



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2005

COMMUNICATION SKILLS Certificate in Marketing Skills

General Comments

The Examiner is pleased to note that the standard of scripts for this paper was very high. Many of the candidates had thoroughly prepared for the exam and were able to provide good answers to the case study and questions. The papers also benefited from the students' considerable work experience and general knowledge of business.

Candidates' exam technique was also of a very high standard. Students applied their knowledge to the questions asked and provided relevant examples from their own experience. There was very little evidence of waffle or pre-prepared answers to imaginary questions. In general, those who answered questions using an essay style format were less succinct. By contrast, those using a well-structured format with subheadings and supporting examples and diagrams, where relevant, achieved a higher mark. Indeed many of the scripts were of a standard one would normally encounter among students taking exams at a more advanced level in marketing.

While future students will have the benefit of both sample and past papers, this was the inaugural year for this current group of exam candidates. The high grades achieved by this year's students is worthy of praise and the Marketing Institute can only hope that the same performance will be achieved by future students.

Question 1: Case Study – Emma's Bad Hair Day

The case study carried 50% of the marks and was based on customer service procedures at a hair salon. The first question asked students to identify customer service procedures for dealing with a customer complaint. The better candidates were able to identify the correct steps in dealing with complaints and comment on how deviations from those standards could have an impact on customer loyalty. Weaker answers looked at the events depicted in the case study and evaluated the customer service experience, but failed to compare them to the standards set out in course materials. Very few picked up on the fact that the characteristics of services, in particular, variability and inseparability, impacted on this case. The customer had booked with a particular stylist. Offering the services of another stylist meant that the customer had an entirely different customer experience.

Candidates were then asked to comment on the value of customer complaints. Most recognized that customer complaints are an opportunity for the company to learn about how their procedures are perceived from the customer perspective and should be welcomed.

The third part of the question looked at the salon's policy of learning by experience. Most recognized that a proper customer service experience could not be created and managed without clear standards and customer service training of all staff. The existing practice meant that new staff learned the habits, good and bad, of staff such as Emma.

Question 2

A question on the five dimensions of service quality – tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and communications (or empathy) - was extremely well answered. Most people were able to identify and describe each of the dimensions, many giving examples from their companies or companies that were known to them.

Question 3

A question on the communications model produced some extremely good answers. While students had the option to evaluate the Clio advertisement from their course material, many opted to assess well known advertisements or advertisements from their own organizations. Most students were also able to explain very clearly the role of noise in interfering with the successful transmission and reception of advertising messages.

Question 4

While many students understood the basic steps in the preparation, attendance and follow-up to a meeting, few dealt with the issue of 'meaningful outcome'. Most answers did not deal with the issue of making a persuasive presentation and having clear objectives about what the audience should think, say or do as a result of the presentation.

Question 5

Almost all answers on managing a major PR problem correctly identified the need for the company to urgently take corrective action and to make spokespeople available to the media and to local residents. Given that PR was dealt with in a general way in your course notes, it was encouraging to see how well students were able to apply the theory to a practical situation.