



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2007

MARKETING IN PRACTICE Certificate in Marketing Skills

General Comments

There are two stages to any exam: preparation and performance. Once inside the exam hall, it is essential to put every effort into maximizing one's performance and extracting every last ounce of value from the knowledge gained during the preparatory stage. Each year this examiner gives the same advice. Each year, students fall somewhat short of giving the last push of energy required to perform to a high standard in the exams. It is frustrating to see the numbers of papers that list points - albeit correct points - but fail to develop those points to get the additional marks. Too many students achieve a D grade, although their papers indicate enough exam preparation and knowledge to achieve a higher grade.

The answers provided in this year's papers were often too brief and superficial. A two hour exam should give students time to do a very thorough case study and provide reasonably substantial responses to the two remaining questions in Section B of the paper. A worrying number of students provided answers to all questions set on the paper, each answer of just a paragraph in length. Two questions and two questions only should be attempted in Section B. It is gratifying to note, however, that every student attempted the case study.

Section A (50%)

Case Study: *At Your Service*

Like the *Greenfingers' Garden Centre* case study of May 2006, this case study reflected the issues around retailing and changing consumer trends. Students were asked to assess the best route to achieving high turnover for a shop located on a busy street in the centre of a major city. They had to do this in the context of high rents and the need to maximise sales potential throughout the day. Many students recognised that the shop needed to change its offering during the course of the day to ensure the shop's offerings remain relevant to the convenience market, with lunch, mid-day and evening hot food offerings.

In Section (i) students were asked to identify three segments that could be potential target markets for Mr Siopa's business. A practical case study requires practical answers. Students who suggested he focus on families in the locality had clearly failed to note that the shop was located in the centre of a major city. The numbers of families living in city centres is relatively low, compared to other more obvious segments, such as the local working population. Equally, the tourist market was not an appropriate segment, given the business' target of maximising sales throughout the day, and by implication, throughout the year. The tourist market is fickle and seasonal.

In Section (ii) students were asked to provide a proposal to develop Mr Siopa's business within one of the segments they had proposed in Section (i). This required a development of the full marketing mix. There were some very good answers to this part of the question for those who recognised how a segment should be targeted and developed. A number of students, however, just provided tips and points on how to promote the shop to a given segment. Promotion is just one aspect of business development. The range of products on offer was also an important issue to address in this question.

Students have approximately one hour to complete this question. Many answers appeared to have taken a good deal less time to prepare and present, judging by the brevity of some of the responses.

Question 2

A question on the promotion mix used by Ryanair in the Irish market proved very popular. Most recognised that while Ryanair is extremely adept and successful in generating PR, the company also has a very heavy advertising emphasis. Few identified the main purpose of such ads: to drive traffic to the website. A number of students also confused direct marketing with direct mail. Ryanair uses direct marketing, via the Internet, to communicate and sell to its customers. It does not use direct mail as a main platform for promotion.

Question 3

There were a number of excellent answers to a question on the environmental forces affecting the Marketing Institute of Ireland. Some good answers explored the changing educational environment and the major changes in our demographic structure, our technological landscape enabling the Institute to deliver more and more to its members and students online as well as the changing political and economic landscape.

Question 4

A very simple question on the similarities and differences between products and services clearly divided those who knew the answer from those who did not. There was no room for woolly answers to this topic. Those who performed well identified the special characteristics of services and went on to examine how services products require an extended marketing mix, compared with tangible, physical products.

Question 5

A straightforward question on the Consumer Buying Decision Model did not prove very popular and many of those who answered it confused the buying model with the AIDA model.