



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2004

SERVICES MARKETING MANAGEMENT

Overall Comments

The number of students sitting the Autumn examinations is low and therefore generalisations are difficult. I will make some comments based on the scripts corrected but more particularly on the type of answer required at degree level in this subject.

I will say again that students do not read the question carefully enough in many cases and also fail to prepare for the exam. I expect that students have read the essential text and are familiar with the concepts discussed throughout the text.

SECTION A

The question asked candidates to discuss the use of the Gaps Model of Service Quality as a tool in managing a service organisation. It is clearly stated on the paper that marks are awarded for the relevant use of examples. Therefore it should be obvious that the best approach to this question was to present the model and then present examples of how it is used. Most students could replicate the model. Since the model is the basis for the text book this was to be expected. However the level of example and discussion was poor in many cases.

Students spent too much time on an indepth discussion of the model rather than reading the question which asked for a discussion of its use as a management tool. This is an important point for future students. The section A question accounts for 40% of marks for the entire paper. Yet year after year students fill a full answer book on this question (often without reaching the point) and as a result run out of time and cannot complete the exam. Time management and reaching the point are crucial to success in answering section A.

A good answer would have included a drawing of the model, properly labelled, a brief overview of the objectives of the model, and examples highlighting the use of aspects of the model. Generically the examples should discuss service design, service personnel, and communication. The same points don't need to be remade for each gap in the model.

SECTION B

Question 2

This was an easy question. The subject matter is covered well in the text and students showed that they had read and understood the topic. The answer should have covered search, experience, and credence qualities. A good answer would have included a drawing of the continuum of evaluation and relevant examples from product and service marketing.

Question 3

This question dealt with the topic of customer satisfaction. The topic is introduced in the text by a quotation from researcher Richard Oliver “Everyone knows what satisfaction is, until asked to give a definition. Then, it seems, nobody knows.” This was an issue with candidates answering this question. Either it was answered very well or very poorly. A good answer here would have included a definition of satisfaction (not necessarily from the text - a student's own definition was acceptable), a note on how satisfaction is influenced by service and product features, customer emotions, and perceptions.

Question 4

This question required an overview of the chapter on marketing research in the text. Interestingly, even though students are now in their fourth year of studying marketing, this question proved unpopular. The answer required was a discussion of a selected number of techniques that could be used in designing a research programme. Students were free to mention any techniques or methods they wished once they justified their use in a service setting.

Question 5

New Service Design and service blueprinting is an important aspect of the course. The topic is covered very well in the text with examples and descriptions of the components graphically illustrated. This proved another unpopular question, not for the first time. Any student who had covered this chapter in study and revision could have scored highly. The answer required a brief description of the concept, a discussion of the components and then a discussion on the use of blueprinting and its benefits. Finally, a candidate was asked to create a simple blueprint. Even reproducing an example from the book would have sufficed.

Question 6

Each year I must comment on the failure of candidates to adequately answer questions on the promotion of services. In this case the question asked about external communication and service delivery. This comes back to the basis of the book and the gap model. Why does a gap arise between expectations and perceptions? One reason examines the role of external communication.

We are all consumers and can each provide examples of a gap between what the communication promised and the service experienced. Yet year after year students cannot apply the theory they have learned to the promotion of services.

The text suggests four factors that contribute to communication problems

1. inadequate management of service promises
2. elevated customer expectations
3. insufficient customer education
4. inadequate internal communication

These are matched with four categories of strategies to match service promises with delivery;

1. manage service promises
2. manage customer expectations
3. improve customer education
4. manage internal marketing communication

I would hope that next year students will prepare better for a question on service marketing communications.