



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2006

MARKETING IN PRACTICE Certificate in Marketing Skills

General Comments

At each exam sitting there is a significant percentage of candidates who let valuable marks – those marks that lie between a pass and a fail grade – slip through their fingers because they do not apply the information that they have learned sufficiently well to the exam question they are addressing. As mentioned in the Examiner's May Report, this year there was a good deal of sloppiness in terms of setting out answers, such as failing to start answers to new questions on a new page, or failing to clearly mark questions so that the examiner had to thumb through scripts trying to decipher which answers belonged to which questions.

Section A (50%)

Case Study: Greenfingers' Garden Centre

This case study reflected the issues around retailing and changing consumer trends. Greenfingers' Garden Centre, like many other garden centres, is finding it increasingly difficult to survive as garden sizes are decreasing and many customers are living in apartments rather than traditional family homes. John Tylor, proprietor, has failed to adapt his business and candidates were required to comment on how the business owner might have tracked changes in the business environment. Students were then required to suggest an alternative strategy for the Greenfingers' business.

In Section (i) students were asked to suggest what marketing analytical tools might have been used by the company to track emerging trends. Changes in demographics and housing changes are relatively easy to track, as the State – through the Central Statistics Office - gathers very detailed information in this area and makes long-term projections available to the public. Few commented on this fact. A number of students confused segmentation, SWOT and PEST analytical tools. This error suggested a fundamental gap in their knowledge and learning from the programme.

In Section (ii) students were asked to recommend a strategy to help John Tyler grow his existing business. Most suggested that Mr Tyler broaden his range of products to include plants and accessories suited to smaller gardens. Some very good answers suggested a shift to added value services, such as garden maintenance. For many small businesses, long term survival is dependent on finding ways to add value to your traditional offering.

In the final section, candidates were asked to suggest ways in which Mr Tyler might use the Internet and direct marketing to promote his business. Some very good answers suggested some

form of seasonal on-line advice to ensure that Greenfingers remained 'top of mind' on the part of customers.

Question 2

A question on pricing did not prove very popular. However, most students were able to identify the fact that consumers are now comparing prices on the Internet so that price competition has become even more intense. Many also mentioned other environmental issues such as the general health of the economy as an influencer on price.

Question 3

Services marketing tends to be one of the better understood parts of a marketing programme. Most candidates were able to describe the special characteristics of services and how they require that we use an extended marketing mix of people, process and physical evidence in order to market our services effectively.

Question 4

The examiner was delighted to observe that students, in general, are very adept at using the SWOT analytical tool. There were, however, some examples of students confusing strengths (internal capabilities) with opportunities (external forces) and/or weaknesses (internal) with threats (external).

Question 5

A question on distribution channels produced very poor answers. Many candidates merely provided a diagram of their distribution channel without any comment as to its effectiveness or justification.