



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2004

SERVICES MARKETING MANAGEMENT

General Comments

The results this year showed a deterioration from last year. 81% of candidates passed, a drop of 5% and only 20% achieved a grade of 'A' or 'B', a drop from 33% in 2003. I would like to propose some reasons for the change.

1. Poor exam technique cost a number of students a higher grade. As with last year a number of students left the compulsory Section A question for their final question to be attempted and ran out of time.
2. Simply listing points or offering bullet points will not suffice in a degree level examination. Students must demonstrate their knowledge and be able to offer a reasoned explanation in their answer.
3. The shotgun approach does not work particularly well. In other words tell the examiner absolutely everything about services marketing, whether asked to do so or not, and some marks will accrue. Some marks may well accrue but the time wasted may cost marks elsewhere should the candidate run out of time. It is much better to have a focused, reasoned answer than a shopping list of the whole course.
4. Yet again I must comment on the need to read the essential text. The examination is based on the text and makes the assumption that it is read.
5. When asked for examples I expect students at degree level to offer examples from well-known companies, or at least companies with established marketing departments. The number of students offering their hairdresser, their local pub, or their gym as primary examples reached epidemic proportions this year. Examples should be relevant and adequately demonstrate the point being discussed. Therefore the company should be of a size that it is involved in organised marketing activities.
6. It was noticeable this year that the parts of the questions requiring practical answers were poorly answered. Even issues as basic as the marketing mix were not adequately illustrated.
7. Could I ask that the instruction on the cover page to begin a new question on a new page be followed. It makes an examiner's life easier!

Question 1

- (a) This was a very straight-forward question that required the candidate to discuss the difference between product and services marketing. I would have expected a high level of knowledge of this basic part of the course. Yet almost 1 in 3 candidates did not even attain a pass mark. Students should have offered a brief description of the characteristics of services and the unique challenges presented by these characteristics, and how the services marketing mix can be used to overcome these challenges. A very good answer would have included a model, usually the gap model, but also the services marketing triangle. This question needed a good logical structure and gave candidates what I had anticipated would be an easy question to begin with. Unfortunately this proved not to be the case for a significant number.
- (b) A number of students did not even attempt part (b). Parts a & b are equally weighted and so these students were immediately marked out of 20 instead of 40. I was surprised at the number of students who could not apply the services marketing mix. The question did not ask for the three additional components but asked for a worked example of the entire services marketing mix. Many candidates offered only people, process, and physical evidence. This was not sufficient. Another common error was to offer a bullet point for each element, possibly a half page in total. This was not sufficient. The two parts were equally weighted and should have received equal attention.

I would suggest that the Section A question (both parts) should not exceed five pages of average size handwriting. Students are inclined to write copiously on this question but often to the detriment of other answers.

Question 2

This question asked students to discuss the role of the customer in the service encounter. It should have focused on (1) the customer as a co-producer or partial employee and whether this is desirable or necessary, (2) the impact on service quality, and (3) the different roles a customer may take in the encounter. This was not a particularly popular question as it required specific knowledge from the text. Those who attempted the question either knew the subject matter and achieved high marks or knew nothing about the topic and received very low marks. There were very few students in the middle!

Question 3

This question dealt with the areas of desired and adequate service. This proved a very popular question and most candidates did well. Over 90% of students who attempted the question achieved better than a pass grade. In fact a high proportion achieved A or B grades on this question. The answer required students to define 'desired service' and 'adequate service'. This would have led to a description of the zone of tolerance and then the discussion on the importance of understanding these concepts. The difference between an average and a good answer here lay in the response to the second part of the question. This asked why it is important for a services marketer to understand both types of service expectations. The better answers offered examples and discussion whereas the other answers offered the theory aspect of the answer and very little, if any, practical aspects.

Question 4

I regarded this question as the easiest on the paper. Certainly it was very popular. However a common error made was to offer strategies for customer retention but not giving the benefits as was required. The benefits for customers include confidence benefits, social benefits, and special treatment benefits. Benefits for the organisation include increasing

purchases, lower costs, increased positive word of mouth communication, and employee retention. This was the core part of the question. Again candidates were asked to illustrate the answer with examples. The most common example given was the candidate's hairdresser. While the example was accepted and relevant I would expect candidates at degree level to think beyond such a simplistic example. Better examples would have been banks, airlines, or supermarkets or any organisation with a defined marketing department or function.

Question 5

This question asked candidates about the provider gaps in the Gaps Model of Service Quality. These are;

1. Not knowing what customers expect
2. Not selecting the right service designs and standards
3. Not delivering to service standards
4. Not matching performance to promises.

The majority of those who chose this question knew the gaps and listed them as shown above and presented a diagram of the model. However, many did not discuss the factors giving rise to the gaps as the question required. I was also surprised that many students who had used the model in their answer to the Section A question did not attempt this question, this in spite of demonstrating that they had a good level of knowledge of the model. Again I would suggest that this indicates poor exam technique.

Question 6

This question examined the employee's role in service delivery and in particular the concepts of role conflict and role ambiguity. This was the least popular question, possibly because it was very specific. However, those who attempted the question generally did quite well and related the answer to gap 3 – the service performance gap. The answer required a candidate to define or discuss the two concepts and then discuss how organisations can overcome the challenges presented and their impact on service quality. The area is covered very well in the text and would be considered an important aspect of the course. As a result I was not surprised that candidates did reasonably well on this question.