



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2005

SERVICES MARKETING MANAGEMENT

General Comments

This year the numbers achieving an 'A' or 'B' grade recovered from last year's 20% to a figure of 27%. While this was encouraging the overall number passing was at its lowest level for some years at 74% overall. As with previous years I would like to give some reasons for the lower pass levels.

1. Exam technique was a problem this year for a significant number of students. For example Section A asked a relatively straightforward question about the application of the Services Marketing Mix. Yet for some reason many students decided to describe in pages of detail the services marketing triangle, the gap model, and any other model they could think of. This effort contributed ZERO to their overall mark as it was irrelevant to the question posed. Likewise in question 6 the question asked the candidate to justify their selection of a single gap from the gap model but many decided to describe each gap. These errors cost students time and gained them no extra marks.
2. I do not believe that bullet points on their own are a sufficient answer at degree level. Candidates who supply laundry lists cannot expect to receive top marks.
3. Read the question and answer what is actually asked, not what you think was asked.
4. Practical examples supported by theory receive the highest marks. The examples should be about well known companies or organisations. At degree level I do not expect descriptions of a student's local takeaway or hairdresser.
5. Students are still not reading the text.
6. Time management. Some students failed to answer the required number of questions. Indeed for some reason a minority of candidates left section A to attempt on completion of section B. I would regard this as a high risk strategy as some ran out of time and lost most of the 40% available for section A.

I would ask that students compare the above points with last year's and indeed the previous year's. The same points are being made year after year. Students must be able to demonstrate an adequate knowledge of the theory and practice of services marketing through this examination. This requires a good knowledge of the assigned text. I am not satisfied that all candidates have even read the text. Students depending on the distance manual or other notes will not do well in this subject. The text is assigned for a reason and so as

examiner I expect that students have a good knowledge of the central issues in the text and also that they can demonstrate an understanding of these issues through examples.

Section A

It is very worrying that students presenting for their graduateship final examination cannot adequately describe the use of the services marketing mix to support an organisation's positioning strategy. Positioning is central to the whole concept and practice of marketing. Yet many students, certainly most of those who failed, could not bring together these two concepts into an adequate discussion. Many will criticise the question and say it is not specifically dealt with in the text. I reject this criticism as I believe that students must be able to integrate topics across the various subjects studied. Certainly they must be able to link something as fundamental as a positioning strategy and the marketing mix.

As I said last year the services marketing mix has seven components not three. Students were expected to discuss the use of all seven elements to differentiate the positioning of the two companies. Indeed many did not even offer contrasting strategies and instead discussed how one company used the marketing mix.

Again as mentioned last year five pages of average handwriting is more than enough for section A. Too many students went into far too much detail on this question and so ran out of time when attempting section B.

Section B

Question 1

This question was popular and was either very well answered or very poorly answered. The required answer was a description of the amended complex decision making process as posited by Zeithaml and Bitner. However a discussion on the wider issues involved in consumer behaviour as related to services was also accepted. Consumer behaviour is a regular feature on this examination paper as it is a central issue in the understanding of services marketing. Therefore I expect a high standard of answering.

Question 2

This question was not popular as it required knowledge of a specific theme from the text. The basic themes are 1. recruit, 2. develop, 3. support, 4. retain. Students who had read and studied the chapter on employee role in service delivery received very high marks on this question. Indeed some students received marks of 80% and above.

Question 3

This question required students to discuss the distribution channels applicable to services. A number of students spent a considerable time discussing the characteristics of services. While this was an introduction to the answer the question did ask candidates to describe the specific ways in which the distribution of services differed from the distribution of products. Again a study of the text will highlight electronic channels, franchises, and agents as some specific differences. As a result those students who studied the text received high marks. Unfortunately too many who attempted this question did not appear to have studied the text and so did not score well.

Question 4

Every year there is a question taken from the chapter on integrated marketing communications and every year I comment in the report on the inadequacy of the answers. This year was no different. Too many students use the shotgun approach when attempting this question and hope that something will gain them marks, but not knowing exactly what that 'something' is. Since candidates should realise that this is a regular examination topic I expect the chapter to be well studied and also that students will be able to support their answer with relevant examples.

Question 5

This should have been the easiest question on the paper. This was a question that could be answered by every candidate as they all should be able to adequately discuss one gap. This was not a trick question. A student could have offered any of the gaps; either the provider gaps or the customer gap. Once the point was argued the candidate received marks. The majority of students attempted this question and the vast majority of those received good marks; many in fact received marks in excess of 75%.