**There are three basic components of a good marketing information system:**

1. Information acquired via market intelligence

2. Information from operating data

3. Information library.

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What a MkIS does is to bring together data from these sources, usually into a comput­erised database. By structuring it appropriately this allows the interrogation and linking of the data. It is important for the systems to be designed by marketers, not computer people, as the form of the output is critical to good decisions.

Market intelligence is all of the data available from the many external sources. It may have been acquired formally or informally but will usually be checked for reliability before it is entered into an MkIS.

Information from operating data, such as production or accounts, has been covered under the heading of operational information. It is usually different from marketing informa­tion as it is collected for very different reasons. Nevertheless, there is likely to be some marketing relevance in this data and that must input into the MkIS.

It could perhaps con­tain the details of car production, 2-door versus 4-door, or various engine sizes ordered. Certainly sales information drawn from invoices is very impor­tant and yet this needs to be presented in a way that might categorise customers by relevant market segment, or might show products purchased in as much detail as possi­ble. It could take the form of a sophisticated customer database, such as that used by major service companies for mail order or airline reservations.

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The information library is a collection of all the formal research gathered by an organisa­tion that is still relevant and up to date. It might also include research surveys carried out by trade associations or by associated companies, as such reports are sometimes available and they do add to knowledge. Thus the MkIS will contain a comprehensive collection of all relevant information which could help achieve better marketing decisions.

Computer-based systems are particularly useful for handling numerical information, but can provide only limited assistance when handling qualitative information based on descriptions and ideas. The need to address this problem has been recognised, and much work has been done to develop ‘decision support systems’ designed to provide the infor­mation needed for marketing decisions.

No doubt the number of companies developing and using such systems will increase. The main benefit offered by such systems is likely to be the facilities they offer for accessing the available information. Because of the volume, complexity and time-dependent nature of marketing information, the provision of market­ing information will continue to be the specialist marketing activity of marketing research.