



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2008

COMMUNICATION SKILLS Certificate in Marketing Skills

General Comments

The module Communications Skills, while dealing with the practical and skills aspects of interpersonal relationships, is based on academic research and established principles. The exam process allows the student to demonstrate their ability to apply these principles to practical examples. In general, students of the Certificate in Marketing Skills are particularly good at bringing common sense, combined with thorough study of their course materials, to mini-case studies and business scenarios. This year, the standard achieved by participants was encouraging and many students have the potential to advance to further studies.

Section A (50%)

Case Study: *Coffee Bean*

This year's mini-case study was inspired by Starbucks loss of market share and the emergence of McDonald's as a café venue. Just as in Starbucks, the *Coffee Bean* has lost some of its original momentum and competitive advantage, with over-automation and impersonal service causing the chain of coffee houses to lose its 'soul'.

In part (a) students were asked to suggest how Harold, the chain owner, could help his staff to understand the importance of customer service. As this is a service organisation, the customer interface is very important. Students needed to discuss how the customer experience is affected by the type of service they receive. In fact, for Harold, the customer service is an integral part of the brand and so good service will attract and retain customers, while bad service could turn customers away to less expensive and more hospitable competitors.

In part (b) students were asked to outline the five criteria customers use to evaluate service. In general, the answers explained what was meant by each of the five terms and showed how the *Coffee Bean* could ensure that the customer would have a positive impression of the five criteria, namely, tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and communication (empathy).

Question 2

Those students who had studied their course notes found a question on the steps towards planning an advertising campaign a very straightforward question and were able to structure their answers clearly around each of the steps, gaining a very high mark.

Question 3

A question on creating a positive first impression on corporate and personal clients in a car dealership was well answered, with students able to discuss both the importance of appearance and behaviour in creating rapport and getting the sales process off to a positive start.

Question 4

Sometimes when students are asked to give an example from their own experience to support their analysis of a situation they suddenly become short story writers rather than exam candidates. In this question candidates were asked to give an example of a complaint being resolved in a satisfactory way. Too many students got wrapped up in their personal story and failed to properly analyse why the recovery by the company was effective.

Question 5

A question on running meetings was not very well answered. Few students examined the purpose of meetings and what would constitute a well run meeting but instead drew up a list of things to do before, during and after a meeting.