

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

PL Retail Business (RB305)

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Publications Code DP036822

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Introduction

This series saw an extremely small entry which skews the percentages between those achieving and not achieving. The results were mostly around the pass grade with one achieving a grade A but there were no A* awards in this series.

The paper seemed less accessible with students able to generate marks at lower levels but not across the board. There would appear to be a broader knowledge base with fewer blank question entries this series.

Previous improvements in the standard of entry have not been continued in this series. It appears that many students have still not developed exam techniques to address the requirements of the questions they are asked. Answers were often very basic and did not take into account either the command word or the number of marks. Again, this was especially noted in the questions requiring students to 'discuss, evaluate, assess or analyse'. Students need to be made aware that these questions are generally looking for two sided arguments, some of which may require a decision that needs to be justified. Questions requiring students to 'explain, describe or outline' were often answered in just a few words or a single sentence, which meant that student often lost several marks, affecting the overall result. Students need to read the question thoroughly and be able gauge the depth and complexity of answer required in these exams.

Students that gave stronger answers had clearly analysed the pre-release case study and were able to apply their answers to the questions asked. Most students lost marks due to the very generic answers they gave. A significant number of the students gave very brief answers. Quite often students did not give enough of an answer to be able to access all of the potential marks.

The simpler questions were often the most weakly answered. Students lost marks on brief explanation by giving just a single or few word answer rather than a developed sentence.

Conclusion

This exam series indicated that students were generally more at ease on questions about the USP of a retail business rather than location or situational analysis. There was generally a good level of understanding on how a retail business could change their marketing mix in response to external factors. One of the weakest areas was the question on positioning in the market place with a significant number of students linking this to physical location. Sales versus market orientation was generally well understood but the use of key performance indicators to judge the success of a store was not strongly answered. Students need to know how to read the question and the number of marks allocated to be guided into the depth of answer required. They need to know what is being asked of them in questions to evaluate, assess or make recommendations. Students need to understand that merely repeating stimulus material in their answers does not generate marks when they are clearly required to make a decision from the material given.

Responses to questions

Question 1(a): One way market research can help stay ahead of competitors.

This was a disappointing response, most students used the answer 'questionnaires to find out what customers really want' but then failed to develop this into competitive advantage. For a four mark question it is expected that this statement is developed to include how this intelligence can be used to support business decision making to gain competitive advantage to the automotive company in the case study. There were a few well developed answers that addressed activities such as checking out competitor websites and what could be done to either emulate or counteract these.

Question 1(b): Trade periodicals as a trusted sources of secondary research

There was some confusion as to what trade periodicals were. Most students appeared to believe these were publications giving statistical reports on previous research results. They were generally identified as trustworthy because they were independent but no one identified that they were publications representing the industry they publish for.

Question 1(c): Advise how the market research reported on (above) could impact on marketing strategy

There was some confusion with this question as the market research reported 'above' was actually stimulus material at the beginning of the question. However, a sizeable number of students thought this referred to the trade periodicals in question 1(b) and answered accordingly. This was due to the layout of the question paper as question 1(b) was above 1(c) on the same page and the stimulus on the previous page. Answers given were assessed to take account of this issue but there were some limitations. Answers for trade periodicals were accepted as secondary research which may be acceptable and cost effective with the counter argument that this would have been collected for a different purpose and may not be an accurate 'fit' in relation to strategic marketing decisions for McCardle Cars.

Question 2(a): Outline one factor affecting pricing strategies in the retail car market

Most students were able to pick up a mark for identifying competitor activities. Stronger answers were developed to identify what these activities may be and what McCardle Cars could do to counteract this activity.

Question 2(b): Outline how McCardle Cars uses one type of new technology to promote their business

The majority of students referred to the website and a good majority mentioned social media. Stronger answers referred to the reporting of charitable fund raising activities and blogs from the company mascot Cuddles McArdle.

Question 2(c): Analyse how Jade could plan and coordinate the marketing mix to achieve the objective of customer delight

This question was generally not very well answered as many students did not appear to relate the question about the marketing mix to the stem the relating to a vision statement objective. This led to several responses being very generic and tended to describe the marketing mix rather than apply to the case study. The main issues appeared to be with 'plan and coordinate' the marketing mix. Stronger responses were well applied and referred specifically to customer delight and how this influenced Jade's marketing plans.

Question 3(a): Explain why excellent after sales service is important for McCardle Cars Ltd

There were some very good answers to this question with many students recognising that a car is a substantial purchase and that there is a need for customers to return. One student was able to discuss that it was actually more cost effective to have returning customers than always seeking new ones. Most students' generally accessed two to three marks and this was a good differentiator as stronger students were able to gain the fourth mark. Generally this was answered quite well.

Question 3(b): Outline what is meant by competitive advantage

Most students were able to identify that competitive advantage was something different that a business is able to do. On the whole this question was quite well answered with most students able to access the two marks available. This was another good differentiator as a few students opted not to answer this question and left it blank.

Question 3(c): Analyse how differentiation gives McCardle Cars a competitive advantage

This question again proved to be a good differentiator. Stronger students were able to demonstrate their understanding of what was meant by 'differentiation'. Some students were able to discuss the concept of differentiation in terms of excellent customer service specifically to the McCardle Cars case study. Some students lost marks by not considering differentiation as a competitive advantage or applying to the case study.

Question 3(d): Assess how a PESTLE analysis would help Jade in developing marketing strategies

Many students identified the elements of a PESTLE analysis but did not develop their answer to apply to the marketing strategies which limited their score. Some students selected one or two elements and developed them in terms of the business overall rather than focus on marketing strategies. Stronger answers considered PESTLE as a situational analysis of external factors and introduced SWOT for internal factors in relation to marketing for McCardle Cars.

Question 4(a): Discuss whether personal selling is an appropriate promotional method for McCardle Cars

Most students were able to discuss promotional methods or personal selling but not all were able to relate the two. The general consensus appeared to be that promotional selling is an appropriate method for McCardle Cars to use personal selling. Stronger students made very strong links between the two and identified that people who bought cars asked a lot of questions and face to face selling was the best method of dealing with this.

Question 4(b): Evaluate the contribution of 'People' in the extended marketing mix to McCardle Cars

This was a twelve mark question and generally was not well answered. Most students demonstrated some subject knowledge about the extended marketing mix but this was often just an explanation of what the extended marketing mix was and not really linked to the case study. There were a few high scoring answers and these tended to link the element of 'People' to the personal touch required in a high service orientated business in the case study. Most of the arguments were quite one sided and focussed on the positive elements of the 'People' in the extended marketing mix with few identifying how people can also give a negative impact in a bad experience.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwant to/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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