

# Marketing holds the key to improvement



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## Business Comment

WRITING this as I sit up late awaiting the result of the election, the importance of marketing in all we do strikes me again.

How did we come to choose between Gordon, David and Nick? David had re-branded and re-positioned the Conservatives; Nick seemed to be coming up strong from the TV debates, and was the image of Gordon Brown unmarketable in today's media society?

Some criticised the TV debates as moving the election process much closer to the American presidential system and being about personality rather than policy.

Their effect was that as we went into election day the pollsters were telling us four in 10 electors were undecided who to vote for.

What is clear is that as all three parties vied for the centre ground. Historic political affiliations seem to

have been declining in importance, replaced by the marketing gurus.

Looking on Google, it is fascinating to see that the definition of marketing has itself changed. I really took to one of the statements that came up: "Marketing is not about providing products or services, it is essentially about providing changing benefits to the changing needs and demands of the customer." (P.Taylor 7/00).

This is what business has to address all the time. We have to move with the times and provide what the customer wants.

As an incomer to Inverness from south of the Border, I have seen too many cities and towns that have failed to do this. Just think of some of the tired English seaside towns with their ageing and less than grand hotels struggling to meet today's needs.

Yet others, such as Brighton, have moved forward and continue to thrive. Why? Because they knew the importance of continually improving the experience they offered tourists and residents alike.

They knew what they wanted to be and put in place a dynamic marketing strategy to achieve it.

I was fortunate to be living in Birmingham and be part of that city reinventing itself from a heavy metal bashing city to a service city. Who, 30 years ago, would have thought of going there for a conference? Now thousands go, generating millions for the local economy.

Inverness has many natural features. It generates tourism income of £100 million out of the total tourism spend of £600m for the whole of the Highlands.

BID recognises that we, and all the stakeholders in Inverness, need to create a focus on the city to improve the experience and develop the comprehensive marketing plan that moves us all forward.

A partnership approach must be the way to do this.