



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2009

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

General Comments

Overall, the May 2009 examination scripts indicated that the majority of students have a good understanding of, and critical appreciation of marketing communications theory and practice. It was also pleasing to observe that students are continuing to indicate evidence of their background reading by referring to relevant online resources as well as business and marketing sections in the print media. For example, evidence of this was particularly visible in Question 5 pertaining to online advertising, which tended to attract very strong answers. As previously noted in past examiner reports in this subject, it is important that students should offer current and relevant examples to support their theoretical discussion within a question, and that examples should not be used as a substitute for that discussion.

Question 1

This question required students to indicate their understanding of integrated marketing communications (IMC) and its defining characteristics, for example, the requirement to communicate with target audiences efficiently by way of appropriate touch points. Students were required to critically discuss Shimp's (2007) perspective, indicating the extent of their agreement. Such discussion could have addressed the possible obstacles to IMC, for example, the perceived lack of agencies that can offer an integrated service, or the necessary changes in organisational culture.

Question 2

This question required students to demonstrate their understanding of the role of the Hierarchy of Marketing Communications Effects model. This framework illustrates a series of psychological stages that consumers must progress through, ranging from unawareness of a given brand to the ultimate stage of brand loyalty, in order for marketing communications activities to be successful. As such, the marketing communications objective(s) for a brand will depend on the stage in the hierarchy in which most members of the target audience are located.

Question 3

This question required students to discuss the factors involved in maintaining an effective advertising agency-client relationship. Issues to be addressed therefore could include the quality of communication between agency and client; the role of the advertising brief; the importance of an agreed system of remuneration; the interlinking concepts of advertising creativity and effectiveness; the requirement for the agency to act proactively and move with advances in the communications arena, e.g. with regard to new and emerging media; and the requirement for integrated communications.

Question 4

This question required students to demonstrate their understanding of the nature of reactive marketing public relations (MPR) by applying it in the case of the recall of pork and pork-related products in Ireland in late 2008. Answers should have considered the requirement for principals such as government departments and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland to communicate with various stakeholders such as customers, suppliers and media. Students also had to assess whether other crisis management guidelines were followed, such as the need to act urgently and decisively, and to address the negative publicity at hand, as well as the employment of appropriate sources of information such as online resources, news releases, media briefings, management/CEO communications, and customer assistance telephone numbers.

Question 5

This question required students to critically discuss the role of online advertising in the context of the media mix. In doing so, students should have noted key characteristics of online advertising, in terms of its relatively lower cost, potential for less clutter, individualisation and interactivity. In critically discussing this quotation, students questioned whether online formats such as websites, display advertising and search engine advertising are replacements for conventional media, or instead, are complimentary to traditional media. Reasons cited included the rate of broadband access in Ireland and the limitations of various online formats. Stronger answers also questioned whether the goal-directed or 'leaning-forward' nature of the online user rendered him/her less receptive to online commercial messages in comparison with the 'leaning back' nature of, say, the television viewer.

Question 6

This question required students to critically discuss their views on the nature of sex appeals in advertising. Issues to be considered therefore included the potential for sex appeals to attract audience attention, to increase message recall and to generate emotional responses. In critically discussing this question, students should have noted that the effectiveness of such an appeal depends on factors such as the relevance of the appeal to the brand/organisation/audience/situation at hand. Other issues to examine were the facility for the creative execution to detract from the brand message, and the potential for the message to be viewed as demeaning and offensive. Students cited examples such as public service advertising, health and safety advertising, political advertising and financial services as categories in which they felt the use of sex appeals would be unsuitable.

Question 7

This question required students to explore how marketers seek to create and transfer meaning in marketing communications messages. Students should therefore have indicated the centrality of meaning to the concept and practice of brand positioning. The relevance of semiotics should also have been addressed, in terms of how marketers use signs to construct meaning which is then transmitted to, and decoded by target audiences. In considering the decoding of the intended message, students should also have discussed the role of the recipient's perceptual field, and the culturally constituted world in which meaning is constructed and negotiated.

Question 8

This question required students to demonstrate their knowledge of advertising regulation in Ireland with specific reference to the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI). Issues that could have been examined included the self-regulatory nature of the ASAI, in contrast to the statutory basis of the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, and the sanctions available to the ASAI. Students also gave examples from the complaints section of the ASAI's website to illustrate where they felt that advertisers were not adhering to the Code, or where they felt that complaints received, were /were not justified.