



MARKETING PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

General Comments

- (a) Candidates should note that it is important to read examination questions carefully and to be clear on what is being asked. It is essential in any examination situation, but perhaps particularly in the final year of the graduateship, that candidates plan and structure each answer. These are separate but related issues. Many candidates appear to latch on to one key word or phrase and proceed to write all they can remember on that topic regardless of the relevance of this material to the question asked. This approach is not acceptable at this level. It is important that candidates structure their answers rather than writing at random thereby leaving it up to the examiner to salvage and structure what is relevant to the question asked.
- (b) There is room for considerable improvement in candidates' approach to answering the case study question. The format of Section 1 has been the same over a number of years. The subsections of question 1 are designed to take the candidate sequentially through the steps necessary to arrive at an informed strategy. These broadly are analysis, formulation and evaluation of strategic options, making and defending strategic decisions. Analysis and strategy formulation are separated in the question as they are in reality. The first two subsections generally focus on analyzing the current situation and the last two on the formulation and evaluation of strategy. The aim is to evaluate candidates' abilities in these areas. Some candidates exhibit excellent skills and abilities in each of these areas and thereby gain high marks. However a large majority of candidates merely reiterate the case without any analysis whatsoever. This approach is not acceptable at this level.

Question 1

- (a) This section was not well answered on the whole. The majority of candidates merely reiterated facts from the case or the historical development of the company in each of its markets and failed to identify or analyze the key factors that contributed to its success or otherwise in that market. There may be many reasons for this failure. The majority of candidates may be unfamiliar with the concept of 'Key Success Factors', may be unable to apply the concept in practice or indeed both of these reasons might apply. Some candidates, rather than analyzing the situation, suggested a range of actions, usually tactical, that the company should take in each of the markets. These included 'set up a database', 'improve the factory', 'launch an Internet site'. Some weaker answers presented a SWOT analysis for the company. Excellent answers to this question identified and commented on the key success factors in each of Waterford Crystal's main markets.
- (b) The better answers to this question analyzed the implications of the Chairman's challenge in terms of growth, sales and profitability and, based on this analysis, commented on the challenge.

Weak answers, and they were in a majority, merely reiterated the challenge. Some stated that it was or was not achievable but did not support the opinion with analysis.

- (c) The better answers systematically listed and described the strategic options available to the company in each of its markets. Most excellent answers availed of an analytical framework to generate the strategic options, Ansoff's matrix for instance, and this was wholly appropriate. Weak answers randomly listed actions, some tactical and some strategic, that the company could consider. The weaker answers had little or no analysis to support the proposed course of action.

Question 2

The best answers to this question exhibited a good understanding of the concept of market share and of the role marketing share position can play in the development of a marketing strategy for a product. Many weaker candidates did not appear to understand what market share meant and stated that it referred to for example 'the amount of customers and the amount of times they purchase your product', 'the number of customers your company has' and similar definitions. Candidates should have a good understanding of such a basic concept in marketing. Weaker candidates described all the stages in developing a marketing strategy without any particular reference to market share.

Question 3

Excellent candidates showed a good understanding of the complexity of market definition and measurement and were conversant with relevant chapter in the prescribed text. They dealt competently with issues including the levels at which markets can be defined, substitutability within markets and the problems associated with measuring markets. Excellent answers included illustrations and examples. Weaker candidates focused exclusively on market segmentation and described the process of segmentation, the bases for segmentation and segmentation strategies.

Question 4

Many candidates answered this question well and showed a good understanding of the concept and application of sustainable competitive advantage (SCA). Good answers indicated the sources of SCA, and could cite examples of companies that were successful, at least in the short term, without any particular SCA. Weaker answers merely described the concept of a sustainable competitive advantage and ignored the remainder of the question.

Question 5

Excellent answers explained the origin and rationale for product portfolio models and competently discussed the limitations and benefits both of the concept and of the individual models. A large number of candidates did not give any rationale for the use of product portfolio models. Weaker candidates described the main portfolio models, the Boston Consulting Group Matrix usually. Weaker candidates had difficulty evaluating either the concept or the individual models. Candidates at this level must go beyond mere description. They should be able to critically evaluate techniques, concepts and theories.

Question 6

Excellent answers presented an informed and considered essay on the impact of eBusiness on key aspects of branding such as brand creation, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand building. Excellent answers cited appropriate examples and illustrations. While there is no definitive position on the impact of eBusiness on branding, candidates should be conversant with the key themes of the debate. Weaker answers tended to be anecdotal in character.