During a recent empirical study, in which 49 companies were involved, it was found that the senior marketing official does not normally sit on the board. There is a tendency in the industry to focus on production and finances while tolerating “the marketing department” to spend a portion of the money, keeping themselves busy with placing advertisements.

Even at a meeting of some of the top marketing brains in the country it was concurred that marketing is not a science. It is also not generally considered to be a profession, at least not in the classical sense.

In order to gain the necessary esteem in the market, it is the responsibility of marketing professionals to get back to basics and deliver what it was intended to deliver - namely net profit.

In a bear market everything possible has to be done to maintain turnover, while decreasing costs in a responsible manner, without casting the company into a negative spiral. It is not good enough to merely throw money at marketing or to simply cut costs: both have to happen in harmony to achieve the desired effect.

It is important to get back to the basics of identifying decision makers in a target market, segmenting the market and communicating a solution to a need within that specific market in order to stimulate a sales decision. At the same time, a close liaison with the production department is required. Looking at the four Ps of marketing - Promotion, Price, Product and Place - it has to be noticed that only one of these Ps is under the control of the marketing department. Product development is managed by operations, price by cost accountants and place by logistics. To have an effective marketing department, alignment of all these elements is of vital importance.

The Marketing Association of South Africa invited top marketing experts, such as Christo Bischoff of North West University, Awie Vlok (CSIR), Ivan May, Tracy-Leigh McMillan (Sappi), Chris Moerdyk, Roger Sinclair, Sylvester Chauke (Nandos) and Jeremy Sampson (InterbrandSampson) to join a technical panel and be available to provide expertise and technical advice to the marketing departments of the association’s corporate members.

It is envisaged that through providing this service, member marketers will be supported in their tough circumstances, to affect the balance sheet positively.

Corporate members will be able to phone a hotline number or e-mail marketing questions to a central point, from where guidance will be sought from the technical panel and distributed to the originator. Questions and answers handled through the month will be worked into a monthly newsletter to share the knowledge with the broader marketing community through, for example, regular articles in the Journal of Marketing.

We envisage that the technical panel will contribute towards marketing professionals forming a community of value, with a resultant positive economic impact.