



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2000

PRACTICE OF SELLING

General Comments

Overall, the candidates have produced quite a pleasing set of results with a big improvement in referencing the course material and expanding on their answer length. There was an increased level of personal opinions expressed, suggesting more of the candidates are from a sales background than before. Whilst this can work in a candidate's favour, it can also backfire when too much time is given in the answer to the personal experience and not enough to the theoretical context.

More care needs to be taken on interpreting the question being asked, particularly if the question is a compound sentence. Often the answer structure is in the question, yet hurried approaches to answering can misdirect the answer and consequently the mark suffers. There are a number of opportunities in some of the sections to use visuals to illustrate an answer and those chances should be seized as they add to the overall content and presentation. A number of candidates confuse "objections" with "objectives," and this has a severe impact on the answer. Candidates are well able to produce examples when asked, and the use of critical incidents is increasing. An overall impression of increasing professionalism in selling emerges, which is exactly what is required in today's marketplace.

Question 1

This was definitely the most popular question and most candidates answered it first, perhaps because of its straightforwardness and ability to get the writing flow established. Some candidates showed how preparation impacted on each stage of the sales process, others used the content as laid out in Lancaster and Jobber. There was a pleasing number of cross-references to other syllabus material and examples and critical incidents abounded.

Question 2

This question needed allusion to the changing role of the sales representative in today's marketplace with the shift from transactional to relational selling. This by definition requires increased usage of qualitative sales targets as managers assess these softer aspects which are so important to achieving sales success. Few candidates lost the opportunity to point out the imperative of the sales manager coming out on territory in order to make these assessments and take on the role of coach rather than controller. Many used material from Anderson's article to emphasise this point. Many examples were presented and personal experience used.

Question 3

The strong answers here led into the essential article content with a summary of the importance of direct marketing in the Irish economy and the increase in jobs in this area. Drivers of this situation were also discussed. The answer needed a definition of telemarketing, a discussion of the four roles it can play, and a clear identification that these are determined by the extent of face-to-face contact needed by the customer. A number of candidates were not specific enough with regard to the question asked, thereby reducing their mark.

Question 4

Again, strong candidates had little difficulty with this. Lancaster and Jobber highlight four developments: JIT, central purchasing, reverse marketing and leasing. Some students included e-commerce and internet developments, which are also acceptable. The use of the word “function” in the question was to deliberately direct the candidate into dealing with organisational buying. Some candidates missed the lead and talked about direct response television and other consumer-focused developments.

Question 5

This was an extremely popular choice but too many candidates used it as an opportunity to dump everything they knew about key account selling into the answer. Hence there were a lot of answers which waxed lyrically about the stages of the Relational Development Model without tying it in to the question which asked for the likely sales process to be used. The model is an illustration of the typical progression of a relationship between buyer and seller – not a sales process. Those, however, who illustrated the different activities carried out at each stage by the supplier account manager overcame this problem. Others used Lancaster and Jobber’s content and some took the chance to visually represent the SPIN model within this framework.

Question 6

This answer was looking for the recognition that implementing a sales force automation programme will inevitably need a form of change management input as well. While most candidates dealt with this extremely well and gave much information about the tools, training and support required for effective implementation, a small percentage went off down the wrong road of cultural factors in international selling; a good illustration of the point made earlier that candidates should read the question carefully and look for the clues contained within.

Question 7

The most unpopular question on the paper yet those who attempted it did very well. Preparation for sales negotiation is clearly dealt with in the essential text and all that was required was the combining of that material into the context of a sales training programme. Some candidates produced very workmanlike agendas for the day or days required, and gave very clear information about the variety of presenters and delivery techniques they proposed to use.

There was a slight misinterpretation issue with this question. Some candidates took the performance appraisal process to mean overall evaluation whereas others took it literally and gave the required answer on performance appraisals. The essential text uses the term “evaluation” for the wider picture and that is why the examiner did not use it in the question design. However, allowance for this ambiguity was made in the marking of answers.