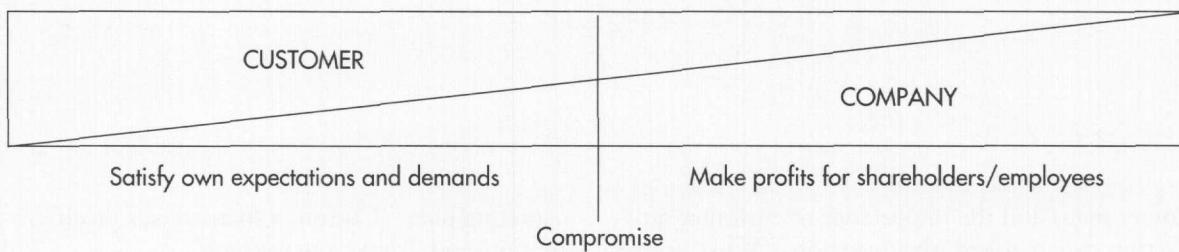
- do a SWOT analysis,

and, more often than not,

- advocate radical change by:
  – introducing new products (immediately)
  – entering new markets (immediately)
  – more investment in promotion activity.

The problem here arises from 'advocating radical change'. Such radical change almost inevitably ensues from such an exercise, principally because of two factors. Firstly, students are inexperienced and therefore see solutions in extreme 'black-or-white' terms. Secondly, a situation analysis that is carried out from 'outside' a company invariably misses the nuances of internal cultures and decision making practices unique to an individual company. Generally, because of these factors, students fail to grasp the importance of 'bringing existing management along' with their recommendations. Students fail to recognise that managers generally do not like change, especially radical change, and that most managers have a vested interest in the *status quo* and therefore may be unsettled by extensive change. Similarly, most management cannot finance expensive solutions; they need/want solutions that are simple and workable and which they understand and can support.

Figure 1   **Compromise of Focus**

CUSTOMER

COMPANY

Satisfy own expectations and demands   Make profits for shareholders/employees

Compromise

What is the *issue* here? It could be argued that there are many issues (and indeed there are) and it may be that these issues are inherent in both the situation analysis and the teaching and learning process. However, there are some aspects which are not taught, i.e., how does an existing management team (or an entrepreneur) think when it comes to making decisions? What constraints and pressures are they under that will allow them to take decisions or not? Suppose that students were taught to adhere to the following aspects when doing such a study and making a presentation to management of a company.

- Don't advocate 'radical' change – any change should be introduced gradually in order to allow confidence to emerge.

- Don't change the product and ways of doing things – managers don't want to change immediately, they want to get more sales/customers/profit. Consequently, most advice should centre on improving marketing communication.

- Look for solutions *within* the firm's existing systems. Therefore, solutions should *involve* the company's managers and employees in working out problems and creating solutions.

- Promote marketing *without* advocating heavy promotional spend and price reductions.

- Emphasise marketing availability, suitability, value perception, and communication.

Think about teaching these issues. A marketing course which had to contend with these issues would appear radically different to an existing one which considered, conventionally, the 'situation analysis' as a topic.

Consider, briefly, another issue inherent in this area of learning. What is the nature and structure of the presentation to the company? Students will be assessed on the comprehensiveness and sequentiality of the *process*, so they will be expected to present a comprehensive situation analysis and SWOT analysis. But this is not what a company's management,

especially an entrepreneur, wants to hear. Instead they want solutions that are viable. As such, in giving a presentation, students need to focus on 'what to do' and show how this will work. They should not spend a lot of time on findings from the situation analysis and SWOT analysis. In offering solutions they should not say 'should do' instead they should say 'how to'. Also, they should make the presentation personal and to the individual concerned without the use of terms like 'the client'. As educators, if we accept this 'reality', then how do we assess it? Do we make an assumption that the 'analysis' part of the process has been carried out comprehensively and correctly? Do we find some other way to assess this aspect? Or do we (radically?) assess other aspects, whatever they may be?

Scenario 2. Customer Focus versus Profit Orientation

Textbook marketing theory in relation to the 'customer' has acquired the status of a *missionary doctrine*. That is:

- the theoretical emphasis is on the customer as the *central focus* of all marketing activity

- the zealous emphasis on meeting customer wants and needs

Table 2   **A 'Pragmatic Alternative'**

1 Refocus the professional doctrine, not on the customer, but on the HONESTY – OPENNESS – FRANKNESS of the message.

2 Focus on 'marketing for profit'.

3 Treat the customer as a 'player' in the game of exchange and trade.

4 Recognise that the customer has his/her own agenda and objectives.

5 Focus the marketing message on 'WE WANT TO SELL YOU SOMETHING AND WE AIM TO PERSUADE YOU TO BUY IT'.

6 Recognise that the customer wants the best for him/herself and that the company wants the best for itself.

Figure 2   Factors Impacting on Quality/Price from the Company/Customer Perspectives

Specific aim of customer	Compromise	Specific aim of company
↑ Quality ↓ Price	←──────→ *Compromise based on:* Amount of negotiation required Strength of respective positions Desire to trade Alternatives available Uniqueness of product	↓ Quality ↑ Price

- anticipating these wants and needs in order to satisfy and meet customer expectations

- the desire to flow with the changing desires of customers.

In adhering to this theory, educators have *indoctrinated* students with a generation of textbook messages built upon the 'missionary doctrine'. Educators have presented the customer as an idol, whose every desire must be met and views sought before taking any decisions. Educators have been compounding and reinforcing this flawed focus by, for example, the 'new' philosophies of relationship marketing based on customer services and customer care.

It is contended here that there is a dichotomy between marketing theory as presented by the educators and that practised by practitioners. This dichotomy has long been recognised by educators working with entrepreneurs and small business owner/managers. The central focus of marketing theory (the customer) is incompatible with the central focus of the marketing practitioner which is, albeit implicitly rather than explicitly, that of profit. The customer and the marketing practitioner have different agendas and objectives, which are usually incompatible. For example, the consumer will diligently seek to satisfy his/her own expectations and demands when making a purchase, while a company will seek to make profits from the exchange that will serve to satisfy shareholder return on investment and employee salary increases. It might be expected that some compromise between these divergent objectives would prevail. (See Figure 1.)

Referring back to the earlier discussion in relation to motivations of entrepreneurs and marketers as presented by the conventional literature, the constant motivation is presented as customer focus. However, the primary motivation in practice is highlighted as profit. In this context it is easy to see that a compromise, certainly on the part of the

entrepreneur, will always exist. But in creating this compromise there is the ever-present inference that a customer focus is inherently a 'half-truth'. Such a circumstance is increasingly being recognised by consumers who are suspicious of company motives during a transaction. What does marketing theory/education need to do? Perhaps a more pragmatic alternative could be adopted. Such an alternative is offered in Table 2.

Consider how such an alternative approach might appear in relation to two important and integral dimensions of marketing, quality and price. Generally, it can be assumed that consumers will seek the best quality at a minimum price, whereas companies will optimise quality and try to maximise price. Where the exchange occurs between these two extreme aims will depend upon the amount of negotiation, the strength of position, the alternatives and choice available, the uniqueness of the product and the depth of desire to trade which exist between a company and its potential customers (Figure 2).

The 'alternative' illustrated in Figure 2 is not too different to marketing in practice. Generally, naturally, and often subconsciously and implicitly, the manager/practitioner focus on the customer is with finding out, manipulating, assessing, exploiting, outflanking, surprising and stimulating. Would it be better to teach this philosophy alongside the missionary doctrine? It would appear to have more 'real world' relevance than current conventional education.

Scenario 3. Marketing Research: 'Scientific' versus 'Natural'

Much of the foundation philosophy of marketing research programmes stems from the rigour required by scientific research. A basic tenet is that if research is to be considered valid it must be carried out with a discipline and rigour which emphasise objectivity and validity, and clearly show cause and effect. As a consequence, much of

the curriculum focuses upon methodologies and how they must be performed 'correctly'. Similarly, an emphasis is placed upon the 'one best method' for a particular piece of research, even to the point of underlining the difficulties and complexities of using more than one method.

Consider for a moment the single aspect of questionnaire construction. Students are instructed on devising appropriate questions which occur in a correct sequence and which have proper lead and follow-on questions. An emphasis is also given to the objectivity, construction and sequence of 'forced-choice' questions and interpretation of answers to open-ended questions. Here again we have a dichotomy between theory and practice. Although not in the strictest sense, market research as described above can be deemed to derive its origins and philosophy from 'scientific' research. But marketing practitioners and particularly entrepreneurs and owner/managers of SMEs do not carry out research in this way. Instead, they take a naturalistic, even artistic approach to gathering market information. 'Artistic' in this sense relates to the notion that a practitioner's research will be uniquely created by the individual and related only to his/her company. Interpretation of findings, gathered haphazardly, spontaneously, opportunistically and personally, will be perceived in terms of significance and meaning, uniquely by that individual. Just like in art, interpretation is individualistically in the 'eyes of the beholder', whether this is the artist who created the piece or the viewer of the piece.

Practitioner market research will use any method at its disposal, regardless of correctness and compatibility. Typically, a practitioner will gather information from a variety of sources and in a variety of ways. The concepts of rigour and validity seldom enter into the mind-frame. The practitioner will have a 'feel' for the value and usefulness of information and its source, and will intuitively accept or reject information as it is gathered. Much of the information gathering (note the use of the term 'information gathering' as opposed to market research) may well be semi-conscious.

How can marketing educators make research more practitioner 'real', whilst not rejecting the characteristics of 'scientific' research, particularly in relation to its rigour and validity? Could educators accommodate the ethos of 'practitioner' research? 'Scientific' research fails to recognise that market information is of a *unique* value to an individual and his/her company. Interpretation of findings is an entirely *personal* thing for the purpose of *understanding*, and this understanding is precisely personal. Equally, could not educators accept the approach of using and/or adapting any research methods with which the researcher is comfortable and which he/she chooses to use out of convenience or expediency?

Conclusions

For many years educators have struggled with teaching management techniques to entrepreneurs. It has long been recognised that entrepreneurs and SME owner/managers do not 'manage' according to the principles and techniques presented by the textbooks and, similarly, it is recognised that they take decisions that stem from their unique characteristics rather than any textbook philosophy. Exactly the same problems confront educators when trying to teach marketing in the SME context. Generally, enlightened educators have 'adapted' marketing techniques to suit the entrepreneurial context. Similarly, teaching approaches have been modified to suit the entrepreneurial learning style and characteristics.

The 'pragmatic alternatives' offered here are intended to take further the innovations that have applied to interface teaching. They stem from the growing debate regarding whether marketing, as it is generally recognised today, is appropriate at all. Increasingly, educators are raising the voice of doubt (Baker, 1993, 1995; Carson, 1995; Brown et al., 1996). Educators cannot ignore any longer the issues raised by the increasingly vociferous body of discontent. Key questions need to be answered: Is marketing being taught correctly, regardless of the learning audience? Are teaching and learning methods still appropriate? Is the subject of marketing as conventionally described still relevant to the issues of today? If the answer is no to each or any of these questions, then what are the alternatives? As educators it is incumbent upon us to find acceptable solutions.

The comments made here are offered in order to raise the debate concerning education approaches to both marketing and entrepreneurship, i.e. the essence of interface marketing education.

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