



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2005

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

General Comments

Overall, the exam paper answers indicate that the majority of students have a good understanding of, and appreciation for Marketing Communications theory and practice. Therefore, all concerned must be complimented. A widespread trend amongst some students was the use of one to two pages per answer. It is suggested that these students are not doing justice to their breadth of Marketing Communications learning during Stage 3, and indeed, to each exam question, by offering such short answers. At Diploma level, a three-hour exam would facilitate answers of at least three pages.

Another issue to note relates to consistency of answer scoring across five questions. An overall 'A' grade was not attained this year even though some students were awarded an 'A' in individual questions. In some cases, it emerged that these students were offering very detailed but lengthy answers to their first three or four questions, but appearing to be pressed for time, offered very short answers (in bullet point form) to their final questions. It is crucial that students manage their time carefully during the exam, allocating an equal amount of time per question.

Another point of note is that 14% of students did not attempt 5 questions, thereby automatically losing the marks allocated to these questions. It is important that students apply themselves equally to the number of questions required.

Finally, it is argued that where students present diagrams in their answers, there should be an accompanying discussion / commentary on such diagrams, as opposed to placing the onus on the reader to interpret same.

Question 1

This was the most popular question. Some students answered the question by focusing on the marketing communications decision process as addressed in the textbook. Other students focused on the brand equity framework. Good answers were those that considered the nature of brand equity, encompassing aspects such as brand knowledge and functional, symbolic and experiential benefits, as well as considering the role of marketing communications in building and enhancing brand equity. Excellent answers further addressed the importance of integrated marketing communications in terms of developing equity.

Question 2

This question required students to demonstrate their understanding of the progression or sequencing of steps that advertisers seek to move consumers along. Some students referred to the hierarchy model presented in the textbook whilst others referred to models such as Strong's AIDA model or Lavidge and Steiner's Hierarchy of Effects model. Good answers also considered the inherent questions

pertaining to such models such as the sequencing of behaviour and attitudes, and the relative importance of advertised information alongside personal experience.

Question 3

This answer required students to critically examine the concept of the database as a corporate asset to be exploited. Good answers referred to the value of the database in terms of lifetime value analysis and considered aspects such as building customer loyalty, focusing on prime prospects and cross-selling. Supermarket databases were the popular examples. It is important that students do not confuse a mailing list with a database, as was the case in some answers.

Question 4

Overall, the answers to this question were very good. Students showed a thorough understanding of, and ability to apply creative strategies such as pre-emptive, brand image and resonance strategies. Weaker answers tended to focus largely on examples of soft drink advertisements in isolation from the theoretical underpinnings of the question.

Question 5

Components of corporate identity include the product/service offering, corporate environments and behaviour, and the presented corporate brand in terms of advertising and public relations. Some students focused on sponsorship in their answers without considering other aspects of corporate identity.

Question 6

The area of advertising to children has been given tremendous coverage in Ireland in the last year or so, in the context of the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland's (BCI) introduction of a Children's Advertising Code. Many students chose to discuss the role of the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland without mentioning the role of the BCI. Popularly addressed criticisms included the questions as to whether children can differentiate between advertising and programming, and whether they can discern advertising's persuasive intent. Other aspects which were addressed included the issue of unhealthy eating and child obesity as well as the phenomenon of 'pester power'. It was noted that some students addressed the first part of the question, but omitted the second part, i.e. did not indicate whether each criticism was justified or not.

Question 7

Some students focused on the selection of an advertising agency whilst others allocated too much time to considering the different types of agency. The crux of the question required the student to consider issues such as quality of communication, the importance of the advertising brief, agreed system of remuneration and the concept of the relationship as a strategic alliance or partnership.

Question 8

This question required the student to consider the creativity/effectiveness challenge faced by advertising agencies and their clients. Weak answers focused on examples of advertising which the students deemed to be creative and / or effective. Strong answers sought to consider and integrate creativity in terms of novel and appropriate creative ideas, with effective advertising which considers aspects such as marketing strategy, the adoption of the consumer viewpoint, persuasion and the achievement of marketing and marketing communications objectives.