



## Continuous improvement at *Industrial Marketing Management*: Suggestions from the Editorial Review Board

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We are very proud of the development of *Industrial Marketing Management*. As we have written in recent issues (see, for example, Di Benedetto & Lindgreen, 2018), the journal is widely recognized as the premier academic journal in business-to-business marketing, and its citation rankings and submissions continue to grow annually. But we are always searching for ways to improve our product, which we offer to our readers, as well as the process of providing timely review and publication of the best new articles in business-to-business marketing.

In November 2017, we published an editorial on the future of *Industrial Marketing Management* (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2017). In the spirit of continuous improvement of both product and process, we then contacted the members of the *Industrial Marketing Management* Editorial Review Board in early 2018 for their reactions to the article, and their thoughts and comments on the direction of the journal and their suggestion for further improvement.

The Editorial Review Board is a dedicated group of academics with many years of dedication to our journal, and a vested interest in maintaining and improving its status and relevance. It is no surprise, then, that we were pleased and even overwhelmed with the thoughtful comments we received from the Editorial Review Board membership. We have highlighted the comments we received, and added a few thoughts from the present and past Editors-in-Chief (Peter LaPlaca included), in this editorial. We welcome your thoughts and any additional insights.

We have organized the suggestions and comments from the Editorial Review Board into three categories: Administrative Issues, Development Issues, and Future Research Directions.

### Administrative issues

In this section, we review suggestions regarding the administration of *Industrial Marketing Management*, and the effects on both journal content and the review process as experienced by authors.

Many of the suggestions put forth in the editorial (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2017) were met with approval from the Editorial Review Board, who also suggested areas of improvement. Firstly, for *Industrial Marketing Management* to increase its global presence and usefulness across a broad base of academics, it must continue its efforts toward theoretical and methodological pluralism. A wide range of

methodologies must be representative, and while *Industrial Marketing Management* has come a long way from the descriptive case studies and surveys of the past, there is still room for improvement. For example, fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) is rarely applied in management studies, but is an emerging methodology in related fields, and combines qualitative and quantitative research. This can be a useful methodology for the study of business-to-business marketing and knowledge management, and it might even merit attention as a Special Issue topic. Other methodological or analytical techniques are either quite new, or rarely used in *Industrial Marketing Management*. Such techniques include simulations, ethnography, interpretive studies, action-based research, and the like. These methodological or analytical techniques can be explicitly encouraged, so that authors working in these areas know they potentially have an outlet in *Industrial Marketing Management*. This focus also would indicate the potential usefulness of these techniques to academics early in their careers, and may even result in greater uptake of these techniques in the marketing literature.

In a similar vein, *Industrial Marketing Management* submissions have grown in recent years meaning that there is an opportunity to focus on improving article quality across the board. The journal has quite simply more articles to choose from every year, which means the review process can be increasingly selective. It is far better to publish a smaller number of quality articles than to boost quantity of publications. The quality versus quantity focus has a real long-term benefit to the journal in that a greater ratio of highly relevant articles boosts the journal's impact factor. As a simple example, *Industrial Marketing Management* may want to increase the number of case study articles per year to rectify an imbalance of methodologies. But this does not mean that a weak case study with little theoretical contribution should be preferred just because a case methodology was used. Good case study research is very valuable in theory development, but is usually marked by (1) studying multiple companies, (2) including multiple levels of management within each company, and/or (3) collecting longitudinal data. Without one of these elements, the contribution to theory will be questionable at best. An editorial clearly specifying what methodologies and techniques the journal is looking would provide useful guidance to prospective authors.

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We received several thoughtful suggestions on how to improve the review experience for prospective authors. *Industrial Marketing Management* receives articles from a wide variety of academic areas, including purchasing, supply chain management, and innovation among others. *Industrial Marketing Management* currently does not use an associate editor system (all regular-submission papers are assigned directly to one of the Editors-in-Chief who then select reviewers). Having topical associate editors might ensure that the most expert reviewers would be selected. While the Editors-in-Chief do their best to match papers to reviewers, an associate editor system would add a level of protection to avoid incorrect reviewer assignments. Topical associate editors might also be able to provide finer tuning within a topical area: for example, an associate editor with expertise in innovation would be able to better match a paper to a reviewer based on method. The Editors-in-Chief are able to find available reviewers in innovation; but the associate editor could make more precise recommendations regarding which reviewers are expert in a specific topic (cross-functional integration) or method (case-based versus survey).

Related to this, an associate editor system might help avoid problems in the revise and resubmit process. An associate editor can decide whether a paper that has been through one or two rounds of revision should be reviewed again, or (depending on the extent of revisions) may make the final decision without another round of review. This would speed up the decision process where warranted, and would also reduce the workload of the Editors-in-Chief.

In short, an associate editor system might add balance to the decision process and even result in improved feedback to authors. In the long run, this may increase the perception of the quality of *Industrial Marketing Management's* review process and, ultimately, the perception of *Industrial Marketing Management's* overall quality.

Here is a brief list of some of the other Editorial Review Board suggestions pertaining to administrative issues:

- Improve media coverage of articles, especially those with interesting managerial or public-policy implications.
- Institute a best-reviewer award to stimulate even higher-quality reviews
- Encourage greater readership and paper submissions from all parts of the globe, including underrepresented constituencies in parts of Asia and South America. This might be accomplished by introducing local champions to represent and promote *Industrial Marketing Management* on a local basis.
- Strive to get the journal on more A-level journal lists. While it is the premier business-to-business marketing academic journal, it is often viewed as being a specialty journal such as *Journal of Product Innovation Management* or *Journal of Retailing*. Nevertheless, some of these specialty journals are recognized as being high-quality and high-impact journals, deserving of a place on the A-level journal lists.
- Speed up the review process and provide quality reviews at a quicker pace to authors. This ultimately will shorten cycle time from research inception to publication.

### Development issues

In this section, we highlight specific activities that could be undertaken to improve the review process and more fully meet the needs of all our constituent reader groups, especially the business-to-business managers for whom every issue of *Industrial Marketing Management* should offer at least a few key take-aways.

A constant challenge at *Industrial Marketing Management* is the search for qualified reviewers, and as the number of annual submissions increases, this issue will not go away soon. *Industrial Marketing Management* can implement a trainee reviewer program like that used by *Journal of Consumer Research*. Reviewers can nominate assistant professors or doctoral students with little or no experience in reviewing. These trainees' reviews are not used by the editor; but once the editorial

decision is made, the trainee receives a copy of the decision letter, as well as all reviews from the actual reviewers. This training program would provide valuable information to help young academics calibrate their reviews, and ensures a greater pool of experienced reviewers in the future.

A related program, which could be readily implemented, requests authors to submit review histories of recently published articles. *Journal of Consumer Research* also occasionally asks authors to share the review history of a recent acceptance (that is, all revisions of the manuscript, reviewer comments, and author replies to reviewers). These review histories are a rare glimpse inside the reviewing black box, and should provide young academics with guidance in reviewing as well as writing their own papers.

*Industrial Marketing Management* also must not lose its focus on providing useful insights to business-to-business managers. Too often, the "managerial implications" section of theoretical articles consists of a simple rewording of the results section and little else; it appears to be a section bolted on after the fact. To improve this situation, *Industrial Marketing Management* proactively can encourage authors to consider explicitly multiple stakeholders from the outset of the research process. That is, *Industrial Marketing Management* can seek out and encourage research that is of interest to academics, but also clearly is designed to have meaning and importance to the practitioner community. One possibly controversial idea would be even to de-emphasize theory building in some cases. Many research studies, of course, are designed to advance theory, and indeed make significant advances in theory building. But insisting on valid (but narrow and incremental) theoretical contributions, far removed from practical issues and important only to other academics, may take attention away from managerial implications and reduces the value of *Industrial Marketing Management* to its managerial readership. This is the "rigor versus relevance" argument: rigorous articles that provide significant theoretical insight are influential and highly cited, but relevance means a real contribution to both academic and practitioner.

A rough metric could be used to achieve a desired balance between rigor and relevance: one-third to one-half of articles make an ambitious theoretical contribution; one-third addresses an issue of topical or managerial relevance (and a descriptive or exploratory research design may be adequate); and the rest can be review papers, meta-analyses, position papers, the occasional invited paper by a leading academic, and the like. All these types of articles can increase citations; and this balance ensures that *Industrial Marketing Management* provides content relevant to all readers.

*Industrial Marketing Management* offers a best-paper award, based objectively on downloads. As a result, theoretical papers or literature reviews usually win the award. One suggestion was to initiate a most practice-relevant article award. Instituting and publicizing this award might result in a greater number of top quality articles of practical significance to managers.

There are other directions that can be implemented immediately to increase the relevance of *Industrial Marketing Management* to its managerial constituency. Co-authorship between academics and practitioners is, surprisingly, still uncommon and can be strongly encouraged. *Industrial Marketing Management*, in fact, would be a natural target for articles co-written by marketing managers and academics. A Special Issue even could be dedicated to such collaboration, which certainly would identify several under-researched topics of importance to the practitioner community. Practitioner-focused executive summaries aimed at the business media also can lead to greater visibility of *Industrial Marketing Management* in this community.

Additionally, position articles designed to stimulate debate among academics and practitioners would also be highly visible and influential. Choose the right target topic, and there is likely to be a range of opinions, which can lead to short comment articles and response or rebuttal articles. Many authors will be willing to write short position papers defending their ideas or responding to other articles. These back-

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