



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2002

BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS MARKETING

General Comments

The failure rate at this session was around 37%.

Overall, there was a clear demarcation between effective and weak scripts. In the case of the former, candidates made more extensive use of references, examples and personal judgment, to substantiate their line of argument. By contrast, weaker scripts provided a shallow analysis and examination of the various issues. This was particularly evident in question one (which represented forty per cent of the available marks).

Specific Comments

Question 1

Candidates generally tackled this question in a reasonable manner. The more effective answers drew upon material not covered in the core text-book. This material was generally assessed for its relevance and such answers also made good use of illustrations to augment the degree of analysis. Weaker answers did not appear to recognize the fact that as the question was worth forty per cent of the available marks, it required more focus and effort than would be the case with the remaining questions on the examination paper. Inevitably students making this mistake provided very superficial and descriptive answers, resulting in a low mark.

Question 2

The majority of answers singularly failed to identify the key success factors that drive the new product performance of firms. Issues such as the need for a limited structure, flexibility and real time communication and improvisation were not examined in sufficient depth. Likewise recognition should have been given to the need for resources commitment and a clear and unambiguous NPD strategy. The stronger answers identified these issues. Examples were missing in virtually all answers.

Question 3

This should have been a relatively straightforward question as it impinges on other subjects covered by the candidates in the marketing planning subject. Weaker answers did not relate the discussion to the specifics of the relationship between buyers and sellers in B2B markets. Techniques such as business marketing focus groups and customer visits could have been given more extensive and substantive treatment. The better answers took a pragmatic view and recognized that a mixture of quantitative and qualitative measures would most likely yield superior outcomes.

Question 4

This should also have been a straightforward question. Weaker answers focused on a basic description of the three buying situations that tend to predominate in B2B markets. However it was necessary to delineate between the challenges of relationship building versus transactional details. Discussion should also have focused on the nature of the product to be promoted and whether we were dealing with a standard or relatively complex product. The cost / benefit approach could also have been used to greater effect in assessing the various promotional methods. “Wherever possible” suggests an extreme view. More effective answers identified this issue. Candidates also had an opportunity to revisit the concept of integrated marketing communications.

Question 5

More effective answers went beyond a basic description of the three different buying situations. They also explored the different motives that buyers might have for making a reevaluation of alternative suppliers. The “triggers” had to be identified: the search for cost savings, quality improvements and so on. Weaker answers ignored the strategy guidelines and implications such as whether the marketer is an “in” or an “out” supplier, and the importance of understanding the composition of the buying centre.

Question 6

The stronger answers assessed the various elements of the balanced scorecard concept and considered the role of informal control mechanisms for the type of company as portrayed in the question. Weaker answers simply described some of the elements of the concept without an adequate assessment of its usefulness.