



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2007

MARKETING PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

General Comments

This final exam in Marketing is a capstone exam and students are expected to demonstrate analytical and decision-making skills which give evidence of the cumulative learning acquired over a four year intensive marketing programme. Candidates cannot expect to pass by simply identifying and describing the correct model or concept. In this Stage 4 exam, it is essential that students have a clear understanding of the difference and interdependency of marketing strategy and marketing tactics.

The case study which represents 40% of the total marks is a key decider in how students perform. The Branding of Kilkenny was the subject of this year's case study and presented interesting challenges because of the wide variety of stakeholders involved and the special challenges associated with branding a location rather than a product or service. The candidates who achieved higher marks identified these challenges and indeed acknowledged the almost insurmountable task of creating a cohesive brand based on such disparity of interests. By comparison, weaker students reiterated the basic facts of the case study, without any interpretation or critical comment about the challenge facing the marketing consultancy.

Section B of the paper accounts for 60% of the marks and draws questions from the theory and practice of marketing strategy and process. There are two areas which cause difficulty for students in this section: the application of students' own critical skills to marketing problems and the presentation of models and frameworks without any justification or conclusion. These points will be identified more closely in the Examiner's review of individual questions.

Question 1 Case Study The Branding of Kilkenny

On the whole, the case study was well prepared and the issues facing Sixty Marketing in building a new brand identity for Kilkenny were addressed. The deficiencies arose in the level at which questions were answered, with many students failing to properly interpret and draw conclusions from their reading of the facts of the case.

Section (a) and (b) required students to analyse the case. In Section (a) students were asked to compare the challenge of marketing a location compared with marketing a product, such as a Mars Bar. Those who provided good answers identified the need to use the extended marketing mix but, in addition, to seek credible common brand values that could be used and represented by all the stakeholders involved.

To answer Section (b) successfully, students needed to do more than simply tell the 3Sixty Marketing story, good though it may be. Candidates were asked to assess, not simply describe how 3Sixty had approached building a new brand identity.

Those who have studied previous exam papers may have noted that the third part of the case study often asks the candidate to suggest a strategy for the future development of the company. Often this question relates very closely to the question under review within the case study. Despite this, few seem to be able to come up with a cogent plan for the future. The poor answers either produce a scattering of disconnected points or a pre-prepared SWOT analysis or over elaborate A-Z marketing plan. In this example, the long term plan needed to address the issue of stakeholders and how they could together continue to support and develop the brand values.

Question 2

After four years study it is essential that graduates can apply theory to practice. A very straightforward question on how an owner of a chain of convenience stores might develop an environmental analysis was answered very poorly. Students were required to identify the key issues that this type of business owner needs to track and to see how those trends might affect the business in question. Most answers barely rose above the level one might expect from a first year student, with basic descriptions of each of the forces and too little analysis of their impact on the business.

Question 3

A question on the ‘new economy’ produced many disappointing answers. The problem was that students did not appear to have read the chapter on this topic. Many interpreted the question on whether a company needed to create a ‘new economy’ strategy as suggesting a complete move to the online environment. Technology enables direct interactions between marketers and consumers for almost all company sizes and good answers dealt with the way on line technologies can impact any aspect of the marketing mix, from distribution to customization of the product or service.

Question 4

Candidates were asked to outline the range of market entry strategies available to marketers launching a new product or service. A company must decide whether to act as pioneer, follower or even late entrant in the light of its strengths and resources as well as the level of innovation of the product or service itself.

Question 5

There were many examples of first year answers to this fourth year question! The Examiner expected more than a re-hash of the model (which was usually incorrectly labelled by candidates) and a short description of the different phases. The question required a critical examination of the information the model yields, but also a comment on the model’s weaknesses. Again, there were few examples of products to illustrate alternative sales growth patterns.

Question 6

Sleep Tite is an Irish bed manufacturer distributing its products across Europe. Students were asked to outline the advantages and disadvantages of selling direct versus selling via wholesalers and finally, whether it was possible for the company to pursue both distribution strategies simultaneously. The first part of the question was very straightforward. Students who briefly outlined the strengths of each option and showed how each had pluses and minuses in terms of meeting distribution objectives did well. The second part of the question needed to address the potential conflict that could arise from running two distribution channels simultaneously. Some students suggested that, if scale allowed, the company could develop two product lines with separate identities with the direct channel allowing for greater customization. The cost and time required to run parallel distribution channels would, however, be considerable.