



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2006

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

General Comments

In general, students demonstrated a very good understanding of the marketing communications syllabus and provided relevant and current examples of marketing communications practice. As recommended in the May 2005 report, the examiner would emphasise the importance of time management during the exam. It is crucial that students allocate an equal amount of time to each of the five questions which they are required to attempt. In some cases, it was evident that students had run out of time, and their fourth and fifth questions were either very short or else presented in bullet point form.

The examiner is also satisfied to observe that this year, students tended to offer more discussion within each answer. As outlined in last year's report, at Diploma level, students would be expected to offer at least three pages of discussion per answer.

A final note is offered regarding students' attention to the question asked. It was apparent that some students tended to focus on the stated topic within a question, rather than answering the specific question being asked. For example, this was evident in Question 7 relating to sales promotion. Some students offered a substantial discussion on the types of consumer sales promotions without relating their answer to the context, i.e. the short-term/long-term nature of sales promotion.

Question 1

This question required students to illustrate their understanding of the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) and also to indicate the barriers to IMC. Good answers tended to define the concept and to identify the distinguishing characteristics of IMC, e.g. its 'one-voice' nature, and its utilisation of all forms of relevant contact. Barriers which the student could have addressed include the debate over the language and terminology used vis-à-vis integration, the perceived lack of agencies that can offer an integrated service, the existing provision of specialist services and the required changes in organisational culture.

Question 2

This question required the student to examine how marketers create and transfer meaning in marketing communications messages. The student was required to indicate an understanding of the concept of meaning, and the accompanying requirement in marketing communications that consumers interpret a message in the way in which the sender intended. The cultural context of meaning transfer was also an important aspect to the discussion. Students were expected to refer to the application of semiotics and the way in which communicators may use signs and figurative language, such as similes, metaphors and allegories, to communicate a desired meaning.

Question 3

Overall, this question was very well answered. It lent itself very much to the provision of examples of celebrity endorsers - David Beckham featured widely across the vast majority of answers. The examiner would emphasise that examples should be used to illustrate the theoretical discussion in an answer. A very small number of students concentrated their answers solely on examples of celebrity endorsement. The student was required to address the role of celebrity endorsement in terms of appealing to a target audience, drawing attention to a brand, and positively influencing attitudes and behaviour towards a brand. The student was also expected to offer a theoretical discussion on the employment of celebrity endorsers. For example, students referred to two general characteristics of endorsers – credibility and attractiveness. Other students detailed the TEARS model, namely trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, respect and similarity. Other criteria that can be used to select an endorser include the match up or ‘fit’ between the brand and celebrity/audience; cost issues; the potential for negative publicity.

Question 4

This question required the student to address the role and structure of a full-service advertising agency. A small number of students chose to focus on issues related to the agency-client relationship such as the advertising brief and the methods of agency remuneration. As stated in the opening comments above, it is important that students adhere to the question being asked. The student was expected to define the concept of a full service agency in terms of offering the ability to develop an advertising campaign from inception to completion. Services offered include the undertaking of research where necessary, the provision of creative and media services as well as client services. Students were also expected to be familiar with roles such as account directors and executives, and media planners and buyers. Given the move to integration, students should have indicated their familiarity with agencies offering a wide range of elements from the marketing communications mix.

Question 5

This question required the student to focus on the tools of persuasion which marketers use to influence their target audiences. In the textbook, Shimp (2003) lists six such tools – reciprocation, commitment and consistency, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity. Again, the examiner would emphasise that examples should be used to illustrate the theoretical discussion in an answer. For example, a discussion concerning the influence tactic of scarcity should have referred to the theory of psychological reactance.

Question 6

This question was designed to encourage the student to demonstrate his/her knowledge of the Internet as a means of communication. Therefore, the student could have addressed the role, advantages and disadvantages of the Internet vis-à-vis media such as television, radio and print. Students correctly identified issues such as individualisation, interactivity and relatively lower cost as being areas where the Internet might be favoured over established media. However, strong answers also argued that the relatively small Internet (advertising) spend, when compared with print and television spend, indicates that the Internet is still an emerging medium. Other strong points included the levels of Internet access in Ireland and access to broadband, which could render the more widely available media such as print, more attractive to advertisers.

Question 7

This question required the student to consider the nature of sales promotions and to critically discuss the contention that they are more suited to a short-term, tactical use as opposed to a long-term, strategic use. Rather than listing the various promotions, students were required to assess the merits of promotions in the short-term and long-term. Students correctly identified the importance of using promotions for short periods of time, recognising that protracted use could lead to a special offer becoming the norm for a customer. However, students equally recognised that sales promotions may serve to introduce a product to a user, for example, at the introductory stage of the product life cycle, and that the customer's satisfaction with that product may then favourably affect his/her long-term use of and loyalty towards that product. Students also referred to the risk that some promotions, or the extended use of a promotion, may serve in the long-term to damage a brand's equity. Equally, other students argued that brands such as Ryanair, use sales promotions such as price offers, alongside advertising, as part of an overall integrated approach to developing their brand equity.

Question 8

This question required the student to indicate their understanding of the reactive form of public relations, namely crisis management. Strong answers applied public relations theory by referring to the need to communicate with different publics, such as customers, retailers, suppliers and the media, as well as the use of PR tools such as news releases. Weaker answers addressed this question in a vague manner by referring to the need to withdraw the product and to assign blame for the problem. It is important to note that when a question such as this offers a certain scenario, the student is expected to address that scenario by applying the relevant theory.