



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2000

MARKETING PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

General comments

There was an overall pass rate of 65% in this subject, similar to previous years.

1. Candidates should note that it is vitally important to read the question carefully and to specifically address the question in their answer. Candidates must not interpret questions as 'describe', ignoring what is actually asked.
2. Candidates at this level are expected to select from their knowledge what is pertinent to answering a question. Taking the 'write all you know on...' approach will not achieve a pass grade.
3. Candidates at this level of the graduateship are expected to integrate topics and areas of the course rather than viewing them as discrete, isolated topics.
4. Answers should be structured, particularly those in response to the more discursive questions. Such answers should have an opening position, reasoned arguments, evidence of application and conclusion, or some other appropriate structure.
5. Candidates should pay attention to managing their time during the examination to avoid losing marks.

Question 1

Candidates should not reiterate the case. The focus of answers to the case study question should be analytical. Candidates should make decisions where appropriate and justify those decisions with sound analysis.

In relation to part (a) there was a small number of candidates who identified the key success factors necessary in order for this venture to be successful. These answers were wholly appropriate and attracted high marks. But there was evidence in a large number of answers that candidates did not have a clear understanding of the concept of 'key success factors'. A very large number of candidates presented a list of all the positive facts about the venture, while many others just listed facts relating to the company, or gave an historical account of the development of the company.

In relation to part (b) a minority of candidates was very competent in evaluating the research methodology used in the study, in evaluating the reliability of the data generated and in indicating the marketing uses for the data. However, the vast majority of candidates merely re-wrote the survey findings, with little or no analysis.

Part (c) was answered well on the whole.

In relation to part (d) of the question, candidates achieving high marks made a well-reasoned decision, backed by sound analysis, in relation to whether or not the venture should go ahead. However many candidates were either unable or unwilling to make any decision. Some candidates actually stated that they were not going to make a decision and commented ‘ I think I will sit on the fence on this one’ or ‘I would make a decision if I had more information’. This is unacceptable and such answers fail definitively.

There was a good deal of inconsistency in the analysis presented by many candidates in that, having lauded the enterprise in part 1(a) and declared it a sure success, subsequently in part 1(d) they state that the venture should not go ahead and that it will fail. Analyses should be consistent throughout the question, as the purpose of the subsections of the question is to take the candidate through the stages of analysis.

Question 2

Almost 70% of candidates attempted this question. Candidates achieving a high mark in this question were fully conversant with the value chain and with the bases for competitive advantage at each stage. Excellent answers were peppered with appropriate examples of the application of the concepts. Weak answers merely described the value chain and appeared unable to relate this to competitive advantage, while others described generic strategies with no reference to the value chain.

Question 3

This was the least popular question and was answered by 30% of candidates. On the whole it was well answered with many candidates exhibiting a good understanding of techniques and approaches to performance measurement that are aimed at making it positive, both for the company and for employees. Weak answers described the balanced score card, others described the marketing planning process and indicated the role of control and performance measurement in that process.

Question 4

45% of candidates attempted this question. A broad range of answers was acceptable. Answers fell into two distinct categories, those that presented a considered, well argued, and structured answer and those that were anecdotal, citing personal experience of purchasing products (usually CDs and Calvin Klein clothing) on the internet. While it is probably true that no-one has the definitive answer on the impact of e-business on marketing, candidates at this level should have the ability to present a structured coherent essay on the impact of e-business on the marketing paradigm.

Question 5

This was a very popular question, answered by 80% of candidates. On the whole it was not well answered with a small number of notable exceptions. Many candidates interpreted the question as 'describe Porters 5-Forces Model'. This is unacceptable and attracted a fail grade. Some even exhibited a poor understanding of that model and could not go much beyond listing the elements of the model. Other weak answers described a PEST model. The small number of excellent answers showed an understanding of the dilemma cited in the question as well as an understanding of the various frameworks and techniques available to assist a marketing manager understand, predict and perhaps change the competitive environment.

Question 6

A large percentage of candidates attempted this question, some 88% in all. On the whole this question was not well answered. Good answers exhibited a comprehensive knowledge of the significance of market share in marketing planning including the different market share measures, the role of market share in setting targets, performance measurement, portfolio decisions, the relationship between market share, price and profitability and stage of market development.

A significant number of candidates appeared to decide that the question could be answered by merely describing the BCG matrix. There was evidence in many answers that candidates did not know what market share meant and statements such as 'it is the number of customers you have' or 'the amount of your sales' were not unusual.