



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2004

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Question 1

88% of candidates answered question 1, 43% achieved a grade C or higher and 39% failed this question. Well answered questions included a framework or model for discussing the role of marketing communications as a means of enhancing brand equity in order to achieve favourable consumer response to the brand. It was expected that answers to this question would show how marketing communications strategies affect brand equity by including a discussion on brand level marketing communications decisions. Answers to this question should have proceeded to concentrate on the nature and importance of brand equity and how this is achieved through the creation of brand awareness and development of appropriate brand image strategies.

Weaker answers to this question fail to discuss any model for managing marketing communications decisions and showed poor knowledge of enhancing brand equity. In many cases these questions briefly described their favourite brands without referring to any marketing theory. Some of those who failed this question gave simplistic definitions of elements of the marketing communications mix with no reference to brand equity or a simple outline of the AIDA model.

Question 2

49% of candidates answered this question, 26% achieved a grade C or higher and 58% failed. An understanding of the nature of meaning in marketing communications can be greatly enhanced by pragmatically applying the core concepts of semiotic theory. It is important to understand that signs and symbols mean different things to different people in different contexts. Answers to this question should have shown how marketing communicators build meaning and how audiences derive meaning from a range of marketing communication messages. Discussion should have focused on the nature of signs and how meaning is transferred from culture to brands and to consumers.

The aspect of meaning that was given the greatest attention in answering this question was the use of figurative language in marketing communications. However, where a definition approach is taken to describing figurative language, examples must be given and it must be shown how the ad takes meaning from the referent in the hope of building brand associations.

Some weaker answers either gave very basic communication models or concentrated on a single international campaign that had failed; the example given was using a baby on a can in some African countries. Neither of these approaches referred to the nature of meaning in marketing communications.

Question 3

66% of candidates attempted this question, 22% gained a grade C or higher and 66% failed. Interactivity enables the user to control the amount or rate of information that she/he wishes to acquire. It transforms the viewer from passive recipient to active user. It enables the audience to not only acquire information but to complete transactions. It was expected that answers to this question would explore these issues in detail and show how marketers need to consider new communications strategies to fully engage in interactivity. This could have included an evaluation of internet advertising formats such as web sites, lessons to be learnt from data base management and the move from an informational to a transactional model of marketing.

Weaker answers to this question described how they used the internet without fully exploring any relevant marketing issue. It was particularly disappointing that those that took this approach failed to discuss how the internet enables the marketer to extend and deepen relationships with consumers. Many people answering this question showed poor knowledge of either internet marketing or direct marketing and totally failed to explore the core concepts of individualisation and interactivity.

Question 4

63% of candidates attempted this question, 18% achieved a grade C or higher, 54% failed. It was expected that answers to this question would concentrate on factors that marketing communicators consider when setting a budget. The main decisions that should have been discussed were: objectives and how they are to be achieved within budget, competitors spending with a strong focus on share of market and share of voice and, finally, the funds available and how budgets are set.

Quite a number of answers focused on the Marketing Communications plan and did not give enough attention to budgetary considerations. Some of these answers included a discussion on costs of media and how this affected the budget decision. These answers tended to drift off the main question asked.

Others took the approach of only giving a brief outline of budget setting methods with no discussions of factors that need to be considered before this decision is made. These answers tended to be very short and relied on definitions.

Question 5

43% of candidates attempted this question, 39% achieved a grade C or higher, 28% failed. This used to be one of the weakest areas on examination scripts, it is now the best answered question on the paper. There were very good answers outlining fully the role of values in marketing communications and showing detailed knowledge of the Meccas Model. The answers were very strong on description and explanation of the theoretical model. The weakest part of the answer is in application, little or no examples were used to explain the model. It is essential that candidates show how the theory can be applied in practice.

Question 6

39% of candidates attempted this question, 10% gained a grade C or higher, 38% failed. There were some very strange answers to this question with many candidates concentrating on creative strategy and the brief, even though neither was asked. Other very weak approaches included detailed descriptions of not just one ad but several ads in a campaign e.g. the Guinness believe series. These answers showed very poor knowledge of media and little or no understanding of the basic elements of a media strategy.

This was a very straight forward question and it was expected that candidates would discuss target audience selection, determining media objectives, selection of media vehicle and scheduling and media buying. Where candidates showed knowledge of media strategy it tended to be in the area of selection of media objectives and there was some very good discussion on the trade off between different objectives. There were few examples of good media strategies in practice.

Question 7

68% attempted to answer this question, 18% achieved a grade C or higher, 35% failed. There was a heavy reliance on examples in this question, the most popular being, Heineken and Rugby with particular emphasis on Munster Rugby, Guinness and GAA, and Nike for ambush marketing. There was little or no attempt at discussing how these examples were relevant in showing how ethical guidelines were adhered to or breached for Sports Sponsorship.

It was hoped that discussion on ethical guidelines would include ambush marketing, the ethics of targeting, integrity in business and the relationship between ethics and regulation. Ambush marketing was the element of this question that was dealt with in most detail with lots of very good examples. However, it would appear that candidates' knowledge of ethics and regulation is confined to advertising and few attempted to apply their knowledge to sponsorship. Those candidates that did gave very good answers.

Question 8

72% of candidates attempted this question, 23% achieved a grade C or higher, 34% failed. Sales promotion can be both strategic and tactical. It was expected that candidates would examine strategy and tactics of sales promotion in the promotion mix. In many cases there was little differentiation of strategic and tactical role and virtually no reference to the promotion mix. There was a reliance on tactics of sales promotion with candidates giving definitions of different sales promotion techniques and in many cases failing to expand on how and when these are used to react to competitive activity. Candidates who failed this question tended to rely on a basic description of one sales promotion technique with no reference to question asked.

Good candidates considered both the strategic and tactical roles discussed, objectives, segmentation and targeting strategy particularly in relation to deal proneness of consumers, and budgetary considerations. In addition they examined the tactics of sales promotion and how these could be used alongside other elements of the promotion mix.