

occupation, socioeconomic status, level of education, place of residence, ethnic group affiliation, and geographical context (see Burkhalter 1986:116-117). This aspect of market research is termed **market segmentation**. The business anthropologist attempts to understand, for example, what kinds of consumers, as distinguished by specific characteristics, would be likely to purchase a particular product, and how these consumers' expectations about the product (for performance or longevity, for example) might vary.

Business anthropologists involved in market research also analyze the constantly shifting symbolic meanings consumers attach to products. An important factor here is consumers' conscious or unconscious desire to create or enhance a particular image of themselves or their economic or social status. A number of corporations employ business anthropologists specifically to help them create image-enhancing products.

AN APPLIED CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGIST AT WORK

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In my case—I'd been hoping that a technology company would be interested in getting a detailed understanding of how people actually use their products.

This possibility occurred to me while I was doing my Ph.D. dissertation research. I worked with a community-based environmental justice organization of the Navajo Nation, a group whose members were strug-

gling to defend their land from mining, timber cutting, toxic waste dumping, and other abuses. They wanted to create an organization they felt was "truly Navajo," but at the same time, they needed to interact, via the medium of technology, with all kinds of outsiders—lawyers, grant makers, politicians, non-native activists, urban environmental groups. It's not hard to imagine the frustrations and challenges that both the outside groups and the technologies brought to the lives of these courageous Navajo activists. This kind of technology use, it seems, will only get more com-

Chevrolet, for example, eager to command a post-sport utility vehicle (SUV) market, hired business anthropologists to study how car buyers decide which vehicle to purchase on the symbolic role played by automobiles and consumers to purchase them. Schumacher conducted in-depth interviews to discover what sort of image SUVs have in potential buyers, she found, were eager to overcompensate for women with children, in particular, liked the fact that they do not announce to the world "I'm a mother" (Shumacher 1998). Women viewed SUVs as simultaneously safe and adventurous. Use of this kind of information has helped to make SUVs more successful, says marketing expert Lisa Schumacher, "if a marketer can equate his or her product with [its] deeper symbolism, it can turn it from just another good product into a cultural icon."

At Intel, in the Intel Architecture Labs, I work with a small group of social scientists in a group called People and Practices Research. Our collective goal is to identify new uses for computing power by understanding the needs of real people. We call it "design ethnography."

The process is pretty simple. We start by identifying a group of people that we know is not well served by current technology products—a minority group, for instance, or people over sixty years old, or small business owners. Once a specific group has been identified, we try to ascertain the activities, engaged in by its members, that technology—*I should say, well-designed technology*—might support or enhance or make more enjoyable, to the point that people might actually want it. Our fieldwork isn't all that different from academic anthropological fieldwork, except that it's usually shorter in duration and involves the liberal use of other resources (such as marketing or demographic research data—and, of course, any literature we can get our hands on).

Back in our offices, we use pictures, interviews, and whatever

other resources we can find to address our concerns, the people we work with, and the times we'll try to occupy—a familiar example. Some pictures and interviews inspire new we liver computing fit with their goal is to answer the question: what practices can we add to existing technology to stand where it stands today, to people and to practices that stand where it stands today. It's a great way to be a natural anthropologist. In our firms, including net firms, are ethnographic research and user interface design are better than

I'm an anthropologist for Intel Corporation, the company that makes microprocessors. Most people think that sounds a little strange—an anthropologist working for a microprocessor manufacturer—but it's not as strange as you might think. Applied anthropology has a lengthy history in the business world, helping firms better understand their own internal organizations, and today these firms are becoming increasingly interested in the use of ethnographic methods to gain a better understanding of their customers. This is particularly true in the high-tech industry, where the use of ethnographic methods is a fairly natural outgrowth of requirements gathering and participatory design. Some anthropologists have been doing this kind of work for a long time—two examples are Lucy Suchman (formerly of Xerox Palo Alto Research Center) and Bonnie Nardi, who has worked at Apple Computers and AT&T.

I feel very lucky to have a job like this. Sometimes anthropologists wind up in inter-

Chevrolet, for example, eager to command a position at the top of the lucrative sport utility vehicle (SUV) market, hired business anthropologist Ilsa Schumacher to study how car buyers decide which vehicle to purchase (Shuldiner 1994). Focusing on the symbolic role played by automobiles and consumers' "intangible motivations" to purchase them, Schumacher conducted in-depth interviews with car buyers in order to discover what sort of image SUVs have in potential purchasers' minds. Some potential buyers, she found, were eager to overcome "gender identification." Women with children, in particular, liked the fact that SUVs, unlike station wagons, do not announce to the world "I'm a mother" (Shuldiner 1994:C6). Other consumers viewed SUVs as simultaneously safe and adventurous (ibid.:C3). Chevrolet's use of this kind of information has helped to make SUVs enormously popular. Indeed, says marketing expert Ilsa Schumacher, "if a marketer is skillful enough to equate his or her product with [its] deeper symbolism, they have the potential to turn it from just another good product into a cultural icon" (Shuldiner 1994:C3).

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Back in our offices, we use pictures, videos, transcripts of stories, and whatever

other resources we can to give our engineering and design colleagues a rich sense of the concerns, the activities, and the lives of the people we worked with in the field. Sometimes we'll try to re-create the spaces they occupied—a family room or a small office, for example. Sometimes we'll show hundreds of pictures and tell accompanying stories to try to inspire new ways of thinking about how to deliver computing power to people in ways that fit with their lives and practices. Always the goal is to answer this question: what kinds of practices can we make better for people by adding technology? Half the battle is to understand where technology might be a disruption to people and to avoid the mistakes and frustrations that such disruptions cause.

It's a great job, and the good news is, there seems to be a growing market for applied cultural anthropologists in this field. A number of firms, including some of the "dot com" Internet firms, are actively looking for people with ethnographic research skills to help them better understand their customers, and thus create better products.