



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2000

STAGE 1 PROJECT

General Comments

This year's project dealt with the issue of e-commerce, which is perhaps the most significant topic in marketing circles at the present time. Students were asked to assess the kind of impact that e-commerce and the developments in Internet technology are having on the marketing activity of a chosen organisation. As is customary, this report provides a breakdown of the grades, a review of content issues and a review of technical issues.

Breakdown of Grades

Like last year, performance in this exercise was very satisfactory. Clearly, there is a high level of interest in the area of e-commerce and many students expressed how much they enjoyed doing a project in this area. This is reflected in the grades, which were an improvement on last year which itself had been a significant improvement on previous years. It is very satisfying to report that just under 50 percent of students achieved at least a B grade.

Content Issues

The brief provided an implicit structure for the report and it was particularly pleasing to note that most students are now adopting this structure, which is helpful in ensuring that each part of the assignment is adequately addressed.

The first part of the project asked students to select a company operating in Ireland and describe the business that it was in. A good mix of both indigenous companies and subsidiaries of multinationals were selected. The main banks were the particular favourites, perhaps reflecting some of the publicity around their Internet strategies or lack thereof.

The main body of the report asked students to examine the extent to which Irish firms have incorporated the Internet into their marketing activities. As the grades above indicate, this was generally very well done with students being able to describe and explain some of the innovative marketing activities being carried out by many companies. However, a number of weaknesses in this area were also observed. Most notable perhaps was a tendency by many students to simply describe a company's website at length. The brief specifically indicated that this alone was not acceptable. It was important to comment on the site but it was also necessary to describe the role played by the site in the company's marketing. Was it a core component of the firm's marketing activity? What kinds of marketing activities were being conducted online? Was the Web becoming a central part of the firm's marketing activities or was it still somewhat peripheral? These were the kinds of questions that needed to be addressed. There was also a tendency for some students to describe the firm's website in 'glowing' terms to the extent that part of the report read like an advertorial. A more balanced approach is required at this level. Finally some students still insist on placing questionnaires

along with the responses to the questionnaires in the body of the report. Presenting raw questionnaire data in this fashion is not good practice. The main findings of any primary research should be presented and discussed in the body of the report and the questionnaire should only be included in an Appendix.

The final part of the project concerned analysis and recommendations. This section was generally well handled. Most projects critiqued the firm's Internet activities and in the main the reactions were positive. Many of the reports presented an excellent series of recommendations on how to develop online marketing activities, which a reader would find very valuable. However, it is always important to source these recommendations where they are not the student's own ideas.

In the spirit of seeking to maintain the improvement observed in the last two years, the following again are the examiner's expectations with respect to each grade category.

As. These are projects which are outstanding in every respect. Submissions falling into this category are generally very well presented, provide a detailed and integrated analysis of theory and practice and usually provide some novel insights, findings or show a particularly strong command of the theoretical concepts.

Bs. Submissions in this class tend to be very good all-around. They will typically provide a balanced examination of all the project's components, show a good command of the theoretical concepts and be well organised and presented.

Cs. Projects falling into this category are typically of the solid but unspectacular variety. They will generally deal with each of the elements of the brief at a fairly rudimentary level, show a knowledge of the basic concepts like the marketing mix and be reasonably well organised and presented.

Ds. Projects in this category tend to be weak in many respects but show that the candidate has a sufficient command of the subject matter to be allowed to progress. Submissions at this level, tend to be selective in their coverage, missing important components of the brief and usually show only a superficial knowledge of marketing concepts. In many cases at this level, projects tend to be poorly organised and structured and generally reveal many typing/spelling errors.

Es. Projects that fail outright generally miss the brief entirely and contain information which is of no relevance to the question that was asked. Also falling into this category and the "compensation" range are projects that are carelessly put together, offer very little in terms of content and show a dangerously weak knowledge of marketing concepts.

Technical Issues

In general the quality of project presentation was very good this year. However as always there are some exceptions and despite developments in word processing technology, some students continue to ignore the spell check facility, incorporate a variety of font types into the submission and use font sizes that are only legible under a microscope! So once again, please pay attention to the following.

- **PROOF READING.** The level of spelling errors was very high in some cases. Proof reading is essential and students are advised to have at least one other individual read their report before submission.

- Despite being clearly outlined in the instructions, the level of sourcing of charts, tables, diagrams or comments in the text is still low. Particularly where statistics etc. are included in the report, these must be sourced.
- Many tables, charts and diagrams were untitled and not referred to in the text.
- Referencing in the text of the reports was particularly bad being haphazard and in a variety of styles. The instructions clearly state that 'comments should be referenced by including the name of the author in brackets in the text, with the full citation included in a bibliography'. This instruction was followed in only a limited number of cases.
- Bibliographies were much better this year than in previous ones indicating perhaps the availability of information about the Internet. However, in some instances they were very brief and a list of people interviewed does not constitute a bibliography.
- Appendices were generally not used very well often including material of questionable relevance. In addition, appendices should be included in the sequence in which they are referred to in the text.
- Many projects did not include a one-page abstract and some of those that did included it at the end rather than the beginning of the project.