



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2009

SERVICES MARKETING MANAGEMENT

General Comment

The overall standard was good this year. The number of 'A' grades increased from 2008 but disappointingly there remains a significant proportion of fails also. Those who achieve top marks demonstrate a sound understanding of the theoretical concepts contained in the core text and can also illustrate this understanding through relevant examples. Relevant is an important phrase here. Too many candidates are providing very lightweight personal anecdotes rather than examples of business practice. It is key at Graduateship level to be able to combine the theory and practice. It is also key to have studied and understood the assigned text. As examiner I am making the assumption that candidates for the exam are very familiar with the concepts discussed in the text. Candidates will not score highly by providing answers based on anecdotes.

SECTION A

Question 1

The question asked candidates to describe the provider gaps and the factors leading to these gaps occurring. Firstly too many candidates could not list the gaps correctly. The gap model is the over riding conceptual framework guiding this text book. Candidates must be able to correctly identify the gaps. The provider gaps are;

Gap 1: Not knowing what customers expect

Gap 2: Not selecting the right service designs and standards

Gap 3: Not delivering to service designs and standards

Gap 4: Not matching performance to promises

Under each heading the candidate should then discuss at least 3 factors leading to these gaps occurring. For example gap 1 would need to cover areas including a description of the gap e.g. the difference between customer expectations of service and company understanding of those expectations and then a discussion of the factors as follows;

1. Inadequate marketing research orientation
2. Lack of upward communication
3. Insufficient relationship focus
4. Inadequate service recovery

This structure is in keeping with the layout of the textbook and therefore should have been familiar to students. In fact a sound knowledge of Chapter 2 of the text would have provided candidates with a sufficient understanding of the concepts to enable them to complete a good answer.

SECTION B

Question 2

Customers' roles in service delivery is an important theme of the course. Their role in increasing quality and productivity is a contributing factor in the widening of gap 3. Candidates need to discuss the following strategies for effective customer participation;

- defining customers jobs,
- recruiting, educating and rewarding customers; and
- managing the customer mix.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to discuss the challenges inherent in service design. A number of candidates seeing the words 'service design' proceeded to write only on the stages in new service development. This was not asked and no matter how much was written the candidate was not accumulating marks. The answer should have focused on at least three of the following;

- oversimplification
- incompleteness
- subjectivity
- biased interpretation

Question 4

I would have expected candidates presenting at the award level of the Graduateship to have a sound understanding of the concepts of marketing research. This question required them to take this knowledge and include it with the concepts from services marketing so that they could reflect on the possible need to include both quantitative and qualitative research when conducting services research. Many candidates gave a good explanation of the different elements in an effective marketing research programme for services and would have attained a pass mark for so doing. However a higher grade was achieved by those who could go beyond this and discuss the objective of a research programme and the input that a multi method approach would have in achieving these objectives. Other candidates discussed the areas of perceptions and expectations and the different strategies for attempting to measure such concepts unique to services marketing. These candidates would have achieved 'A' grades for such an answer.

Question 5

This question was very related to the chapter on customer expectations of service. As stated in the text marketers need and want to understand the factors that shape customer evaluation of expectations. Candidates would have discussed the zone of tolerance and then gone on to discuss;

- Sources of desired service expectations
- Sources of adequate service expectations
- Service encounter expectations versus overall service expectations
- Sources of both desired and predicted service expectations

This was a very well answered question in general and was very popular. Good answers would have included graphical illustrations of the various sources and how they were interlinked.

Question 6

Questions on the servicescape are never popular. Candidates who attempt this question score well. The requirement here was to discuss the typology of servicescapes, i.e.

- self service,
- interpersonal services, and
- remote services.

Then the roles as described in the text would be discussed,

- package,
- facilitator,
- socializer, and
- differentiator.

A discussion on the roles would lead the candidate to a discussion on the implications for strategy and the positioning of the organisation.