



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2006

PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL SELLING

General Comments

This is the worst performance of any group of candidates since the subject Principles of Personal Selling was added to the Marketing Institute curriculum in 1995. The average mark achieved by the candidates was 28%. Bearing in mind that the pass-mark is 40% this puts the performance that the examiner had to work with into a clear context.

The usual problems of Marketing Institute examination candidates were evident again: failure to read the question, poor exam technique, failure to integrate knowledge from other subjects, failure to fulfil the instructions in the question, and so on. In addition, this year, the examiner noted a particularly deplorable standard of spelling and syntax. This is ironic given that so many of the candidates emphasised the importance of good communication skills in personal selling.

Question 1

This was the most popular question on the paper. Unfortunately most candidates failed to address the statement in their answer and those who did failed to *discuss* it as required by the question - instead they just looked at it from one perspective. Strong arguments could be made both in support of the statement and against it. In reality it would be expected that candidates would draw a conclusion somewhere between the two extremes. It is disappointing that after a year of studying personal selling that candidates still might suggest that a good salesperson will have a "quick smart answer for everything" or that he should "push and push".

Question 2

Of all the candidates who attempted this question only one recognised that it was a high involvement/high risk purchase situation and presented a systematic decision-making process relevant to that situation. From the answers presented it would appear that other candidates hadn't studied the topic in either this subject or in marketing. A 5-stage process such as Problem Recognition, Search, Alternative Evaluation, Choice and Outcome was expected. The candidate should then have explained how in a high-involvement situation the salesperson is involved in all stages of the process.

Question 3

This was the least popular question on the paper - only one candidate attempted it. The stimulus-response method of sales presentation endeavours to trigger an emotional response from prospects. It recognises that different prospects have different motives for purchasing the same product and therefore the salesperson must establish the stimulus that will elicit a positive response. A substantial number of marks were allocated to the use of the vacuum cleaner example to illustrate the answer.

Question 4

This question again emphasised the candidates' inability to integrate their knowledge of different subjects. The marketing planning process was studied in both this subject and in marketing, but you wouldn't know that from reading the answers. Logic would dictate that a candidate would start an answer by delineating the stages of the marketing planning process and then describe the role the personal selling function fulfils in each stage of it. Nobody did that however. Several candidates examined the role and function of personal selling without putting it into the context of the marketing planning process. This is probably the result of not reading the question properly. They got no marks for their efforts. The circumstances under which a company would be likely to employ a personal selling team would include: a high priced product, a technically complex product, a product aimed at a geographically concentrated market, a product sold through retailers, and so on.

Question 5

Cold calling can be defined by as: a method whereby the salesperson contacts sales-leads *without appointment* and with no knowledge of the business or individual called on. Most candidates confused this with prospecting. While it is part of the prospecting process it is only a part of it, indeed a small part. The question required the candidates to evaluate cold calling as a selling tactic, that is: to give its advantages and disadvantages, its merits and demerits. It didn't ask for a description of how to do it or for an explanation of why it might be done.

Question 6

In sporting parlance this question was a *gimme* for anybody who has studied personal selling. It simply required candidates to explain four of the most basic sale closing techniques. Unfortunately many candidates missed this easy-scoring opportunity, while one even refused to take the kick. Of those who attempted the question they largely made the mistake of describing the basic mechanics of the techniques without explaining the underlying principles.

Question 7

This statement was taken directly from the essential reading textbook. In giving the instruction *discuss* it required the student to look at the statement from all perspectives. Most marks were lost because the few candidates who attempted the question only looked at it from one perspective.

Question 8

The typical functions of sales call reports are: a source of marketing intelligence for management, a valuable part of a salesperson's information system, an aide memoir for salespeople, a control tool for management, a basis for evaluating salespeople or designing training programmes, and a system for easing the transfer of a sales territory to a new salesperson. The typical information that should be included in a sales call report would include: name of prospect, contact name and details, objective of call, details of issues raised, outcome of call, date of next call, objective of next call, previous prospect called on, subsequent prospect called on, marketing intelligence gathered, etc, etc.