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Integrated Marketing Communications

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If a brand like Apple supported a campaign about the impact on society of people spending too much time on their laptops and phones, or launched a very basic mobile phone would you think this was strange? This is because Apple has a very clear market positioning based on providing cutting edge technology products, which enhance people's lives. This positioning is evident in everything from its sleek product design to all of its marketing and customer communications across multiple channels. All of their communications are integrated to support their market positioning and brand values. This chapter discusses integrated marketing communications, why it is important for businesses and how to go about delivering an integrated approach. The chapter also looks at the challenges of doing so and the future of integration. It links to the case study on Standard Life plc, which is included in Chapter 11.

Integrated marketing communications is commonly abbreviated to IMC and this chapter will use this shorthand.

Defining integrated marketing communications

The term 'integrated marketing communications' was first coined in the 1990s and captured the need for marketers to co-ordinate their communications better, both across their different audiences or stakeholder groups, and their communications channels and promotional tools. Organisations may have worked with a number of specialist creative agencies or intermediaries for different elements of their promotional mix, including advertising, direct mailings, public relations and sponsorship, while customer service communications were handled by another part of the organisation. IMC is about ensuring that all of these elements are joined up and present a unified positioning and image across all communications – both internal and external.