



Dr Tim Coltman, an academic with real-world business experience, is helping companies form better relationships with their customers. Picture: UOW

# Business man

## Research

Helping business managers more accurately predict customer behaviour is a passion of Dr Tim Coltman.

ONE of the original big ideas in marketing is that a company's future profitability is dependent upon its ability to fulfil customer needs rather than sell products.

But just how good are we at anticipating future needs?

Most studies show that less than 33 per cent of new products and technologies "succeed". This implies that despite years of academic research, numerous articles in respected journals, a myriad of consulting assignments, and the work of practitioners inside enterprises, few if any businesses can accurately forecast customer demand.

My research passion is to convince managers that better models of human behaviour - both outside and inside the firm - will make quite a difference.

The research evidence is compelling and clearly shows that without models of buyer behaviour managers will always be less sure about the range and potential implications of the judgements they make.

In recent years, my research has

focussed on three complementary perspectives.

The first is concerned with corporate investment in new information technologies such as customer relationship management (CRM) programs.

CRM programs will generate improved customer information, which in turn supports greater customer insight. Improved insight will enable greater customer responsiveness, which in turn leads to greater customer satisfaction, in turn leading to increased loyalty and finally improved profitability.

In collaboration with a number of businesses and a business school, we conducted the largest study of CRM performance in Australia. The results show that building the right type of customer relationship is the key to performance improvement.

Further, this research shows why CRM programs can be successful and what capabilities are required to support success.

The second concentrated on a more accurate methodology to forecast customer demand. Traditional techniques such as focus group discussions or market simulations are inadequate because they lack realism.

Using a new approach based on advances in multimedia, statistical preference modelling and information acceleration we have achieved more accurate measures of consumer "willingness to pay".

This fresh approach provides

several advances over traditional surveys: (1) we provide greater realism that ensures more accurate predictions are developed more quickly and cheaply, (2) the sophisticated way this research is undertaken enables us to identify the gap between current product offerings and a consumer's willingness to pay.

Further, we are also able to identify the most optimal communication strategy to support new product rollout by modelling what a customer knows about a product and how they prefer to find out about new products.

The third has sought to integrate complementary fields in management science to develop a more holistic understanding of supply chain management.

In collaboration with a global market leader in international express and logistics, this research will develop a model of strategic alignment that is dynamic, multidimensional and normative.

This research scheduled for completion in 2008 is sponsored by the Australian Research Council. The results will have a bearing on future supply chain management research and practice.

*Dr Tim Coltman is a senior lecturer/research fellow at the University of Wollongong's School of Information Technology and Computer Science.*

## Q&A

**What did you want to be when you were a kid?** I always loved sport and wanted to represent my state.

**Has your career followed a straight line?** My favourite saying is that "one day I will grow up and decide what I want to do with my life". More seriously, I have had a diverse career that started as

a metallurgist; then a surveyor; then a fireman; then an IT consultant; then a project manager; before becoming an academic. Perhaps the hardest decision was leaving the NSW Fire Brigade as only a handful of people ever leave.

**What would you change?** I have absolutely no regrets with any of my choices.

**Advice for young researchers:** Make the right choices. One of the most

important choices relates to the quality of training.

**Next adventure:** In 2006-07, I will conduct a large research project in collaboration with DHL (global freight forwarding company). The study will cover seven countries (Australia, Singapore, India, Korea, China, Japan and Hong Kong) and survey 3500 companies.

**Website:** [www.uow.edu.au/~tcoltman](http://www.uow.edu.au/~tcoltman).

# Employees can make easy work of disability



## Opinion

**Robyn Weekes**  
director of employment, equity and diversity,  
University of Wollongong

IF YOU are thinking of employing a person with a disability but are unsure because you haven't travelled this route before, let me reassure you.

You are not alone. In a national inquiry commissioned by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission last year into employment and disability, one of the key barriers to improved employment opportunities was employers' concerns about financial and personal impact if the job did not work out.

In my role of director of employment equity and diversity at the University of Wollongong (UOW), I have experienced many more successes than failures in employing people with a disability.

There are no guarantees that every person you employ will be the perfect employee. I would rate the chance of a successful employment relationship higher if you employ a person with a disability. In my experience, people in this group typically have a "can do" attitude.

Most people with a disability want to work if they have the capacity to do so, but sadly the opportunities are limited. When they are given an opportunity, they put in a huge effort to show what they can do. It is important for them to prove something, not only to you, but also to themselves. People with a disability are very loyal employees. They have very low attrition rates.

Another barrier to employing

people with a disability is our perception of what a person with a particular disability can do. We inevitably underestimate their capacity.

We do not fully appreciate what technology is available to assist people with a disability.

While most of us are aware of devices to assist workers handling heavy materials, many are unaware of ergonomic technology such as screen readers for the sight-impaired or word-prediction software, voice activation for those unable to use a computer keyboard.

People with mobility-based disabilities are often very computer literate because computers can provide access to information.

UOW has a longstanding commitment to employ a diverse and skilled workforce, which reflects the diversity of our community. People with a disability are one of the various groups in our community under-represented in employment. People with a disability represent 16.6 per cent of Australia's working-age population.

The Federal Government is predicting a skill shortage based on our ageing population.

People with a disability provide a largely untapped labour pool of both full-time and part-time staff for employers willing to put aside their concerns and give someone with a disability a go.

I guarantee you will get a dedicated and very able employee.

## Opportunity 'C' Class

(ACADEMICALLY GIFTED CHILDREN)

## Information Evening

AN INFORMATION EVENING  
will be held at Wollongong Public School on  
**Thursday, May 11, 2006**

for  
**the Year 5 OC Class for 2007**

This evening will provide information about the Program including:

- Things to be considered before entering the Program
- Expectations of Students
- An outline of the Program for 2007
- Selection Processes

Potential students are welcome to attend with their parents/carers. There will be ample time for questions and parents and students from current classes will be present.

Remember - your child must be in Year 4 at the present time, as this class is for children in Year 5 in 2007.

To assist with our organisation, please contact the school on **4228 9120** and provide your name and how many will be attending.

**WHERE:** Hall in the Double Storey Building, Wollongong Public School, Church St Wollongong

**WHEN:** Thursday, May 11, 2006, 7.00pm start