



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2000

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

General Comments

Overall the result in terms of spread of grades among candidates was disappointing in this subject. There are a number of reasons for failure to achieve higher grades. One is that some candidates concentrate on one area but are not consistent in their approach to all answers. Secondly, there is a failure to read the question asked and to apply relevant theory and practice to the questions. Thirdly, lack of reading of the core text. The text provides a very good framework for theory and practice and is an essential requirement to achieving the learning outcomes for this course.

Question 1

This question focused on the nature of meaning in marketing communications. This is the most theoretical question on this year's examination paper and is the most fundamental concept in Marketing Communications. Concepts in relation to this answer are drawn from the first two sections of the syllabus and provide grounding for much of the theoretical aspects of the whole course. This was the least answered question on the paper. Candidates were asked to take a semiotic perspective in examining meaning. Yet many answers only looked at elements of the communications process. Some of these elements address how marketers convey and consumers acquire meaning but many of the elements do not relate to meaning at all. Excellent answers looked at how managers try to manage brand concepts by creating desired meanings for their brands. Good answers varied in their approach but on the whole they examined how marketers create and transfer meaning and how consumers derive meaning. Weaker answers took a definitional approach and defined some aspect of semiotics, for example sign, signified signifier, signal and symbols, but did not relate the definitions to meaning in marketing communications. Most of the examples given in weaker answers tended to be verbal, visual and other signs were not mentioned.

Question 2

This question relates to section four of the syllabus and required candidates to focus on advertising objectives and the factors that a marketing manager must consider in setting objectives. Objectives should be the foundation of all advertising decisions. Objectives should be decided prior to making decision on much of the advertising campaign. There were several approaches taken in answering this question. One approach, which received the poorest marks, was to give the full creative brief and to include a section on creative objectives. The brief was the main focus and objectives were not set prior to making brief decisions but incorporated as

part of the brief strategy. Another approach was where candidates viewed objective setting only in terms of budgeting and focused on objective and task and other methods of setting. These answers were poor and unrelated to the question asked. Really good answers talked about advertising objectives, examined categories of objectives, hierarchy of effects models and the requirements for setting good objectives.

Question 3

Section six of the syllabus is concerned with media strategy, specifying media objectives as an integral part of media strategy. Five objectives are essential to media planning: reach, frequency, weight, continuity and cost. The media planner will review each objective to see what part it should play in the overall media strategy. Candidates were expected to focus on the media objectives. A couple of approaches were taken in answering the question. A very weak approach and one that could only fail the question was where answers focused on the advantages and disadvantages of media such as television, radio and press. This was completely unrelated to the question asked. Another quite weak approach was answers that concentrated on the entire media plan and merely listed media objectives as part of the answer. A third type of answer was the definitional approach; these answers generally received a good pass. Very good answers examined each of the objectives in relation to the example given and went through decisions in determining how the objectives should be represented in the campaign.

Question 4

This question relates to section five of the syllabus, which looks at creative strategy. It was hoped that answers would look at the means end chain and advertising strategy. The better answers showed clearly the relationship between consumers and advertising messages by using the Mecca's model. These answers included a discussion of the reasoning for constructing means end chains and advertising applications of means end chains. This model concentrates on the consumer and on what the consumer values when choosing brands in a particular category and how this determines what brand attributes and consequences need to be emphasized in advertising. A much weaker approach was where answers looked at the creative brief and failed to address the question asked.

Question 5

The role of the database is included as part of direct marketing, section seven of the syllabus. This was the most answered question on the paper. One of the major criticisms of answers to this question was that there was far too much discussion of direct marketing before candidates attempted to examine the role of the database. One approach adopted by many was to concentrate on maintaining and updating the database, some of these answers were quite good particularly when relevant examples were given. Really good answers looked at database assets and lifetime value analysis. The worst answers to this question only looked at the media of direct marketing and did not mention databases.

Question 6

There were some very good answers to this question, which included a thorough analysis of managing brand concepts in the context of well-integrated marketing communications. These answers looked at functional, symbolic and experiential needs of the brand. They also examine how integrated marketing communication effects behaviour achieves synergy and builds relationships by using the brand concept. Weaker answers simply gave a definition if the

marketing communications mix or worse generally talked of marketing examples with no reference to any theory.

Question 7

This question looks at consumer responsiveness to sales promotion. It was the second most popular question of the paper and the answers were generally disappointing. It appears that many did not take on board the material in the new text for this section of the syllabus. Those who did gave very good answers. There was a wide approach taken to answering the question and most of these failed to focus on responsiveness. For example some looked at sales promotion techniques appropriate to each stage in the product life cycle without mentioning responsiveness. Others talked of various methods of consumer sales promotions and reasons for growth of sales promotion. There was also a category of answers that gave detailed examples of either the Hoover or the Polaroid sales promotion campaigns and why they had failed without addressing the question asked. Those who answered the question correctly looked at how consumers differ in terms of their responsiveness and how this affects profitability.

Question 8

This question wanted candidates to draw distinctions between marketing communications aspects of public relations and general public relations. In many cases there was a good theoretical base to the answers to the question that candidates used Grunig's model to explain the theory of public relations. Some using this approach went on to draw out the difference when using public relations for marketing communications and corporate activities of the company. Some answers talked about sponsorship which had nothing to do with the question asked.