Management Practices
No. 18

SPECIAL OPERATING AGENCIES: MARKETING

John Dingwall

CANADIAN CENTRE   CENTRE
FOR MANAGEMENT   CANADIEN DE
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A Word from CCMD

This paper is the seventh of a set of ten "issue papers" arising from a large-scale, collaborative research study on Special Operating Agencies (SOAs).

Special Operating Agencies are operational organizations which have a degree of autonomy within existing departmental structures, but which remain accountable to the deputy minister. Operating under a business plan and management framework which set out the results and service levels expected, each SOA negotiates certain financial, personnel, and administrative flexibilities from its parent department and from the Treasury Board. The aim is to give greater flexibility and scope to employees and managers in their operational roles and to encourage innovation and high performance in the delivery of services.

SOAs have functioned as a laboratory or testing-ground for change, and have pioneered such innovations as single operating budgets, person-year decontrol, and business plans. They have substantial experience with developments that are now affecting the rest of the public service.

The SOA initiative was first announced in December 1989, and the first group of SOAs was established in the spring of 1990. By 1993, enough experience with SOAs had been gained to warrant a general study, and the Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD) and Consulting and Audit Canada (CAC) began work on this subject. The scope of the project was expanded as the Office of the Auditor General became involved in response to interest expressed by members of Parliament (the Public Accounts Committee) who were aware of the Executive Agencies initiative in Britain and wanted information on similar developments in Canada.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have a general stocktaking of the SOA initiative, and that this would best be done as a collaborative research project involving the Canadian Centre for Management Development, Consulting and Audit Canada, the Office of the Auditor General, the Treasury Board Secretariat, and the Special Operating Agencies and their host departments. One feature of this collaboration was the development of a common research base which could be accessed by all who were involved in the research, analysis, and writing. The research base consists of interviews with the chief executive officers of the SOAs and the deputy and assistant deputy ministers to whom they reported; sets of documents, including the business plans, framework documents, and annual reports of the SOAs; and detailed profiles and self-assessments from the larger Agencies. This common research base was used in the preparation of *Special Operating Agencies: Taking Stock*, a report prepared by the Office of the Auditor General. It was also used for developing a set of papers focusing on specific issues related to SOAs. Drafts of these papers were taken into account in the preparation of the Auditor General's report.

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

CCMD is delighted to have collaborated in the development of this series on Special Operating Agencies and views this initiative as an excellent example of a joint research partnership. We are grateful to David Wright of Consulting and Audit Canada and to Graeme Waymark for their important contribution to this series of publications and especially wish to thank John Dingwall who prepared this paper on *Marketing* in his role as a faculty member in the CCMD Research Group.

Janet R. Smith *Ralph Heintzman*
Principal *Vice-Principal, Research*

List of SOA Issue Papers

This is the seventh paper in a series on Special Operating Agencies to be published by the Canadian Centre for Management Development in partnership with Consulting and Audit Canada. This is the list of papers to be included in this series:

Overview of the Special Operating Agency Initiative
(J. David Wright and Graeme Waymark)

Special Operating Agencies: Autonomy, Accountability and Performance Measurement
(J. David Wright)

Special Operating Agencies: Issues for Parent Departments and Central Agencies
(Alti Rodal)

Special Operating Agencies: Business Plans and Annual Reports
(Doreen Wilson)

Special Operating Agencies: Financial Issues
(John Dingwall)

Special Operating Agencies: Human Resources Management Issues
(Betty Rogers)

Special Operating Agencies: Marketing
(John Dingwall)

Special Operating Agencies: Audit and Evaluation
(Michael Thomas)

Special Operating Agencies: Management Advisory Boards
(Jane Newcombe)

Institutional Analysis of Recent Machinery-of-Government Reforms in Australia, United Kingdom, France and New Zealand
(Denis St-Martin and Michael Collins)

Further information on this series may be obtained from: David Wright, Principal Consultant, Consulting and Audit Canada, who may be reached at (613) 995-8572.

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Acknowledgements

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I   Introduction

Marketing is important for Special Operating Agencies (SOAs), and indeed for any other government organizations, to the extent that the following conditions hold:

(i)   Dependence on revenues from the marketplace rather than on government appropriations

Some SOAs have been entirely or almost entirely dependent on such revenues. Examples include Consulting and Audit Canada (CAC) and the Canada Communication Group (CCG) before privatization.[1]   Some other SOAs have been dependent on revenues, but with a considerable appropriations component. Two examples are CORCAN which receives a "fee" for the Correctional Service component of its operations, and Training and Development Canada (TDC) which has received appropriations covering losses on courses provided in the regions and in French.[2]   Other SOAs receive most of their budget in the form of an appropriation, which they supplement to a limited degree with revenues. An example of this funding arrangement is the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN).

As appropriations have been reduced across the government in recent years, the degree of dependence on revenues has increased and marketing has therefore become more important. This has been true not only for SOAs, but also for any departments which cover a significant proportion of their costs from revenues.

(ii)   Optional rather than monopoly or mandatory products or services

If clients or customers are free to choose alternative suppliers, then there is a need for marketing: examples include Consulting and Audit Canada and the Canada Communication Group (before privatization). In contrast, marketing is less important for products and services that are mandatory or regulatory and for which the government is a monopoly supplier (for example, the Passport Office). The Canadian Intellectual Property Office (CIPO) is an interesting intermediate case: its services are mandatory for those who wish to take out patents in Canada. However, since an international company may not necessarily choose to take out a patent in Canada, there is an element of choice and a degree of competition among patent offices around the world.

(iii)   Authority to respend revenues

An agency must have the authority to respend the revenues it receives if it is to have an incentive to do marketing. Some SOAs (for example, CAC and CORCAN) are on revolving funds, and can respend all the revenues they receive. Others are on net voting arrangements in

which the appropriation is calculated as an amount net of revenues received. For these, most of the revenues received can usually be credited to their budgets, but windfall revenues may occasionally be lost. (Net voting is done in advance, with limited allowance for unpredictable increases in revenue.)

Before the *Financial Administration Act* (FAA) was revised in 1991, it was difficult to obtain authority for a revolving fund: this required separate legislation. Authority can now be obtained through Treasury Board approval to include the appropriate vote wording in the Estimates.[3]

The general conditions outlined above can apply not only to SOAs but also to other parts of the government (an example is Statistics Canada). As a group, SOAs have a great deal of experience with marketing, and this experience may be instructive for other government departments and agencies looking for ways to supplement their budgets and to offset their costs in a time of restraint and cutbacks.

II   Evolution and Organization of the Marketing Function

Establishment and Development of Marketing Units

Until now, marketing has been relatively underdeveloped in the public sector. SOAs have therefore been faced with the challenge of developing a marketing function and structure for carrying out the necessary tasks and activities associated with their status.

In most cases, the best solution has been to develop a relatively small but high-quality marketing unit which provides guidance and coordination rather than trying to do everything itself or setting itself up in competition with other parts of the organization. For organizations which provide service, marketing should be interactive: it is everyone's responsibility, and not just the concern of the marketing unit. The marketing unit aims at making people aware of the importance of marketing and customer relations, setting general policies, and mobilizing resources for larger-scale initiatives. For this to be successful, it is best to have a small but strategic marketing unit with a strong voice at the management table. This is the standard arrangement in SOAs.[4]

The alternative to developing a marketing unit is to make marketing part of everyone's job. This was the traditional approach at both Consulting and Audit Canada and Training and Development Canada (TDC), an approach that includes the expectation that people at senior levels will be especially active in establishing contacts and doing marketing.

This approach has the advantage of leaving a great deal of room for innovation and creativity on the part of those responsible for the marketing; many different methods will be tried, with varying degrees of success. However, the efforts of isolated individuals may not be coordinated, and teamwork will be sporadic. There will be little or no "cross-marketing" outside the individual areas of specialty, except perhaps by the more senior managers. While many different methods may be tried, there is no guarantee that they will be shared or communicated, or that any learning will occur at the level of the organization. It may be difficult to find resources and materials for large projects and ongoing initiatives. Systems and administrative back-up will be minimal or absent. A number of capabilities (such as market research) will be underdeveloped. Above all, decisions may be taken without full awareness and analysis of the marketing implications over the longer term. For example, during the delayering exercise required by the Budget of 1991, one SOA reduced its marketing capability (along with much of its project management capability) by approximately 30 to 50 percent by eliminating the entire deputy director level. It is difficult to believe that this would have happened if the SOA had been fully aware of the marketing and revenue implications.

Several SOAs (mostly larger ones) have established a distinct marketing unit to address these problems, to provide a strong voice for marketing on the management committee, and to factor marketing considerations into the planning and decision making of the organization. For

this arrangement to be successful, the marketing manager should be at a sufficiently high level to participate effectively in the management committee. In point of fact, the marketing units of most of the larger SOAs, which have either been or are being established, are headed by a Director (Canadian General Standards Board), Director General (CAC), or Vice-President (Government Telecommunications Agency, now the Government Telecommunications and Informatics Service). These units are typically small and strategic, as recommended in the literature on service marketing.[5]

We now look at the experience in building up the marketing units. How difficult was it to find the funds, the people, and the expertise?

Funding

In most cases, there was no particular problem in finding the funding for marketing — providing the SOA had the authority to respend revenues (for example, through a revolving fund) and could therefore justify and fund the marketing unit as an investment that more than covers its costs through increased revenues over the longer term. Where respending authority did not exist (for instance, where the SOA was still waiting for approval of its revolving fund), it was very difficult to find any funds for marketing.[6]

Staffing

One constraint which was mentioned as a problem a number of times, and which particularly bothered those with a private sector background, was the difficulty of staffing marketing positions quickly and of finding a way to classify the positions. There is no specific classification for marketers in the Canadian government. One SOA mentioned, for example, that it had recruited people for marketing positions from the following categories: Administrative Services (AS), Commercial Officer (CO), and Program Manager (PM). Of all these, it seemed that the CO classification best fitted the job but it was by no means an exact or perfect fit. All of these groups (AS, CO, and PM) are large and general, which creates a problem in terms of the Work Force Adjustment Policy: there are many potential candidates to consider from the priority lists.

The administration of the priority lists has caused some difficulty. In some cases, when it appeared that the SOA had worked its way through the list and was clear to staff the position, other names would be added at the last minute, requiring them to consider other candidates and slowing down the process even further. It could take up to six months to staff the position. In contrast, the SOAs' competitors were free to staff very quickly — in a matter of weeks, or even days, in some cases. A further problem in staffing is that good marketers tend to be well paid and to have many options in the private sector. It is difficult for the public sector to offer a high enough salary to attract and keep them. This will become even more difficult as the private sector

comes out of the recession and as public sector salaries stay in deep freeze, with little likelihood of a "catch-up" increase in future years.[7]

One potential solution to the staffing problem is Separate Employer Status (SES). The one SOA which had both a marketing unit and SES indicated that it did not have a separate classification for marketing, but rather had one general classification scheme with 14 levels for the entire organization. Marketing skills, expertise, initiatives, and accomplishments were taken into account in assigning points and determining levels. Thus, while marketing was not a separate classification, it was nevertheless recognized and rewarded.

Turning to the question of staffing at the management level, three types of managers can be identified: those from the private sector; those from the government who have previous marketing experience perhaps acquired from a stint in the private sector; and those from the government who have no previous marketing experience but who have long service and familiarity with the organization.

While it is always difficult to generalize, it does appear that managers with a government background are no less creative or entrepreneurial than those with a private sector background. All of them think in terms of initiatives and opportunities, and in this sense, all of them are marketers. One difference is that managers with extensive private sector experience tend to think more in terms of structures and processes (for example, systematic approaches to product development).

Sales and Customer Interaction

In order to increase sales and to meet the particular needs of a wide range of customers, certain of the larger SOAs have established business centres or account executives. This approach has been most highly developed by the Government Telecommunications and Informatics Service (GTIS), which has 13 account executives. CCG also has several account executives, and CAC now has two who are to cover the Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) market (the home department, and the largest client in most years) and the Quebec region, which is a distinct and special market.

The account executives are, in effect, brokers between the SOA and the customers or clients. It is their job to know the needs of the client as well as they can be known, and to make suggestions and recommendations to clients concerning which packages or configurations of services would be most suited to their needs. It is also their job to ensure that the services are actually provided as promised, and that measures are taken to rectify any mistakes, problems, gaps, or shortfalls.

Previously, much of the marketing to customers was done by specialists with respect to their own products and services. For example in CCG, the providers of photocopying services

would deal directly with the customers on most matters. Now, however, the services have become more diverse and complex, and there is a greater need to customize or tailor them to particular sets of needs. For instance, CCG may have discussions with customers over providing not just photocopying and basic printing services, but a complex set of electronic publishing and related services.

From the viewpoint of the SOA, there is a major competitive advantage in such an arrangement: customers become accustomed to demanding a set of products and services which only the SOA can provide, or for which the SOA has a comparative advantage. This encourages and stimulates a sophisticated and customized demand which is closely related to the core competencies of the SOA.

A further development of this approach is to build partnerships with the customers themselves. For example, customized solutions can be developed which draw on the capabilities of both the customers and the SOA. A case in point would be TDC's work with departmental training units in establishing courses which are closely tailored to the department's requirements. (In point of fact, the consulting portion of TDC's business has shown the greatest growth in revenues.) This approach can help in building client loyalty and in improving the competitive position of the SOA over the longer term. Over time, the capabilities of the SOA become more finely tuned to the needs of the clients, and the partnership arrangement also helps to create a sophisticated customer demand that only the SOA can satisfy.

III   Functions and Activities

Marketing units perform a wide variety of functions and activities, such as the following:

- Providing a focal point for dealing with customers
- Strategy and planning, including pricing and positioning
- Coordination of processes related to marketing
- Alignment of the organization around marketing and customer service
- Market research and organizational learning
- Ensuring excellent customer service.

Each of these was highlighted by one or more marketing directors as being important for the organization generally, and for marketing in particular.

Focal Point

The marketing unit is a coordinating point or nerve centre for setting policy, providing advice, and ensuring cooperation and team work related to all aspects of marketing, including ongoing publicity and promotion and particular initiatives such as participation in trade shows. It provides a focal point for responsibility and accountability: management knows where to turn (in the first instance) if there are problems which must be fixed, or if something needs to be done.

One key function of the marketing unit is to coordinate and set policy for communication and advertising, and to ensure that the organization presents a consistent message and a favourable image — especially in cases where the SOA is dependent on revenue from customers. In general, SOAs have made substantial progress in improving their communications. They have expanded their presence at trade shows and conferences and are visible to a wider range of customers. They have developed new or enhanced means of communicating using new technologies such as computer networks. They have made a great deal of progress in developing "customer-friendly" printed materials which are visually attractive and relatively simple to read and understand. (Previously, many of the materials had the look and feel of technical bulletins.) The marketing units make this information available to their account executives and others who have to answer detailed inquiries from customers; they also put together proposals and packages of services for addressing the particular needs of customers.

SOAs are sensitive to the need to market not just their individual products and services, but also the organization itself as one which can deliver high-quality products and services on a consistent basis. (This is the concept of "branding the company" and building a reputation for service, as practised by firms such as Macdonald's, Disney, and Federal Express.) To do this, it is essential to symbolize both the service and the SOA in some tangible or visible way; this is one reason why it was so important for SOAs to obtain the right to have their own logo and identity.[8] For example, the CCG logo can be found in almost any office in the government, imprinted on various boxes, papers, and documents. Some SOAs also see value in promoting the SOA concept

itself, and in marketing this concept as an indicator of efficiency, quality, and orientation towards customers — all part of a more business-like mode of operation.[9]

Strategy and Planning

Another key function of the marketing unit is to ensure that marketing considerations are taken fully into account when management decisions are made, especially on longer-term and strategic issues. Typically, the marketing unit plays a central role in business planning for SOAs, especially in terms of making the whole process more rigorous, comprehensive, and professional. In developing strategies, SOAs need to address some basic questions relating to: stance and positioning; focus and specialization; competencies; and opportunities, niches, and market segments.

Stance and Positioning

At an early point, an SOA must ask some basic questions concerning its identity, mission, and values. These questions are normally addressed through a "mission and values" exercise, or through a strategic planning exercise that focuses on the fundamentals. Several SOAs mentioned that they had done this, with some success. Ideally, this should be done in connection with developing (or at least revising) the framework document — one more reason for allowing sufficient start-up time for an SOA. Such questions should also be revisited as necessary in developing and updating the business plan.

Marketing units have an important role to play in providing accurate and useful information as input to the process, such as research and analysis concerning market trends and the nature of the competition. Alternative futures and scenarios can also be set out as a means of stimulating thought and discussion on the key issues. To do this, it is necessary to stand back from what the organization is doing now, and to assess it objectively and even critically — to carry out a "reality check."

Focus and Specialization

It is important to select from among the different market opportunities available to an SOA. A single organization cannot do or attempt everything, or it will spread itself too thin. It needs to specialize in order to become a market leader in its selected area(s). At the same time, it cannot specialize too narrowly, or it will not have enough room for flexibility and future development.

Marketing units can play an important role in defining and maintaining the focus of an SOA. They are not interested in pursuing every opportunity and possibility that comes along; that is, they are not interested in scattering the resources of the organization, but rather in establishing focus and coherence, and ensuring that the products and services fit together, generate some sort

of synergy, and are developed as part of a coherent strategy. Good marketers tend to be prudent and cautious in establishing a focus for the organization.[10]

Marketing units can also do much to encourage coherence and to bring together the different initiatives of the organization in a disciplined fashion, drawing on a variety of methodologies such as analysis, review, testing, discussion and strategic fit. The marketing approach encourages entrepreneurship in a systematic and disciplined fashion, with focus and follow-through, and an awareness of the wider implications.

Competencies

In deciding on a focus, an organization should ask itself: What are we really good at, and what do we do very well? What are the areas where we are or can be much better than our competitors? What are our core competencies and capabilities? The areas of focus need to correspond with some of the existing core capabilities — and, in turn, these capabilities should be further developed in light of the focus chosen.

Opportunities, Niches, and Market Segments

Once the above questions and subjects have been addressed, the organization is in a position to identify and pursue more specific possibilities in answer to questions such as: Where and what are the gaps and opportunities in the market? How or where could the clients be served better? How could their needs be better met? In asking such questions, it is helpful to look beyond the traditional product and service lines, and to define the opportunities and competencies in the broader sense, for example, along the lines of "helping people communicate" rather than simply "providing printing services."

In addition to these questions of strategy, marketing units are also involved in the management of: market-related processes; alignment, systems, and culture; market research and organizational learning; and the improvement of customer service.

Market-Related Processes

One useful function of the marketing unit is to help to establish, coordinate, and improve the processes of the organization that relate to marketing, or which have an important bearing on market position and competitiveness. In particular, the marketing unit can help to develop a systematic and professional approach to business planning, product/service development, and the formulation of business cases for important decisions and investments. It need not and should not do all of these things itself, but should ensure that the organization as a whole is taking effective and coordinated action in such areas. At the same time, it must ensure that the processes do not become too complex, cumbersome, elaborate, and confining. For instance, it should avoid having

too many market tests and doing too much market research (too much analysis). This is one reason for keeping the marketing unit small.

Marketing units can play a key role in establishing and improving the processes for developing products and services, especially in the market segments and niches being targeted by the SOA and in areas where no one else has an equal or higher degree of competence.

First, there needs to be a way of generating and collecting ideas for new or improved products and services, for example, by taking suggestions seriously and ensuring that there are effective incentives and rewards for putting them forward. Often, however, the problem is not a shortage of ideas, initiatives, and possibilities; rather, it is to select from among the many which could be brought to market, to predict their likely success in the marketplace, and to ensure that they are consistent with the basic strategy and direction of the organization. This means applying a business case test, based on careful and thorough analysis, and backed up by pre-testing, review, and evaluation.

Second, marketing units need to ensure coordination, coherence, and consistency among the various products and services of the SOA. This implies a degree of horizontal and cross-functional teamwork and the use of portfolio and life-cycle strategies for combining the products and services in the most profitable ways. It involves a careful review of existing products and services to see which might be curtailed, downplayed, or discontinued in order to leave room for newer ones.

Finally, it is important to ensure follow-through. Much of this work is done by the line divisions or branches of the organization, but there must be cooperation between the different functions and units, which, in turn, is tuned to the needs of customers and clients. The marketing unit has an interest in making certain that this happens and that momentum is maintained in actually marketing and promoting the product or service — by ensuring, for example, that adequate and timely promotional material is available.

Alignment, Systems, and Culture

Another important task of the marketing unit is to encourage marketing throughout the organization, by developing a marketing consciousness — that is, by educating and exhorting everyone to be a marketer, with a view to promoting the "alignment" of the organization's culture, systems, and structures in support of marketing. This needs to be done through communications (for example, presentations and briefings) which highlight the importance of service and marketing and which point out the need for revenues. These communications should reach not only managers but also large numbers of staff.

The marketing unit can also play a key role in preparing or coordinating marketing materials such as brochures and catalogues which are useful not only for customers, but for

employees who wish to gain a better concept and appreciation of the products and services of the organization.[11] Marketing units can also make staff across the organization aware of feedback from customers and clients, and can ensure that there are regular channels for this.[12]

In some organizations, the established expectation is that marketing is part of the job — part of the role definition. The expectation is that the higher the level of your job and the better you do your job, the more you will be doing marketing, either directly in terms of client contacts, or indirectly in terms of building the reputation of the organization. This, for example, is ingrained in the culture of Consulting and Audit Canada.

Market Research and Organizational Learning

Market research involves coordinating and carrying out environmental scanning, along with an analysis of market trends and developments and an awareness of what the competitors are doing and what their strategies are.

Some of this can be done by the marketing unit itself, but in most cases the marketing unit is small and cannot do everything. However, it can try to ensure that the necessary infrastructure and support systems are there to encourage this scanning and learning. For example, the marketing unit may act as a focal point and a sponsor/coordinator for developing client tracking systems and for adapting financial systems to provide useful information in sales and clients.

Systems Development

Most SOAs are knowledge-intensive in the sense that knowledge is an important component of the service, or else that it constitutes a basis for providing the service. Many of the new and enhanced products and services from SOAs are further developments or spin-offs from a base of knowledge and technology that has been accumulated over a long period of time. The key ingredients are the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of their people. The marketing unit has an inherent interest in identifying the resources of the organization and in mobilizing and focusing them to meet the needs and requirements of the clients.

One way of doing this is through the development of "knowledge management" and "corporate memory" systems which help in improving the coordination between units in the organization, enhancing customer service, and building partnerships and "learning networks" both inside and outside the organization. These systems help to identify the knowledge-related capabilities and resources of the organization and to bring these to bear in responding to the needs of clients and customers. For example, these systems can be useful in supporting account executives or a business centre in answering questions such as: Is there anyone in your organization who knows about or who can help with this? They can also be helpful in developing bids and contract proposals.

While these types of systems can, in principle, be very useful, they can only work if they are kept consistently up-to-date and if significant resources are put into them. Above all, they need a focal point and a "champion" — someone, or some unit, to make a solid business case for them, to ensure that the necessary resources are available, and to put them to good use, thereby setting the example for the rest of the organization. On all these counts, the marketing unit can play a key role.[13]

Ideally, marketing should be everyone's responsibility (with back-up and support from the marketing unit). People should be concerned not only with marketing for their own services, but also with those of other units (cross-selling). This implies an awareness of the dealings clients have had with other parts of the organization. It also requires a good base of knowledge and materials to provide to the clients. For example, there must be a basic inventory of products and services and an up-to-date list of who is providing these. This information should be current in all respects, and should be easily and quickly accessible. Some SOAs have made considerable progress along these lines. One example is GTA (now GTIS), which has developed a client tracking system for the use of its account managers along with a current set of reference materials and publicity brochures concerning its lines of service.

Systems Coordination

Many benefits can be achieved if the various systems are coordinated or integrated. For example, the financial system can be adapted to provide information on sales trends, client profiles and client transactions and contacts (such as contracts, payments, and sales). This is one reason why SOAs should have their own financial system, or at least a very strong voice in the choice and operation of the departmental system.

Another useful linkage is through an EIS (Executive Information System), in which information concerning clients, products, services, and markets can be viewed in the context of information on costs, revenues, staff levels, and so on, using a graphical interface that is intuitively understandable. So far, such systems have been expensive on a per-unit basis, making them costly for smaller organizations and limiting the extent to which they can be used by front-line service providers. However, the costs are now coming down as the systems are beginning to reach a mass market and as there is more competition between the providers. In EIS and business intelligence tools, the "front end" systems run on desktop machines (usually Windows PCs) which are networked to larger machines containing storehouses of corporate data. As the costs come down, or as the price/performance ratio improves, more people will be able to accumulate and exchange information through EIS or equivalent systems.[14]

Marketing and Training

Marketing can also be enhanced by linking it to training and development, for example, by sending employees to conferences and trade shows where they can establish a wide range of

useful contacts. For some SOAs, such as the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) or the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), conference attendance is considered to be important on both counts: it encourages and enables employees to see themselves as marketers by putting them in touch with potential customers and by providing some recognition, rewards, and incentives. At the same time, it is important to ensure that there is effective follow-through by organizing debriefing and information sessions where people share and discuss what they have learned from such events, and what initiatives have been set in motion. For example, such sessions are organized frequently at CHIN. A related method is to use "learning networks" on particular subjects of interest, where the participants regularly report back (for example, through a roundtable) on the conferences and trade shows they have attended. These networks are more effective if managers and not just the employees are involved.

Incentives and Rewards

In most cases, the incentives are heavily weighted towards doing one's own marketing rather than helping others with theirs. Outside the marketing unit, marketing tends to be done by individuals and units that focus on their own marketing. There is still not much incentive for marketing across organizational boundaries. Indeed, there are incentives not to do so: if people are appraised on their individual performance in competition with others across the organization, then their colleagues are also their competitors.

Ideally, there should be incentives for shared marketing. (To use an analogy from hockey, the measurement system needs to award points for an assist as well as a goal.) However, SOA officials indicated that this problem was not yet solved; it would be a challenge for the future. One potential solution now emerging is the development of teams or consortia to provide integrated services drawn together from units across the organization and coordinated or provided by cross-functional teams. This approach, for example, was being followed by the Canada Communication Group for its more customized and knowledge-intensive services.

Customer Service

The most effective way of marketing services, including government services, is through a reputation for excellent service, conveyed by word of mouth. Exemplary service is the best sales device. In contrast, if the quality is low it will be difficult to market the service, and any success in doing so will be only temporary, as customers become disillusioned with the quality and tell others about it.

Marketing can make a contribution to service quality, in areas such as customer contacts and knowledge; service standards; and service culture and employee involvement.

Customer Contacts and Knowledge

Since quality is defined in terms of meeting the expectations of the customers, it is essential to know what these expectations are. To this end, the marketing unit provides a focal point for client surveys, analyses of markets, and client tracking systems. It is therefore important to ensure that the necessary systems, such as customer databases with an accurate and up-to-date set of addresses and customer profiles, are in place.

SOAs with marketing units typically have recently completed client surveys. There is a mixed record on client tracking systems. Some (notably GTA, now GTIS) put substantial effort into establishing a client tracking system, while others were only considering this or were in the early stages of putting a system in place. Relatively little has been done by SOAs to ensure a linkage between the financial management system and the marketing system.

In addition to research, analysis, and tracking, there is a need for intuition, understanding, and judgment. It is essential to have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the different types of customers and market segments; some of the best marketers excel in this. This type of understanding requires frequent personal contact and feedback from customers on a wide range of issues — one of the roles of a business centre or unit of account executives.

Service Standards

To have an impact on service, the knowledge gained from frequent contact with customers must be fed back into the process of planning, developing, and improving service standards. In turn, service standards work best when they are set on the basis of an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the customers (backed up by research) and also an excellent knowledge of the organization itself, including a sense of what levels of service are realistic and feasible on a consistent basis. This also requires a thorough knowledge of the competitors and the levels of service which they are offering. Where are the areas of comparative advantage for the SOA? How can the lead be widened or the gap be narrowed through setting more challenging (but still realistic) service targets?

The marketing unit is in an excellent position to coordinate the setting of service standards and the monitoring of progress towards meeting them, as indicated in the reactions and responses of the customers.

Service Culture and Employee Involvement

One of the most effective ways to improve service is to build a service culture and to promote a high level of "service consciousness." A number of SOAs (and their CEOs) have made it a priority to promote and develop a service culture. One example of this is the Canada Communication Group, which has invested heavily in training for service quality, and which has

established a Customer Service Council, comprising employees from all levels who are "service leaders" in their own lines of work. This Council is run by the employees themselves, and not by management. The Council frequently meets with the CEO and puts forward suggestions for service improvement.[15]

IV   Problems and Strategies

This chapter discusses some of the challenges and problems of marketing in the public sector and some of the approaches and strategies which SOAs have followed. In their marketing, SOAs are affected by: concerns over accountability, legitimacy, and cost; rules, regulations, and constraints; the question of competition with the private sector; and mission, mandate, and public purpose.

Accountability, Legitimacy, and Cost

Traditionally, there has been some suspicion of marketing in the public sector, with concerns over costs, possible influence/manipulation, and the question of the extent to which marketing is really necessary or indeed a legitimate activity for the public sector. There is always a lingering suspicion that marketing is meant to influence the customers and clients — and ultimately, in some fashion, the public and the politicians. There is considerable suspicion of any image-building or public relations activities, and concern over possible unfavourable publicity or political embarrassment because of these activities.

At the same time, there is also a widespread feeling that marketing is expensive and unnecessary, that it is a frill or a luxury, and that its costs should be carefully controlled. There is a long tradition in the public service of subjecting such costs to special controls. Over the past several years, we have seen (in addition to general operating budget reductions) controls such as the Administrative Restraint Measures[16] and the no-frills publishing policy,[17] both of which had an impact on marketing in the government.

All of this adds up to high level of scrutiny, or marketing in a fish bowl. It means that marketers in the public sector must be prudent and careful, and must keep a low profile. They must be careful not to indulge in expensive materials, promotions or campaigns — nothing glitzy or glossy. One approach is to keep the marketing relatively low profile, with the emphasis on providing useful information in forms that are readily understood by clients and well adapted to their needs. This was, in fact, the low-key and economical approach to marketing of SOAs reviewed in this study.

The importance of finding out what the needs of the clients are and then specifically targeting the materials and the information to meet these needs should be emphasized here, and is one more reason for making use of business centres and account executives who can become very familiar with their particular clients and who can put together packages of services to meet these needs.[18] A related approach is to rely heavily on reputational marketing ("word of mouth"), backed up by excellent service, which markets itself.

Rules, Regulations, and Constraints

Some of the most onerous rules and constraints of working in the government have been set aside or eliminated in recent reform efforts. These initiatives include operating budgets, person-year decontrol, and revenue respending authority. SOAs were the first to receive approval for operating budgets and person-year decontrol: these flexibilities were later extended across the government. SOAs have also led the way in receiving authority for revenue respending: this too is being extended more widely across the government. As such flexibilities have been made generally available, Special Operating Agencies have become less special. At the same time, there are some residual inflexibilities which can still pose a problem. These are particularly noticeable on the personnel side, where it can be difficult to offer effective incentives and to recruit and retain qualified marketing personnel.

One important problem is the ricochet effect of expenditure reductions across the government which has an impact on those SOAs that sell products and services to government clients. At the present time, the government market is declining. The fact that some SOAs are in a position of having to compete with the private sector in this market reduces the actual and potential revenues of SOAs that serve government clients.

In some cases, SOAs have certain freedoms and flexibilities which are not shared widely across the system. For example, SOAs on revolving funds do not need to worry about fiscal year considerations, since they are on accrual accounting, where the debits and credits are booked at the time of the transaction. From the viewpoint of most client agencies and departments, the situation is different: funds which are not spent during the fiscal year, and which exceed the limit for carry-over into the next fiscal year, are lapsed and lost. In the past, there were some instances of departments and agencies circumventing this provision by pre-paying at the end of one fiscal year for goods and services to be received in part in the following fiscal year — that is, to "bank" otherwise lapsing funds in the revolving fund of an SOA, or to provide a partial product which met the March 31 deadline, with delivery on the rest of the contract in the next fiscal year. The "banking" of lapsing funds created controversy and embarrassment when it came to light. SOAs are now held to a strict standard, and they take considerable care to avoid a recurrence of such problems.

In theory, SOAs are expected to act more like businesses — to be flexible and entrepreneurial. On the other hand, they must obey government rules, which affect them and their clients. Also, those SOAs which serve government clients must be careful in their pursuit of shrinking government markets. So far, not all of the rules and boundaries have been worked out, and it may take some experience and some "case law" to do so.

The Competition Question

Concern over competition with the private sector is perhaps the biggest constraint on marketing in SOAs. In considerable part the concern is ideological, reflecting the view that money-earning activities should be performed by the private sector and that there is no need for government involvement in such cases. In this perspective, such activities should be transferred to the private sector, as long as there is a competitive market for them.

Concerns over competition with the private sector tend to focus particularly on the more profitable activities and services. In some cases, the concerns may be expressed publicly by the private sector, for example, in the press and in letters to the minister. In other cases, there may have been until now few public criticisms, but the SOA may anticipate a potential problem and refrain from competing in a more profitable area on that account.[19] As a result, SOAs might resort to focusing on low-margin activities and services, with the higher-margin ones being left to the private sector. What is left may not be entirely viable: areas that are abandoned or avoided could be those which the SOA had counted on the most.

One approach to the problem of competition with the private sector is to avoid being too aggressive in marketing and to engage in defensive or status quo marketing which is designed to hold on to the markets which the SOA already has rather than expanding substantially into new markets which may be held by the private sector. The result is a fairly low-key approach to marketing (in comparison with the private sector), in which the task is seen as one of "providing information" concerning the service, but not as one of marketing it aggressively.

For some SOAs, one convenient solution to the competition problem is to form partnerships with the private sector, and to work cooperatively to develop new market opportunities.[20] Such partnerships have a number of advantages. In addition to leveraging and extending the capabilities of the organization, they can help to solve (or at least to mitigate) the "competition problem" by working with private firms and helping to form constituencies and alliances in the private sector. This approach, however, does not solve the competition problem altogether. There is always the possibility that some firms will complain that they were left out, or that their private sector competitors gained an unfair advantage through their association with a government organization. This argues for opening the partnerships to a wide participation, based on general criteria that are set out in advance. Indeed, some SOAs (notably Surveys and Mapping — a new SOA) have gone to considerable lengths to ensure that the partnerships are as open as possible, and that no one has the inside track. At Surveys and Mapping, the emphasis is on cooperation in seeking international contracts for the private sector. It has been careful to define its role as being primarily facilitative, aimed at establishing contacts and credibility and drawing together the competencies and consortia needed for success in landing international contracts for Canadian firms.

At first sight, it might appear that SOAs which have an appropriations component are more able to engage in subsidized competition, to the detriment of the private sector. However, as a general rule, SOAs are all too aware of the political dangers of competition and are cautious about competing too vigorously — unless they have no choice but to compete in order to meet their bottom-line targets. The more an SOA is subsidized by an appropriation, the less it has to compete with the private sector; the more it is on its own, the more it must compete. Where the SOA receives an appropriation and is not entirely revenue-dependent, the appropriations component covers a wider public purpose and provides some degree of security and stability which enables the SOA to take a more cooperative approach towards the private sector.

In point of fact, SOAs with an appropriations component to their funding may be more typical of future SOAs, since the opportunities for complete (or almost complete) cost recovery in the government are limited. Future SOAs are more likely to be based on a mix of cost recovery and appropriations. The only problem with this arrangement is that appropriations are being reduced as part of the general expenditure reductions or through Program Review, which places more pressure on SOAs to market their products or services and to make up the difference through revenues; this means that they are less likely to be in a position to take a cooperative, partnership approach with the private sector. They are under more pressure to compete, and to earn more revenues.

In those relatively few cases where the SOA is in fact completely revenue-dependent, there may be less scope for such partnership and cooperation, especially when it is a question of serving a government market which is declining because of general expenditure reductions and cutbacks. This would be the case for SOAs such as CCG and CAC, and indeed for any revenue-dependent SOA which is facing potential or actual financial difficulty.

As markets are selected and avoided according to opportunities, public purposes, and governmental constraints, there are some geographical implications: on the one hand, this leads to a decreased regional presence; on the other, it leads to an increased international presence.

Regional Considerations

The competition problem has the effect of diminishing the regional presence of SOAs, for two reasons. First, the inability to pursue the most profitable products and services means that they do not have the revenues and resources to establish or sustain a regional presence.[21] Second, the federal market in the regions is relatively limited, and it may not be profitable to serve only this market. It would be profitable, or nearly so, if the SOA could serve the private sector and other levels of government within the regions, but without these other markets, the regional presence may not be viable.

In point of fact, SOAs have been diminishing (or refraining from expanding) their regional presence recently, both for the reasons just mentioned and because of general budgetary

stringency and the decline of the government market. Consulting and Audit Canada has made reductions in the regions; Training and Development Canada has experienced losses on its regional operations; and the Canadian General Standards Board has had to postpone its plans for an expanded set of regional offices.

If regional offices are curtailed for the above reasons, then it becomes all the more important to deliver services through travel, communications, and networking — to the extent that these are reasonable substitutes. In this regard, the relaxation of certain travel restrictions such as CEO authority to approve business-class travel has been helpful.

International Market

Given the political sensitivities involved in competition in Canadian markets (particularly in the more profitable lines of business), it makes sense for SOAs to pursue the international market. Several have done so, at least to a limited extent, while others are considering it. The international market can be quite significant. For example, one SOA estimated that it accounted for close to 15 percent of its business.

This is certainly one solution to the competition problem. It would be difficult for private sector competitors in other countries to complain effectively to the Canadian government that an agency of the Canadian government was taking away business from them. On the other hand, if there were Canadian firms which felt that they had some kind of ownership or "lock" on this market, then they could in theory complain about losing business to an SOA, but in practice would probably have difficulty proving injury.[22]

While there are few political impediments to expansion in the international market, the question must still be asked whether it makes economic and strategic sense for an SOA to expand internationally. Such expansion can be costly, especially in terms of management time. In point of fact, some marketing managers were cautious and even sceptical about the international market. Apart from the question of the time and effort involved, they wondered how soon these markets would become profitable and how stable and consistent the revenues would be. Their preference was to enter these markets cautiously, ensuring that their efforts were well focused and relevant to building a solid set of competencies that would withstand competition over the longer term.

One important reason for entering the international market and staying there over the long term is to build up and strengthen a world-class set of competencies in the SOA. Another consideration is that revenues from the international market can help in defraying the costs of capital and product development (in spreading the fixed costs), particularly in cases where Canadian clients are served free of charge while international clients are charged for the services.

The best combination occurs when an SOA enters the international market in pursuit of its Canadian mandate, and where the international market complements the fundamental mission and mandate of the SOA. This is essentially the case for Geomatics Canada, which participates with Canadian companies in putting together consortia for the international market.

In some cases, the international market figures prominently in the basic mandate of the SOA. This is certainly true for the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), which seeks to increase the marketability of Canadian grains. Interestingly enough, one of the key marketing strengths of the CGC (in addition to its reputation for quality) is its in-depth knowledge of grain, through its Grain Research Laboratory. This is particularly important for selling to the Japanese market, where there are a number of special requirements and where the buyers appreciate working with the Grain Research Laboratory.

In the future, with increasing globalization, it will be more and more necessary for SOAs to move into the international market in order to make fuller use of their assets, develop their capabilities, and stay current and up-to-date, with a view to providing "world class" service which equals or exceeds that provided anywhere else. The best assurance that they rank with the best will come if Canadian services are being sold in competition with those of other countries. Another advantage of the international market is that it provides access to technology, contacts, feedback, and experience which can be used in further developing the service and in providing the funds and revenues needed to do so.

If some SOAs succeed in establishing a significant presence in the international market, there may be spillover effects into the Canadian market. For instance, if an SOA builds up a service which is respected and sought after in the international market, why can it not market that service more widely in Canada? If an SOA were to do business with clients just across the border in the U.S.A., then why should it be restricted from selling to the same types of clients on this side of the border?

Mission, Mandate, and Public Purpose

SOAs are constrained in their marketing activities by the nature of their mission and mandate. They cannot just serve any market they please, nor can they simply pursue the most profitable opportunities or the ones that best correspond to their core competencies. They must fulfil their mandates, which normally will be specified by their framework documents (approved by Treasury Board) and any relevant legislation. Marketing considerations are not always easy to reconcile with the mission and mandate, and a balance must be struck. Thus, a key question is the extent to which marketing considerations may draw the SOA away both from the primary clientele which it is supposed to be serving and from the products and services which it is mandated to provide.

A number of SOAs are in the position of serving a core clientele which do not pay, and a peripheral or optional clientele which do pay, and which can be an important source of revenues.[23] One might wonder whether, in an environment of budgetary stringency, attention would shift to the paying clients. Would priority be given to the paying or the non-paying clients? On the one hand, one could argue that an SOA exists primarily for the purpose of serving the non-paying "core clients," as a matter of policy. On the other hand, one could argue that by serving the paying clients now, an SOA can build up capabilities, such as a better technological infrastructure, that will help it serve its core clientele better in the future. The SOAs in this study made an effort to find an appropriate balance. The main attention was, in fact, given to their core clients, while the optional clients and services were seen as a way of subsidizing the core clients. The catch phrase for this practice is "using the outside to subsidize the inside."[24]

The SOAs were certainly well aware of the conflicts and tensions and were concerned to keep a balance. They were highly attuned to the political implications of any slippages in services to their core clients, and were conscious of their potential vulnerabilities on this score. In general they saw the non-core products and services as sidelines, or "moonlighting," to earn extra revenues to stay viable: so far, these have done more to support than to supplant the core activities and services.

There is, however, the question of long-run drift: to the extent that they are revenue-dependent, SOAs may gradually gravitate towards the markets and services that are the most profitable. This should be tempered by the recognition that most SOAs are concerned more with viability than with profitability, since SOAs are not allowed to earn a consistent profit or to retain a share of the proceeds.[25] Given that their main concern is to ensure viability rather than to maximize profits, it is difficult to say that SOAs in general are driven away from their mandates by the need to make a profit. Perhaps the main force impelling SOAs into revenue-increasing activities is the lack of resources for investment and the trend towards continued reductions in their appropriations. If an SOA wishes to develop new initiatives and new capabilities, then it needs to get its "stake" from its revenues.

For optional, revenue-dependent SOAs which must cover all of their costs from their revolving funds, the expectation has always been (and still is) that they would focus on activities which were economically viable, even if this means dropping certain lines of business. For them, a key question is whether they will continue with activities which have a general benefit and a public purpose, or whether they will focus increasingly on the products and services which are more viable or profitable. For example, should Consulting and Audit Canada focus its consulting assignments more on cash management and less on public service reform? Should it continue to publish *Optimum*, even though there are net costs in doing so?

In the future, such Agencies may begin to emphasize products and services which are more remunerative, rather than those more closely related to their original mandates — and their activities may be more scattered and fragmented as they pursue the opportunities of the moment.

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

They may also become reluctant to pursue those public purposes which are costly or unprofitable. Over time, this can dilute the public purpose component of the Agency and raise questions about why it should remain in government rather than being privatized. It is the public purpose activities which give the SOA its distinctive value-added character.[26]

Despite these trends and pressures, most SOAs do what they can to maintain their sense of public purpose, even to the point of subsidizing their appropriations component from their revolving funds.[27] A case in point is the Government Telecommunications Agency (GTA, now GTIS),[28] which has consistently pursued a role of providing an "architect function" for government telecommunications and informatics, despite the fact that it has to cover the related costs from its revolving fund.[29]

Prices and Revenues

Pricing policies raise some interesting questions related to the mission and mandate of SOAs. In general, what marketing adds to pricing is strategy. It puts pricing into the wider context of factors such as competition and product management.

The current government policy on pricing does not take into account the complexities of market-related factors. The policy is one of full cost recovery, as set out in the Treasury Board policy on cost recovery and the *Guide to the Costing of Outputs*. The principle is that the full costs will be covered, including the costs of overhead items. In principle, there is to be no cross-subsidization.

If this policy were followed rigorously in all cases, it would remove all elements of strategy from the prices charged by SOAs. For example, in product portfolio management, there is considerable cross-subsidization between product lines as organizations seek the right mix of products for the longer term, and as revenues from existing products are used to cover the costs of new products and enhancements.

In addition, with the requirement to show a positive bottom line, there is a strong incentive for SOAs to charge more than full cost recovery in cases where the market will easily and reasonably bear more, and where there is a prevailing market rate. This condition can occur not only for optional services but also (in some cases) for mandatory services. A particularly interesting example is the Canadian Intellectual Property Office (CIPO). One could argue that the prevailing market rate is the international rate charged for patents and trademarks, and that there would be little benefit to Canada in reducing its rates below those prevailing internationally, given that 95 percent of the clients are foreign companies. Instead, it could be of greater benefit to use some of the revenues to provide speedier service or to develop enhanced services to make better use of the information contained in CIPO's databases.

One solution to the problem of reconciling market strategy with full-cost pricing is to take a flexible view of what is the true cost over the longer term. For example, the true long-term cost is difficult to calculate for knowledge-based products and services. How does one actually value the knowledge contained in them? How much confidence can we have in any particular method of valuation? How much contribution to the service was made by past investment in the relevant knowledge? How much more investment will need to be made in order to ensure that the service is kept up-to-date? In fact, many of the products (and especially the new products and services) provided by SOAs do have a significant knowledge component.

In private sector organizations, a key goal of marketing is to sell products and services for more than full cost, that is, to make a profit. If an SOA with a similar cost structure simply charges full cost recovery without building in a profit margin or a return on capital, then its prices will be below those of its private sector competitors.[30] In this situation, it would make sense for the SOA also to build in a profit margin (or something equivalent), if only to keep its private sector competitors in business — but at the same time, to keep prices low enough so that additional competitors will not be attracted to the market.

While the policy, at least in theory, is that SOAs should simply charge full cost recovery, the practice is that they are free to set their own rates for optional products and that they can take market factors into account. The framework documents give optional, non-regulatory SOAs the freedom to set their own rates — a very important flexibility indeed.

One interesting question that arises more and more frequently is whether enhanced or expedited service should be provided as an option for those who are willing to pay for it. Should different classes and levels of service be provided if the market calls for it? If the service is optional, if there are alternative service providers, and if the SOA is obligated to show a positive bottom line, then the answer clearly would be yes.

However, if the service is mandatory or regulatory, then this raises the issue of equity.[31] The most interesting case arises when the basic service is provided at the same price for everyone, but with enhancements available for those who are willing to pay. This raises the question of how one defines what the basic service is, and how optional or necessary the enhancements are. It could also be argued that the solution is not to provide expedited service for those who are willing to pay extra (especially where the services are mandatory or regulatory), but that the service should be improved for everybody to a level which will be considered good or excellent by most customers. This is, in fact, the approach being followed by the Passport Office: through its empowerment initiative and its Technology Enhancement Plan, it aims to speed up service considerably.

V   Conclusions and Comments

This chapter provides a discussion of the following issues relating to marketing in the government context: the general role and context of marketing in government; disadvantages and problems; the contributions of marketing; and the role of marketing units in avoiding problems and realizing benefits related to marketing and revenue generation.

The General Role and Context of Marketing in Government

As noted earlier, marketing has grown in importance, not just in SOAs but in government departments and agencies more generally. This is attributable in large measure to the need to replace declining budgetary appropriations with revenues from the marketplace. At the same time, it has become easier, or at least more straightforward, to obtain authority for respending revenues in the form of net-voting or revolving funds.[32]

While SOAs are at the leading edge of marketing in government, other departments and agencies are also becoming more involved in marketing. The general trend is that the basic conditions underlying marketing in SOAs (respending authority, optionality, and revenue dependency) are now more present in government organizations as a result of Program Review, with the result that over time, marketing is likely to become more important across the government generally.

At the same time, the government has also been promoting, as a high priority, the concept of customer orientation and service quality.[33] Essentially, these initiatives are marketing oriented: the main point of marketing is to focus on the customer and to align everything around service to the customer. For example, decisions on the publication of service standards involve decisions on how to advertise the services of a department or agency.[34]

With marketing becoming more important, it is appropriate to consider both the problems and the benefits it produces. We will look at these in turn, and then consider the role of marketing units in terms of avoiding the problems and realizing the benefits.

Problems and Disadvantages

Depending on one's perspective, the following problems and disadvantages can be identified with marketing in the government context: controlling the size of government; scattered focus; accountability; and manipulation and undue influence.

Controlling the Size of Government

If one believes that government should be kept as small as possible, then marketing can be a problem in that the revenues it generates can be used to build up and sustain a larger government. This has been the view of those in competition with SOAs, especially those

competing with the Canada Communication Group (which has now been mostly privatized). In this perspective, anything that can be done by the private sector should be done by the private sector: any revenue-generating activities which are self-sufficient or profitable should be transferred to the private sector, even if this means separating them from other activities.

Scattered Focus

As noted earlier, one problem with marketing and revenue generation is that they can take attention away from the basic mission and mandate of an SOA and from the core customers (who are often non-paying). The attention of the organization can be diverted in different directions which are not necessarily consistent or mutually self-supporting. This point holds particularly true for the international market, which is often peripheral to the mandate of an SOA.

Accountability

In a purely marketing approach, the focus is on the clients or customers, and the highest priority is placed on serving their needs and wants. This does not necessarily match with the more general public purposes to be served by an agency, nor does it always fit with government-wide rules — both of which are defined from the political level as a matter of policy and legislation. In the view of critics, there may be a tendency to pursue revenues at the expense of public purposes, and to bend the rules to please clients and gain business. A case in point would be the controversy over the use of SOA revolving funds for "banking" departmental funds which would otherwise lapse at the end of the fiscal year.

Manipulation and Undue Influence

Some observers (and critics) argue that marketing encourages customers to buy what they do not need, and to develop needs that they had never anticipated. The same suspicions can be directed at government marketing, with the added concern that the salutary effects of competition are often absent or minimal, or that government agencies somehow have an inside track or an unfair advantage.[35]

Contributions of Marketing

The primary contributions of marketing are to generate revenues through sales and to ensure a strong competitive position in the marketplace. This, in turn, can help with compensating for lower appropriations; developing and utilizing organizational assets; promoting organizational learning and developing core capabilities; improving service quality; increasing employee motivation; and developing new and enhanced products and services.

Compensating for Lower Appropriations

With continuing reductions in appropriations, budgets are being stretched to the point where it is difficult to maintain program integrity and especially difficult to undertake any new initiatives. Revenues from the marketplace can help in these respects.

Developing and Utilizing Organizational Assets

Revenues from the marketplace are useful in maintaining and developing an organization and in making more use of the assets that have been built up through years of investment. Included among these assets are employees, equipment and accumulated knowledge. Marketing and revenue generation enable this investment to be maintained and provide an opportunity to build upon these assets.

Organizational Learning and Core Capabilities

A marketing orientation, and the revenues it produces, provide both the motivation and the wherewithal for organizational learning that is customer focused. Ideally, this should in turn be concentrated on the core capabilities of the organization, those in which it has a comparative advantage over others or which it must develop in pursuit of its mandate.

Service Quality

The best way to secure one's competitive position is through a level and standard of service quality that cannot readily be matched by others. Marketing provides the incentives, the focus, and the revenues for improving service quality.

Employee Motivation

In marketing, one important task is to market the organization to its own employees: they are the ones who have to deliver the services to the clients and they should believe in what they are doing. In addition, a strong market orientation and the prospect of increased revenues can also strengthen employee motivation.

In a number of SOAs, one can readily observe a style of "positive thinking" and "possibility thinking" which is less common elsewhere in the public service these days. In speaking with SOA staff who are involved in marketing — and who have the authority to respend revenues from the marketplace — one often notices a sense of excitement and anticipation over the possibilities for enhancing the products and services of the organization and for developing the organization itself. This enthusiasm contrasts with the more sombre attitudes which are often found elsewhere in the public service at a time of continuing cutbacks.

New and Enhanced Products and Services

A number of new and enhanced products and services had been put in place or were being developed or considered by the SOAs reviewed in this study. In most cases, these had a substantial knowledge or technology component, and were spin-offs from or further developments of technologies and infrastructures that the SOAs had built up over time.

One example is the Technology Enhancement Plan of the Passport Office. In order to improve service, lower costs, and improve security, the Passport Office is automating its systems and making use of new imaging technology. While the main objective is to improve passport issuance, the system can be adapted to generate "by-products" or "spin-offs" which can be sold on an optional basis. For instance, once the system is in place, it would not be difficult to produce an identity card (for convenience in crossing the U.S. border) which could be sold for a modest price and a substantial profit.

Another example would be the CD-ROMs produced by the Canadian Heritage Information Network. The main business of CHIN is to provide inventory and database management services to Canadian museums, free of charge, to assist them in maintaining their collections and to build up a national database of museum collections. One logical extension of this service is to work together with the museums and private sector technology firms to produce CD-ROMs which feature items from the museum collections and can be distributed both for educational purposes and for generating revenues for all the partners in the project.[36]

Another approach is to enhance core products and services in order to reduce their costs and increase their value to clients. For example, the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) is using electronic publishing both to reduce the distribution costs of its standards and to make them available in a form more useful to clients.

A further possibility is to extend the scope of the core products themselves. For example, the Canadian Intellectual Property Office (CIPO) has a huge paper-based repository of patent and trademark information which is now being automated. As this is done, it becomes more feasible to use the database for a wider range of purposes, such as for making technology more quickly available to Canadian companies and for analysing technology trends.

What the SOA mechanism offers in these cases is a way of utilizing and leveraging the federal government's accumulated investment in information technology and knowledge. This fits in well with the Treasury Board's *Blueprint For Renewing Government Services Using Information Technology*.

Role of Marketing Units

In general terms, the role of marketing units is to maximize the advantages and benefits of marketing and to minimize the problems and disadvantages, in the following ways:

- introducing or reinforcing a stronger sense of discipline and focus in the organization;
- taking a longer-term perspective — a more strategic perspective — on questions related to marketing and competitiveness;
- balancing and integrating different considerations relating to marketing;
- encouraging a more professional and systematic approach to marketing and related questions.

Discipline and Focus

In marketing products and services and in developing the capabilities of the organization, it is essential to have a strong sense of strategic focus so that things come together in a consistent and mutually supporting way. It is important to concentrate on what one does best — that is, on areas of competitive advantage and those which are most relevant to the mission and mandate of the organization. Thus, the role of marketing is to provide focus, coordination, and follow-through, especially by concentrating on client needs identified and tracked by the marketing unit.

Time Perspectives

One of the key functions of marketing is to take a longer-term perspective, and to factor this into the strategy and directions of the organization, for example in areas such as the planning of products and services. This requires a time perspective stretching over several years. Even if it is difficult to plan anything in detail in a fast-changing environment, the organization can at least establish a sense of direction and can "position" itself in the marketplace.

Taking a longer-term perspective can be difficult to do if the marketing function is combined with sales and communications — but a longer-term perspective does have benefits for both sales and communications. Sales activities tend to be shorter term in their orientation, especially when there are pressures to meet monthly or quarterly quotas or targets. In the marketing perspective, attention is shifted more towards the retention of customers and building a market share for the longer term: this places the focus on establishing and maintaining an ongoing and lasting relationship with the clients or customers. Communications activities also tend to be shorter term in their orientation. Materials need to be prepared in response to pressures to make sales and meet deadlines — and in the communications business, there are always fires to fight and crises to resolve or defuse. In communications, longer-term planning is essential to ensure that the organization conveys a consistent and mutually reinforcing set of messages in support of its mission, its purposes and its position in the marketplace. To achieve this, a marketing perspective is helpful.

Balancing and Integrating

Perhaps the most fundamental role of the marketing unit is in identifying, analysing, balancing and integrating the different factors and considerations related to customers, service,

competitiveness, and political accountability and visibility. SOAs must take full account of the constraints and implications of functioning in a government environment: they must be careful not to be too competitive or too successful. Often the marketing must be low-key, and they must know or learn when to hold back.

Professionalism

One of the main benefits that a marketing unit can provide is a professional and systematic approach to marketing, revenue generation, and competitiveness. Ideally, a marketer in an SOA should combine private sector techniques and sophistication with public sector savvy and wisdom, including an awareness of the political dimension.

It will be interesting to see how marketing in the government develops as a profession and a specialization along the lines of finance and informatics, with professional associations. One important development will be the willingness of marketers to share their expertise and experience in terms of what works and what does not work, and to share or jointly develop systems that enhance and support marketing.

Notes

1.   Most of the Canada Communication Group was privatized in March 1997.

2.   As a result of Program Review, Training and Development Canada (TDC) has refocused its operations. It is now moving away from providing courses (which generated the bulk of its revenues) and is moving more into consulting and coordination and policy and planning services related to training and development. The plan is to move to appropriations rather than funding from a revolving fund.

3.   For further information on revolving funds, please see Appendix A of the companion paper: *Special Operating Agencies: Financial Issues*.

4.   Note that too large a unit would attract adverse attention.

5.   This is in accordance with what the literature recommends. See, for example, Leonard L. Berry and A. Parasuraman, *Marketing Services: Competing Through Quality* (New York: The Free Press, 1991). For an interesting empirical study and a thorough discussion of the issues, please see: Christian Grönroos, "Innovative Marketing Strategies and Organization Structures for Service Firms." In: Leonard L. Berry, G. Lynn Shostack and Gregory D. Upah, *Emerging Perspectives on Services Marketing* (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1983), pp. 9-21.   For a comprehensive review of the literature on services marketing and management more generally, please see: John Dingwall, *Service Management and Service Quality in the Public Sector: A Guide to the Literature* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1996).

6.   The types of expenditures marketing requires are exactly those which have been subjected to both general and targeted restraint over the years. These include: advertising and promotion; printing and publishing; communications; professional services and research; travel; and attendance at conferences and trade shows.

7.   By the time the freezes run their course, public servants will have had a 3 percent increase in six years, which is equivalent to a real reduction of close to 15 percent in salaries, taking the actual and likely rates of inflation into account.

8.   In negotiating their framework agreements or charter documents, many SOAs requested and received exemption from the requirements of the Federal Identity Program.

9.   Favourable publicity for the SOA concept would also help to some degree in promoting a better understanding of SOAs and the issues connected with being an SOA. Recently, however, SOAs generally have had to contend with some negative publicity arising from private sector complaints over competition from the Canada Communication Group. Some other SOAs saw this as a public relations problem for SOAs generally.

10. Some marketing units observed that it was difficult to keep a consistent focus, since the line divisions were interested in pursuing every favourable opportunity.

11. For example, GTA (now GTIS) did a good job of rewriting its marketing materials to make them more interesting and relevant for customers.

12. In some cases (CCG, for example), participation in trade shows was particularly helpful for encouraging an awareness and appreciation of clients and customers.

13. An example of such a system would be the Corporate Memory System which Consulting and Audit Canada has been developing, off and on. This system is being sponsored and championed by the marketing unit as one of the key users.

14. A Canadian company, Cognos, is currently the leading vendor of business intelligence tools.

15. The Council would be a good example of a "parallel learning structure" which operates outside the usual lines of hierarchy and provides direct feedback to top management.

16. These were in the early 1980s, under the Liberals.

17. This was in the 1992 budget under the Conservatives.

18. See the previous discussion of this point.

19. One SOA mentioned that it was holding back on expanding its main money-making service for precisely this reason, with the result that it anticipated a delay in moving to revolving fund status.

20. An example of this would be the CD-ROMs produced by the Canadian Heritage Information Network in cooperation with the private sector.

21. This has happened in at least one case: an SOA had a plan for opening a series of regional offices, primarily in order to improve services to Canadian industry, but a large share of the costs were to be defrayed by revenues from higher-profit services which have been put on hold because of sensitivities over possible competition with the private sector. For the time being, the plan to open the regional offices has been put on hold.

22. This problem can, however, arise in cases where private sector firm which is not working with an SOA loses a contract to a firm which does have a partnership with an SOA. In such cases, the choice of a private sector partner for an international contract could create political difficulties for the SOA.

23. This situation commonly occurs under a net-voting arrangement.

24. An example of this would be the Canadian Heritage Information Network, which provides free services to Canadian museums but which charges other organizations.

25. On this point, please see the companion paper: *Special Operating Agencies: Financial Issues*.

26. These concerns were recognized at the outset, when SOAs were first formed. For example, the framework agreement for the Canada Communications Group specified that the Agency was to be compensated (through a side-payment) for activities which were to be undertaken for a general public purpose.

27. Please see the companion paper: *Special Operating Agencies: Financial Issues* for a discussion of this point.

28. GTA is now part of the Government Telecommunications and Informatics Service.

29. When GTA was first established, it was allowed by Treasury Board to tap into the accumulated surplus in its previous revolving fund to finance the architect function.

30. This assumes that there are compatible levels of efficiency and that the extra costs of being part of the government are relatively minimal. Otherwise, the cost structures could not be equivalent.

31. Passports would be a good example: should passport service be expedited for customers who are willing to pay extra?

32. Please see the companion paper: *Special Operating Agencies: Financial Issues*.

33. A case in point would be the *Declaration of Quality Service.* Another example would be the promotion of reengineering and redesign, which also puts customer service front and centre.

34. This is certainly the case in the private sector, where service guarantees are a focal point for marketing efforts.

35. This has long been a concern for CCG, especially in cases where it has been both the dispenser and the performer of contracts.

36. An example would be "Canada's Visual History".

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