# IS YOUR CUSTOMER TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT SERVICE? IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT BIAS IN SERVICE QUALITY ASSESSMENT FOR BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

**BRIAN T. ENGELLAND,** *University of Evansville*
**PAUL J. HENSEL,** *University of New Orleans*

*"Market orientation" requires that marketers of industrial products continuously monitor the service quality needs, expectations and perceptions of their customers. However, this monitoring presents special challenges. Informational biases are introduced by organizational buying team members according to impression management behavior, and these biases adversely affect the quality of the customer assessment which is transmitted. This article reviews the causes and nature of these biases, develops a conceptual model to organize research, and offers some beginning prescriptions to improve the accuracy of service quality assessment.*

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of market orientation was persuasively espoused by Levitt (1960) in his classic essay, "Marketing Myopia." In recent literature, marketers have again been encouraged to become more market oriented in the strategic management of their businesses (Franco 1990; Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Narver and Slater 1990; Rado 1989; Shapiro 1988; Webster 1988; among others). Yet, most of the attention has centered on the tangible elements of the firm's offer rather than the often intangible elements that comprise service. Of particular interest to industrial marketers is the measurement of customer expectations and perceptions regarding service quality. There is growing interest in the quality of service that customers receive because service is seen as an important determinant of repeat customer purchase decisions. Indeed, the misunderstanding of customer expectations and perceptions regarding service quality may be one of the leading failures of management (Bender 1976; More 1986). Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1985, 1988, 1990) have focused on the measurement of service quality in service industries, developing a measurement instrument called SERVQUAL. Yet, service in industrial product settings also carries important ramifications for the marketer. Poor service is an important reason for switching to competition (Sonnenberg 1989); and intangible service factors such as sales force dedication and assistance are often valued higher than the more tangible factors of price, performance and product quality (Franco 1990). Firms with higher customer service quality may experience higher profit margins (Dixon 1989). Accordingly, it is important that marketers of industrial products assess and monitor the quality of their service. But that's a challenge that's easier said than done.

**The Journal of Marketing Management**
**Volume 2, Issue 2, pages 9 - 18**


When industrial marketers seek information about how well they are serving their customers, they must record and analyze service impressions from a representative of the customer's organization. But who in each organization should be asked? The purchasing agent? The plant manager? The president? Each of these functionaries is likely to offer a slightly different and conflicting perception on the quality of service received. The theory of impression management (Goffman 1959; Leary and Kowalski 1990; Schlenker 1980) has been applied to a broad range of interpersonal communications situations. We suggest that impression management theory applies to industrial buying relationships as well, and sheds new light on the quality of response that marketers receive. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to explore the application of impression management theory to service quality impressions created by organizational buying team members, propose a model to organize inquiry, and raise likely implications for managerial action.

## MOTIVATION FOR BETTER MEASURES

Marketers have long accepted the idea that successful businesses must be market-driven and customer-oriented. Market orientation is a key element in the "marketing concept" and plays a significant role in the development of business strategy for most organizations. Yet, until recently, little attention has been given to its understanding and measurement. Market orientation can be described as comprising three factors: 1) the organization-wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, 2) the dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and 3) the organization-wide responsiveness to the intelligence generated (Kohli and Jaworski 1990). Identification of customer needs plays a central role in effective market orientation. The generation of market intelligence does not stop at obtaining customer opinions, but also involves careful analysis and subsequent interpretation of the forces that impinge on customer needs and preferences. Market orientation can be characterized as an organization culture that effectively and efficiently supports necessary behaviors for the creation of superior value for buyers, and thus, continuous superior performance for the business (Narver and Slater 1990). The customer orientation component within market orientation requires that sufficient understanding of one's target buyers exists so that superior value for them may be created continuously by the firm (Narver and Slater 1990). Accordingly, successful market orientation is dependent upon accurate information about customers' current and future expectations, needs, and perceptions. Obtaining accurate information about service expectations, needs and perceptions has been problematic. The literature has offered the industrial product marketer little specific assistance, serving more as a cheerleader than as a guide. The practitioner is left to create his own tools. Fortunately, recent work of Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry have added to our understanding of service quality and its measurement in service industries (Zeithaml et al. 1985, 1988, 1990). A major outcome of this stream of research is SERVQUAL, the 22-item instrument for measuring customer expectation and perception. SERVQUAL appears to have applicability in industrial product situations, as well.

The authors suggest that the key to delivering high quality service is to measure expectations and perceptions, then act to close any gaps between the two. In operationalizing the SERVQUAL instrument, four gaps are defined as the major causes of the discrepancy between customer expectation and experiential perception. They are: 1) the customer expectation-management perception gap, 2) the management perception-specification gap, 3) the specification-delivery gap, and 4) the delivery-external communications gap. A focus on the first gap is appropriate as it assumes increasing importance for the market-oriented industrial products marketer, and is germane to the purpose of this paper. Zeithaml, et al. (1990) describe the first gap as the difference between what customers expect and what management perceives they expect, and list three conceptual factors which contribute to this gap. They are: 1) insufficient marketing research, 2) inadequate use of research findings, and 3) lack of interaction between management and customers. For reasons that will be developed later, one more factor could be added to the list: respondent impression management bias (Figure 1). These biases affect the ability of the marketer to gage genuine customer perceptions about service quality.

## THE THEORY OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Impression management (IM) is the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions (Schlenker 1980). IM deals with an individual's concept about himself, his family, his friends, his job and his possessions; and explains many of the ways in which an individual influences both himself and others in everyday social encounters. IM begins with the self-concept, an idealization about oneself that people create from social experience. People attempt to control their self-concept by projecting desirable images, both privately and publicly. In doing so, they attempt to associate themselves with admirable ideas, people, places, and events; and disassociate themselves from that which is undesirable.

When confronted with situations that threaten the desired image, people employ one or more remedial tactics including excuse, justification and apology. If, on the other hand, a particular event or situation occurs which enhances the desired image, people seek to increase the impression of their association with that event by maximizing their involvement and responsibility (entitling), or by maximizing the apparent desirability of the event itself (enhancement). Behaviors known as "white lies" and "stretching of the truth" can be an outcome of IM. IM can act to inflate the individual's perception about significant others. One's girlfriend may be perceived as the sweetest girl in town; one's favorite football team is better than its rivals; one's company is the best among its competitors. One's role within that company can transcend the standard measures of importance, and take on a "larger-than--life" quality in the opinion of the job holder. That these inflated concepts contradict objective assessment does tend to diminish their reality in the mind of the beholder. But, these concepts do bias an individual's presentation behavior, as desirable images are projected both to themselves and audiences with which they come in contact. Thus, when talking to a supplier, a purchasing agent with a strong affiliation to his firm and an understanding of his agent role, will tend to present the activities, capabilities and prospects of his company in the best light. When confronted with situations that threaten this desired image, the agent will employ excuse, justification and/or apology; when confronted with situations that enhance the desired image, the agent will employ entitlement and enhancement. The agent will attend to the supplier representative's reaction, and "play off" this reaction by fulfilling the audience's stereotypes, displaying attractive uniqueness, and varying situational disclosures (Table 1). The foregoing discussion of IM suggests that marketers need to be wary of IM behaviors when asking their business customers for impressions regarding the intangibles that comprise service quality. In the section which follows, we will examine these behaviors in greater depth, and present a conceptual model which assists in organizing the relationships among the factors involved.

**FIGURE 1**
**THE CUSTOMER EXPECTATION - MANAGEMENT PERCEPTION GAP**

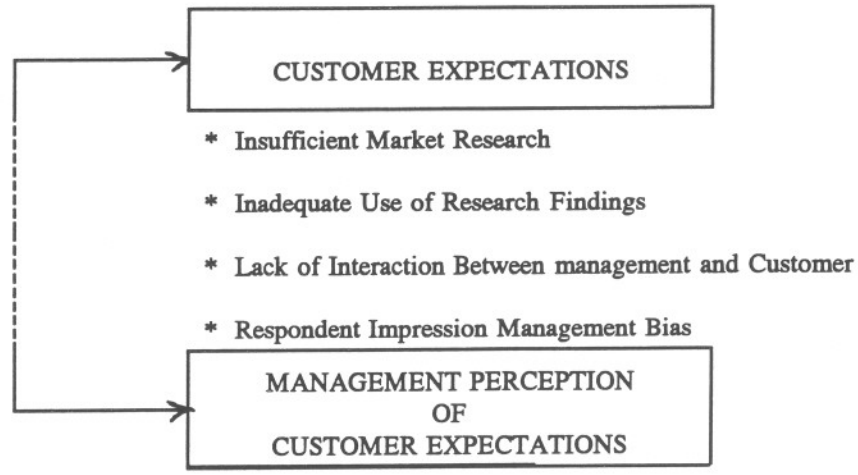
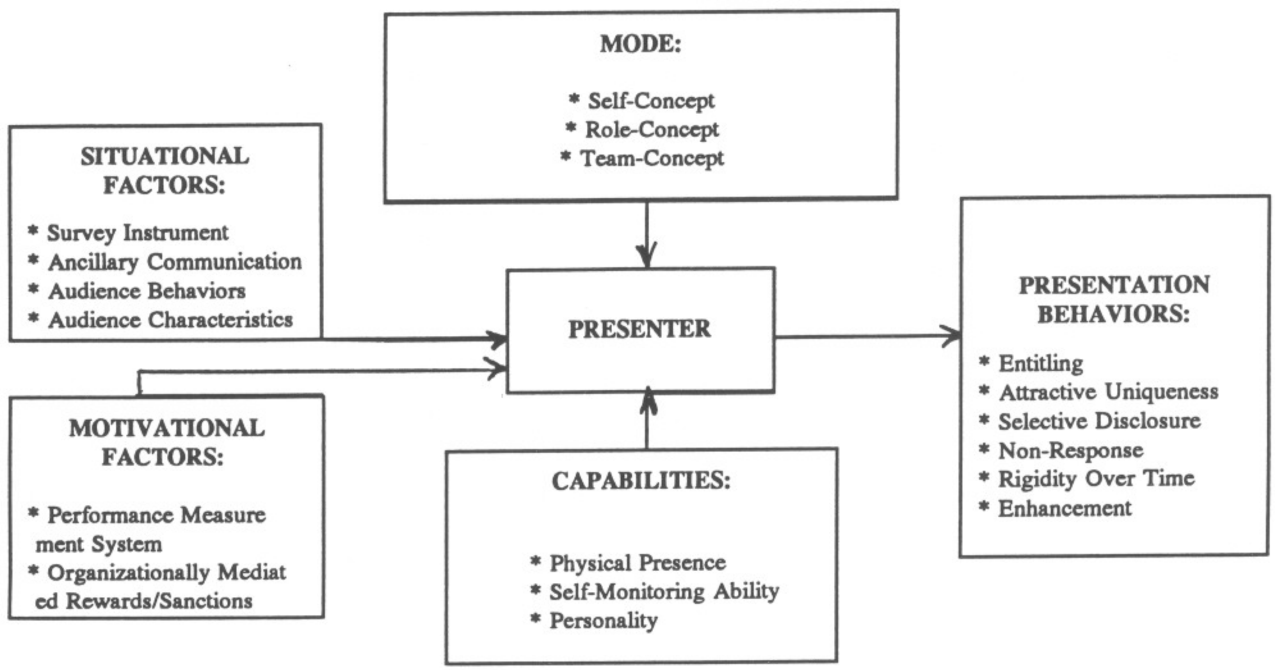



**TABLE 1**
**EXAMPLES OF RESPONDENT IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORS WHICH MASK OBJECTIVE SERVICE QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

| | |
|---|---|
| Entitling | Respondent conveys higher service expectations than objectively measured or required. For example, the respondent says "I expect deliveries by 10 am on Tuesday," when anytime Tuesday is acceptable. |
| Attractive Uniqueness | Respondent offers greater business potential (or smoother relationships) than objective measurement would assess. For example, the respondent claims "We require 1000 units per week," when actual requirements average 500. |
| Selective Disclosure | Respondent conveys only one side of the service impression. For example, the respondent says "The boss was really disappointed with your responsiveness to our last order," when in reality the boss also said that the responsiveness was better than that provided by the major competitor. |
| Non-Response | The customer refuses to respond to service quality questions. This often occurs with mail surveys, and potentially biases the results. |
| Rigidity Over Time | Respondent retains previous service impression, despite evidence of improvement. For example, a respondent may fail to notice the real improvement in your service rep's technical knowledge as the result of attendance at a tech training course. |
| Enhancement | Respondent conveys an inflated level of performance offered by relevant competitors. For example, a respondent may state that a competitor "routinely sends out info sheets on the latest technological improvements, when four years have passed since the last such sheet was mailed. |

**FIGURE 2**
**IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORAL MODEL**




## AN IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORAL MODEL

Factors which affect IM behavior and the impression received are presented in Figure 2. As the model suggests, there are four categories of factors which influence the presenter in his choice of IM behaviors, including: 1) mode, 2) motivational factors, 3) situational factors, and 4) respondent capabilities. Each of the factors may act alone or in combination with other factors to affect the choice and degree of presentation behavior employed. Concept mode is the principal state in which the individual is operating at the time when service quality perception is requested, and consists of self, role and team concept modes; or combinations of the three. Situational and environmental characteristics include the survey instrument, ancillary communications, audience behaviors and audience characteristics. In our situation, the "audience" usually is the representative of the servicing firm, although other buying center members who are present during the assessment elicitation can influence IM behaviors. Motivational aspects are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic rewards which affect the situation (Anderson and Chambers 1985). Capabilities that an individual possesses such as personality, physical characteristics, and presentational abilities (including self-monitoring ability) are also influential (Anderson and Chambers 1985; Gardner and Martinko 1988). The first three categories of factors will be developed in the discussion which follows. The fourth category, respondent capability, cannot be influenced by the marketer and will not be addressed further here. Based upon previous IM empirical and theoretical work, we expect an inverse relationship between the extent of IM behavior use and objectivity of the transmitted impression. That is, the greater the use of IM behaviors, the less the transmitted impression will be objective and free of bias. Accordingly, we present the following propositions:

*P1:* *The accuracy of service quality assessment obtained from a buying center member is influenced by the extent of impression management behaviors exhibited by the buying center member who conveys the assessment.*

*P2: The extent of presentation management behaviors exhibited by buying center members is dependent upon 1) situational factors, 2) motivational factors, 3) the member's concept mode, and 4) the member's personal capabilities.*

## Concept Modes

When a marketer seeks to understand the service impressions of customer organizations, his own sales or customer service department is of little help. The literature suggests that there are significant differences in perception of service quality between customers on the one hand, and front-line sales and service employees on the other (Becker and Wellins 1990). He must elicit assessment from a person (or several persons) within the buying center of the target organization, then make the assumption that those personal impressions are both accurate and representative of the overall organization. Yet, in every assessment situation, service impressions can be obscured by the person who conveys the impression.

Most applications of impression management have focused on self-presentation rather than the presentation of concepts held about products, firms, organizations or roles. Self-presentation is potentially the least maladaptive to objectivity, as effective questionnaire design can mitigate self-presentation biases. However, role and team concept presentation presents greater challenges. Role presentation stems from the presenter's role concept in the exchange situation, and is formed by the presenter's official or unofficial position in the buying organization. In addition, presenters can combine individual performances to create a team presentation, an act which is particularly applicable to organizational situations (Goffman 1959). Team members take on a unified concept of group based on member characteristics, group objectives, or shared values, then attempt to present this team concept in assessment situations. The presenter's behavior can be a mixture of presentations based upon the relevant concepts that the presenter chooses to bring into play. For instance, the presenter may call upon his own self-concept and engage in self-presentation. Alternately, he may call upon his concept of role, and engage in role presentation. Yet again, he may call upon his concept of team, and engage in team presentation. Finally, he may call upon his concept of self, role and team in varying degrees, providing an eclectic performance. Accordingly, we present the following proposition:

*P3: The extent of presentation behaviors exhibited by the buying center member is influenced by the member's concept of self, role and team at the time of elicitation.*

It is unlikely that the audience will be able to discern that the buying center member is engaging in impression management, let alone what combination of the three concepts he is presenting. A study of job interview dynamics found that skilled interviewers were unable to discern which job applicants engaged in aggrandizing impression management behaviors (Gilmore and Ferris 1989). Sales representatives, service personnel or market researchers are unlikely to fair any better. These concepts act to blur the communication of true organizational service expectation and perception. For instance, a presenter's self-concept of loyalty, may conflict with his role concept of being a shrewd negotiator. Alternatively, the shrewd negotiator role concept may conflict with an organizational team concept to treat all suppliers equally. The communicated service quality impression will change depending upon which concept provides stronger influence at the time of presentation. Accordingly, we present the following proposition:

*P4: The buying center member's concept of self, role and team interacts to affect the extent and type of presentation behaviors that are selected.*

## Motivational Factors

The choice of operating concept within any impression management context is mediated by some measure of reward/punishment (Anderson and Chambers 1985; Leary and Kowalski 1990). If the presenter's role position is a buying center member, he or she will likely participate in extrinsic rewards for job performance such as salary, bonuses, pay increases, promotions and other organizationally mediated approvals. Similarly, role-derived intrinsic rewards include self-esteem and self-actualization. Sanctions may exist as a consequence of the performer's job ineffectiveness. He may be ostracized by fellow team members, or in the extreme case, terminated. The same extrinsic and extrinsic rewards and sanctions can also apply to support a team presentation mode.

Many business organizations employ performance measurement indices to assess the performance of buying center members. These indices relate to the successful negotiation of supplier price reductions, quality improvements, and consistent service quality over time. For instance, the successful negotiation of a new contract resulting in significant cost savings is an event that carries both intrinsic and extrinsic reward. The failure to achieve goals of purchase material cost savings is met with sanctions. Thus, the successful performance within role concept earns the role performer high value rewards, and causes role concept to be the preferred choice in relationships between buying center members and suppliers. A buying center member's role concept may conceivably act to impede or promote accurate disclosure of information. Certainly, if the role concept is one of honesty and fairness at all costs, this attitude would promote full disclosure. However, to our knowledge few organizations have a reward structure which unidimensionally recognizes these values, and indices to measure honesty and fairness are seldom used in performance measurement schemas. Performance measurement focuses on goal achievement rather than on the manner in which the project was undertaken. Accordingly, we present the following propositions:

*P5:* *Performance measurement and reward structures are two motivational factors which increase the use of role and team induced impression management behaviors by buying center members.*

*P6:* *The more a buying center member engages in presentation management behaviors, the greater the potential for bias in the information disclosed.*

We suggest that buying center members will tend to sublimate self-concept in favor of role concept and team concept when engaged in normal business communications with suppliers. These concepts react to organizationally mediated reward structures that tend to inhibit complete disclosure, and thus, are potentially maladaptive for the marketer who is seeking full and accurate information.

**Situational Factors**

Situational factors such as the survey instrument, ancillary communications surrounding the elicitation, audience behaviors and audience characteristics also influence the presenter and the extent of presentation management behaviors employed. First, we'll look at the survey instrument and how it may affect IM behavior. We suggest that the respondent sees the specific questions contained on the survey instrument as an extension of bargaining behavior between two adversaries, where the possession of relevant information about the opponent's utility function is deemed to be an advantage in the negotiation. Much of bargaining behavior involves the probing of the opponent's expectations and perceptions (Tedeschi et al. 1973). Buying center respondents are likely to withhold information about their firms, so as to refrain from providing an advantage to the opponent. Accordingly, we present the following propositions:

*P7:* *Survey respondents will tend to engage in selective disclosure and other IM behaviors to the extent that the requested information is perceived to alter the negotiation balance.*

Ancillary communication surrounding the survey instrument itself includes alternate elicitation approaches. Three approaches to response elicitation are 1) mail surveys, 2) telephone surveys, and 3) face-to-face interviews. Mail surveys offer several advantages, including control over pre-survey communications and low cost of elicitation. They exhibit one potentially major bias, however, the bias of self-selection. Although mail surveys result in varying response rates, rates above 50% are rare. Surveys in which a significant proportion of the population of interest voluntarily fail to participate, raise questions about the generalizability of the results. In general, the people who do participate tend to have stronger and more extreme impressions than those who don't participate. Thus, bias of self-selection may tend to exaggerate service perceptions.

Motivation to participate in such surveys is controlled by similar antecedents that determine the motivation to engage in impression management. These are the goal relevance of impression, the value of desired goals, and any discrepancy between the desired and the current image. If a buying center member is satisfied with his current source for products in that category, or if he has a negative impression of the surveying firm, he will have little role motivation to participate in the survey. Mail survey elicitations tend to eliminate those customers that have little role interest in the surveying firm. Response-related rewards (monetary payment, promise of charitable donation, or premium gift) may alter the perception of role interest. The target will weigh the value of the incentive against organizationally mediated incentives; and, depending on the incentive, may increase his likelihood of response. Response-related rewards can be applied to all types of surveys. In contrast to mail surveys, telephone initiated surveys or face-to-face surveys conducted by sales or service staff tend to reduce the bias of selective disclosure and non-response, especially if the questioner is tenacious. But it adds to the cost of ongoing service quality measurement especially for those firms who feel the need to survey frequently. Accordingly, we present the following propositions:

*P8:* *Survey elicitation approaches that alter the perceived rewards for survey participation tend to decrease the presentation management biases of selective disclosure and non-response.*

*P9:* *Survey elicitation approaches that facilitate increased dialogue between questioner and buying center member tend to decrease the presentation management biases of selective disclosure and non-response.*

Face-to-face interviews allow the questioner to provide a level of audience feedback that provides advantages over mail and telephone surveys. Most importantly, the survey taker can visit the customer in the customer's own surroundings, and that can add additional insights into values and beliefs held (Albrecht and Bradford 1990). The face-to-face interview also offers the chance to assess the respondent's strength of opinion, and obtain additional clarification for any unusual response. IM suggests that differences in status of the questioner and respondent will affect the degree of distortion in the response by activating different levels of presentation behaviors. For instance, A question tendered by the president of the supplying firm will elicit higher expectations and lower achievement perceptions than if the questionnaire were tendered from a sales representative. Accordingly, we present the following proposition:

*P10: The greater the difference between the status of the questioner and the status of the buying center member, the greater the extent of presentation behaviors employed.*

IM theory suggests that once a presenter freely adopts an impression strategy, he will continue to use that strategy as long as it remains effective. Similarly, if a buying center member adopts a certain evaluation of service expectation/ perception, he will tend to continue to convey that evaluation consistently over time. IM theory and the authors' experience suggests that service evaluations in industrial buying situations, once formed, are not readily changed. Significant repetitive service blunders, extraordinary achievements, or changes in negotiation posture would seem to be necessary for service expectation and perception to change appreciably. Accordingly, we present the following proposition:

*P11: Buying center members will tend to present service expectations and perceptions over time that are consistent with those previously communicated.*

Audience characteristics such as familiarity are important, and tend to facilitate the elimination of IM biases over time. IM suggests that if the questioner knows the respondent well, representation of impressions will be modest. This is consistent with the finding that a greater degree of communication openness is present in long-term supplier-customer relationships (O'Neal 1989). Gradual information disclosure by both sides tends to bring both questioner and respondent to one mind, and reduces the salience of impression management behaviors. There seems to exist a "quid pro quo" mentality that allows for increasing self-disclosure and familiarity over time. If the questioner is understood to know the respondent and respondent firm well, the buying center member will tend to provide more objective appraisals of service expectation and perception. On the other hand, if the questioner is understood to be unfamiliar with the respondent firm, the buying center member will tend to provide less accurate appraisals of service expectation and perception. Relevant self-disclosures by the firm posing the questions may increase the likelihood of concomitant disclosures by the buying center member. Accordingly, we present the following proposition:

**TABLE 2:**
**APPROACHES TO REDUCE RESPONDENT IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORS IN SERVICE QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

| | |
|---|---|
| Interviewer Selection | Choose interviewers who are known by and are familiar to respondents. Buying center members are less likely to use IM behaviors if the interviewer knows them well. |
| | Choose interviewers who hold similar status to the intended respondent. Buying center members are less likely to use IM behaviors in settings where they are neither superior nor inferior in status. |
| | Relevant self-disclosures by interviewers will tend to encourage concommitant service disclosures by the respondent. |
| Environmental Factors | Choose neutral sites for face-to-face service assessment sessions. Respondents are less likely to engage in IM behaviors when on neutral turf. |
| Mail Questionnaires | Increase response rates through multiple request or reply inducements. Status rewards may be effective in reducing role and team presentation modes. |
| | Any communications which support the survey instrument (cover letter, reason for survey, etc.) should be transmitted from an individual holding similar status to the intended respondent. If the survey is directed at company presidents, the cover letter should be signed by a president; if directed to purchasing managers, the letter should be signed by a managerial level individual. |
| Respondent Selection | Choose multiple respondents within any given customer organization. Buying center members in engineering, receiving, quality control, and research may have less reason to engage in role presentation. Their input provides a broader perspective of the customer's true service quality perception. |

*P12: Familiarity between questioner and buying center member tends to reduce the extent of presentation behavior use.*

## PRESCRIPTIONS FOR REDUCING ASSESSMENT BIAS

The preceding discussion suggests that respondent impression management bias is a function of situational factors which can be controlled (to some extent) by the focal organization; and motivational, modal and respondent capability factors that are beyond the control of the organization. It is our position that these biases are counterproductive to the transfer of accurate service quality assessment, and it is in the best interest of the surveying firm to minimize them by managing those situational factors which they can control. We are not in a position to recommend a "one best practice" for all firms, as the current state of research in this area offers limited breadth and depth. However, we can outline some of the prescriptions that can be made about the controllable situational factors, keeping in mind that most of these prescriptions should be characterized as tentative. Please refer to Table 2, which serves as a summary of this section.

Although impression management is a natural consequence of an individual's perception of self, role and company, that perception can have a deleterious effect on the accuracy of survey response. Naturally, the goal of the survey sponsor is complete and unbiased disclosure of the parameters chosen for evaluation. As the wrong impression can be costly to the marketing firm, marketers should strive to control the variables they can. That is, the marketer should control survey situational characteristics, including interviewer selection, site selection, multiple requests and control of the selection of buying center respondents.

Mail response surveys introduce self-selection bias; face-to-face or telephone surveys introduce interviewer-related biases. Yet both survey approaches can be managed so as to lessen the biases introduced. Specifically, second and third requests can be sent to non-respondents in the mail survey sample. Tenacity in survey follow-up can increase response rate. Also, appropriate rewards for participation can be offered, including cash or premiums. In face-to-face or telephone surveys, the interviewer should be selected that has equivalent status relative to the chosen respondent, as differences in status will stimulate respondent impression management behaviors. The interviewer should be adequately prepared so he is perceived to have thorough knowledge of the respondent firm and buying center member. Because familiarity will tend to minimize impression management excesses, the use of individuals who know the customers and industry well is encouraged. This suggests the selection of a known industry consultant as an interviewer.

In selecting respondents, marketers may wish to survey more than one buying center member from each customer firm, especially if members can be identified who do not participate in organizationally-mediated rewards. These members may be found in engineering, quality control, receiving, plant scheduling, production or other allied functional departments. Because buying center members tend to communicate consistent impressions over time, survey programs are likely to be insensitive to minor improvements in marketer performance. Frequent surveys of the same respondent are also likely to be non-discriminative, and each firm is encouraged to address the proper frequency for service surveys. Long-term buyer-seller relationships tend to minimize impression management bias. This suggests that long-term customers will provide a less biased impression than new customers will, and argues for the categorization of respondents on a familiarity dimension. By controlling for familiarity, changes and trends in service quality assessment among a firm's customers may be more accurately analyzed.

## RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The impression management behavioral model we have developed here raises a number of areas for empirical research which go beyond the testing of the listed propositions. Additional research is needed to more fully articulate several of the variable relationships. More study is needed to determine what other situational factors may influence or interact to influence the extent of presentation behavior bias. Factors such as elicitation site, questionnaire length, questioner attitudes and values, questioner dress, and questioner IM behavior are potentially strong influencers. Concerning concept mode, we have suggested that self, role and team presentations are counterproductive to objective information transfer, but is there a difference among the three? That is, which presentation behavior, if any, is least counterproductive? Study is needed to devise measurement instruments to determine which mode or combination of modes is operating at time of assessment elicitation, and further, to determine whether there are differences in the resulting level of informational bias. Perhaps marketers can reduce IM behaviors by influencing the mode of presentation. Additional research is needed to understand how individual characteristics such as physical presence, self-monitoring ability and personality interact with each other. Can measurement scales administered at the time of assessment elicitation predict the extent and type of presentation behaviors that a given buying center member will engage in? Can this information be used to objectively "discount" different respondent's assessments and develop a more accurate total assessment?

Motivational factor research is needed to determine how alternate performance measurement systems affect a respondent's presentation behaviors and the extent to which marketer-sponsored response incentives may counterbalance these systems. Research is needed to determine how best to structure service quality questions which minimize respondent presentation biases in the design of the questionnaire. Can the SERVQUAL instrument be modified and adapted for industrial product audiences? Finally, regarding the frequency and timing of quality surveys, longitudinal research is needed to determine how often responses from the same customer should be elicited and measured. Is there a communication role in the act of surveying which is important in changing customer's service quality perceptions? It is hoped that these questions together with the model advanced here will serve as a useful platform for researchers concerned with ongoing understanding of market orientation and service quality issues.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based upon a review of the literature involving market orientation, service quality measurement and impression management, we have presented a model and several guidelines related to service quality elicitation for industrial product marketers. The model offers a description of the inter-relational aspects of situational, motivational and presenter components as antecedents to impression management behavior, and reveals certain prescriptions for managerial action. Perhaps one of the reasons that researchers continue to reiterate the need for greater market orientation is that great practical difficulties lie on the path to implementation. Indeed, market orientation is widely accepted as a necessary condition for business success. Market orientation requires an in-depth understanding of customer needs, and while tangible marketing mix factors such as product, price, and promotion, have been explored often, the intangibles that comprise "customer service" have been relatively ignored. Service quality assessment is characterized by a gap between the customer's impression of service received, and management's impression of service provided. A significant contributor to this gap is the distortion resulting from impression management biases undertaken by the customer representative who answers survey questions about service quality.

In this work, we have identified the significant contributing factors which influence these biases, and have suggested some prescriptions for marketing firms which will serve to reduce the size of the resulting assessment error. However, it is clear that additional research is needed as outlined, before a "best" procedure can be recommended. We hope that this article helps stimulate that research.

## REFERENCES

Albrecht, Karl and Lawrence J. Bradford (1990), *The Service Advantage: How to Identify and Fulfill Customer Needs*, Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin.

Anderson, Paul and Terry Chambers (1985), "A Reward/Measurement Model of Organizational Buying Behavior," *Journal of Marketing*, 49 (April), 7-23.

Becker, Wendy S. and Richard S. Wellins (1990), "Customer Service Perceptions and Realty," *Training and Development Journal*, 44 #3 (March), 49-51.

Bender, Paul S. (1976), *Design and Operation of Customer Service Systems*, New York: Amacom.

Dixon, George (1989), "Keep 'em Satisfied: Competitive Heat Is On to Learn What the Customer Really Wants," *Marketing News*, 23 (January 2), 1.

Eccles, Robin (1985), "Physical Distribution: The Next Logical Step," *Industrial Management*, 9 #9 (October), 27-32.

Franco, John J. (1990), "Customer Satisfaction: The Partnership Imperative," *Training & Development Journal* (July), 80-83.

Gardner, William L. and Mark J. Martinko (1988), "Impression Management in Organizations," *Journal of Management*, 14 (June), 321-338.

Gilmore, David C. and Gerald R. Ferris (1989), "The Effects of Applicant Impression Management Tactics on Interviewer Judgments," *Journal of Management*, 15 #4 (December), 557-564.

Goffman, Erving (1959), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc.

Kohli, Ajay K. and Bernard J. Jaworski (1990), "Marketing Orientation: The Construct, Research Propositions, and Managerial Implications," *Journal of Marketing*, 18 (April), 1-18.

Levitt, Theodore (1960), "Marketing Myopia," *Harvard Business Review*, 38 #4 (July-August), 45-56.

Leary, Mark R. and Robin M. Kowalski (1990), "Impression Management: A Literature Review and Two-Component Model," *Psychological Bulletin* (107 #1), 34-47.

More, Roger A. (1986), "Developer/Adopter Relationships in New Industrial Product Situations," *Journal of Business Research*, 14 (December), 501-517.

Narver, John C. and Stanley F. Slater (1990), "The Effect of a Market Orientation on Business Profitability," *Journal of Marketing*, 54 (October), 20-35.

O'Neal, Charles R. (1989), "JIT Procurement and Relationship Marketing," *Industrial Marketing Management*, 18 (February), 55-63.

Rado, Russ (1989), "Connecting With the Customer," *Training and Development Journal*, 43 #7 (July), 66-68.

Schlenker, B. R. (1980), *Impression Management: The Self-Concept,* *Social Identity, and Interpersonal Relations*, Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Shapiro, B. P. (1988), "What the Hell is 'Market Oriented'?" *Harvard Business Review* (66 #6), 119-125.

Sonnenberg, Frank. K. (1989), "Service Quality: Forethought, Not Afterthought," *Journal of Business Strategy*, 10 #5 (September/October), 54-57.

Tedeschi, James T., Barry R. Schlenker, and Thomas V. Bonoma (1973), *Conflict, Power, and Games*, Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.

Webster, Frederick, Jr. (1988), "The Rediscovery of the Marketing Concept," *Business Horizons*," 31 #3 (May/June), 29-39.

Zeithaml, Valerie A., A. Parasuraman, and Leonard L. Berry (1990), *Delivering Quality Service*, New York: The Free Press

_____, _____, and _____ (1985), "Problems and Strategies in Services Marketing," *Journal of Marketing*, 49 (Spring), 33-46.

_____, Leonard L. Berry, and A. Parasuraman (1988), "Communication and Control Processes in the Delivery of Service Quality," *Journal of Marketing*, 52 (April), 35-48.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Brian T. Engelland** (DBA candidate, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale) is Assistant Professor of Marketing at the University of Evansville. His research interests include marketing strategy, product development and innovation. As a marketing executive and consultant, he has participated in the development of over 400 new products and services.

**Paul J. Hensel** (PhD, University of Houston) is Associate Professor of Marketing at the University of New Orleans. His research interests include advertising, ethics and service marketing issues. His work has been published in the *Journal of Advertising, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Health Care Marketing,* and various other journals and proceedings.