



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2008

MARKETING PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

General Comments

Some of the general points about the objectives of the Marketing Planning and Management course have already been covered in the May 2008 Examiner's Report. Please read the May report as well as previous Examiner's Reports to get an overview of the issues that arise each year. This report will focus specifically on the questions set for the autumn paper.

Question 1 – Case Study: Philip Kenny Designs: Crafting an Exclusive Homeware Brand

The case study was an interesting example of a company run without any clear plan or marketing strategy. Students generally performed in line with previous exams. Most could identify the key problems facing the company and were realistic in their proposals for alternative strategies. Those who did well did so because they were able to identify, defend, discuss and develop points that were the result of thorough preparation for the case study exam, good structuring and presentation, clear thinking and good time management.

The first part of the case study asked the student to review the key challenges facing Philip Kenny due to the small scale of the business. Most students identified the lack of market research, beyond attending some international tradeshows. Typical of an entrepreneur, Kenny was motivated by enthusiasm and gut instinct rather than any formal customer research or planning process. Critically, Kenny took orders that he could not fulfil and, at one stage in his business development, depended too heavily on one retailer, Brown Thomas. His move to Dublin was unplanned and resulted from an invitation to be part of a co-operative in the Temple Bar area. There is no evidence in the case study of the move being researched properly.

In the second part of the case study, candidates were asked to assess Kenny's branding strategy. The branding strategy is limited to creating a very attractive signature logo which is across all his products and in the store signage. Given Kenny's lack of funds, this was a wise strategy as it underscores the designer aspect of the product. However, students needed to discuss the overall weakness of the strategy relative to the company's competitors. It was also important to discuss the difference between a good logo and a branding strategy.

Part three of the case study required the student to develop a proposal to secure the future of Philip Kenny's business. Much of the analytical work for this question should already have been covered in Parts One and Two of the case study. There were some good suggestions, given the straitened circumstances of the business, including developing stronger supplier networks and working

through agents. The presentation of some answers appeared haphazard, with ideas being put forward without any formal planning framework. Critical to the company's success is the ability to deliver orders consistently, completely and on time.

Question 2

A question asking students to apply Michael Porter's model on competitive forces proved very popular. Students had the option to apply the model to the newspaper, airline or supermarket industry. The airline industry proved the most popular choice, with most students focusing on the competitive battle between Ryanair and Aer Lingus. While students were able to effectively draw up the model, many failed to complete the question by assessing the long-term attractiveness of the industry under examination.

Question 3

Financial services organisations, such as banks, are typically very large organisations with a national or international branch network. A question on why these organisations fail to differentiate themselves from one another clearly required the student to examine the complexities associated with creating a differentiated experience in the service sector. Most students realised that it was important to use the challenges of the extended marketing mix and the special characteristics of marketing intangible products as a framework for answering this question.

Question 4

Surprisingly, a question on the scope of company and marketing analysis which must take place before a company is able to properly identify and develop marketing objectives did prove popular. This was in fact a very straightforward question on how a company should undertake a rigorous situational analysis.

Question 5

Students were asked to evaluate the role of marketing's channel strategy in creating competitive advantage. Those who answered the question well were able to address issues such as the growth of direct and interactive marketing, opportunities for direct sales of digitalised content as well as more strategic management of a company's channel members.

Question 6

The final question on the paper asked the student to play the role of a brand manager whose budget may be cut by 50%. The brand manager was asked to write a memo to the Managing Director arguing the point that spending on your company's brand is an investment, not a cost. Most students who attempted this question were able to argue persuasively that brands are the source of added value in an organisation that is increasingly dependent on intangible assets.