

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE Applied Business (6921)

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General comments

The first of the two main scenarios focused on the promotions used by *Designer Sales UK (DSUK)*, a mainly London-based business which holds sales of designer clothes. Students responded well to the scenario but frequently did not read the questions carefully enough and therefore tended to write general, rather than applied, answers. The second main scenario related to promotions for a new sports and leisure centre. Again, the nature of the scenario was not challenging for students. However, the context of the use of a billboard for placing advertising on was not fully taken into consideration by many students.

Questions 8 to 10 required an understanding of how specific real businesses actually carry out their promotions. Question 8 was about the use of specific websites as a method of reaching a specific target audience. This was well answered by students who knew the details of specific sites but it needed to be applied to the particular questions asked.

Question 9 was about businesses adapting their promotions when selling in the UK and also in the EU. This question was poorly answered by most students and it was clear that many had not studied real business situations where changes in language, culture and currencies needed to be taken into account.

Question 10 was about product placement in a film. Generally this was well answered, but again marks were lost, particularly on part (b), because students did not answer the actual question asked.

Unfortunately the usual perennial weaknesses, which are flagged up after every series, still prevent many students from gaining high marks. These are:

- Not reading the questions carefully enough.
- Not considering the context of the question in sufficient depth.
- Not understanding some very basic terminologies.
- Not considering the number of marks being awarded for a question.
- Not writing in the space provided, especially in cases where students have large handwriting.
- Not developing answers, especially where the command word and the number of marks awarded indicate that this should be done.

Specific comments

1 (a)

This was not well answered with nearly 40% of students scoring no marks. This was due to the fact that they either did not know what a press release was or they took the question as asking why they would place the press release in the publications listed in Figure 1 (even though that was what Q1(b) was asking).

Even students who could give a feature of a press release, another quarter of students, they did not explain why a press release had this feature nor did they compare it to other forms of advertising, so gained only 1 mark. Only the best students put their answers into the context in which the question had been asked.

1 (b)

Very few students failed to gain 2 or more marks. At the lower end there was poor development, with students often considering only one aspect of the listed publications. Even where two aspects were considered, for example the fact that *DSUK* and the magazines both related to designer fashion and that *DSUK* and the other publications were London-based, there was still limited development by all but the best students. The question did ask for discussion but very few students considered anything other than the most obvious connections.

2 (a)

Again, there was a significant minority of students who did not understand the term. Some took this to mean promotion in general. However, most students did understand the term and were able to give the basic effect of increasing sales, attendance, etc. There were many answers that took the sales promotion as relating to the sale of the tickets, whereas it was the tickets themselves that were the sales promotion and the effect should have been to increase sales of designer clothes.

2 (b)

The majority of students did not score above Level 2. The two main reasons for this were that first, most students simply went through the list of features that were given about the VIP tickets and said why they would appeal to customers with no real differentiation between the features, and second, no specific target market was identified. The main point of the question was to match the features against the specified target market and assess which would, or would not, have been most appealing.

Where students did identify a specific target they generally gave good assessments of which features would, or would not, appeal. But even here, some students started with a specific target and they ignored it as they dealt in general terms with the appeal of the features. This should have been a very straightforward question to answer, but not following the instructions in the question led to all but the best students throwing away marks.

3 (a)

This was well answered by most students who had a good basic understanding of the usual benefits of sponsorship to the business being sponsored and, in a good percentage of cases, applied these to this particular sponsorship. The small minority of students who failed to score marks either assumed *DSUK* was sponsoring *The Body Shop* or ignored sponsorship altogether. What was strange was that these same students, with few exceptions, got the right relationship for Q3(b).

3 (b)

Most students could give a valid reason for *The Body Shop* sponsoring *DSUK* but development in many answers was limited. Where students considered the nature of the two businesses and the nature of what was in the goodie bags, there were well-reasoned benefits provided with high marks being scored.

4

Most students could give a strength and a weakness of using word of mouth promotion and then support at least one of these with an explanation of why the strength or weakness came from this particular form of promotion. For all but a very small minority, application to this being a new business was not considered, even though the fact that it was a new business was stated in the question.

5

70% of students scored 2 or less marks. The reasoning for the placement of the billboards was often little more than repeating what was stated in Figure 4. Generally students only gave benefits and the instruction to examine 'how effective' the location would be was only followed by the top 10% of students.

6

Over half of students scored 3 or less marks, with 15% scoring no marks. The main reason for this very poor showing included the following: Some students made no reference to the billboard at all and gave general answers about constraints in terms of finance, staffing and technical resources relating these to the running of the sports centre; Many students did not consider all three internal constraints; some students made little or no reference to the information given in Figures 3 and 4.

Where students followed the instructions in the question, and ensured that they covered all three constraints with good application to the information in the two figures and to this being billboard advertising, they had little difficulty getting into high Level 3 and Level 4, but this only applied to the top 5% of students. Generally the cost constraints were most widely covered.

7

Most students could give basic elements of design, but these tended to be general and would apply to most forms of advertising. This limited their marks to a maximum of 2 marks. Where students considered what would be effective 'for a billboard', as instructed in the question, there were well-explained design elements. However, only the top third of students did this. This was another example of students not reading the question carefully enough.

Questions 8 to 10

As required for these questions, it must be clear that students are dealing with real businesses, but there are some students who do not have sufficient knowledge of real promotional campaigns that match the questions. This was particularly the case with Q9. When students were being asked to describe, assess, explain, etc, what actually happened in the campaign they were giving generalised details of what could have happened rather than actual details of what did happen. These questions expect students to have studied real promotional campaigns and to use knowledge of these to answer the questions. Without this knowledge, the potential marks will be considerably reduced.

Q8

Few students had difficulty in selecting a business website but many clearly did think through what the two questions were asking before making their selections.

(a) The focus of this question had to be explaining how the website was designed to appeal to the specific target audience the business was trying to promote itself to. Many students did not state who the target audience was and could not, therefore, explain how the website design related to that target. Students who chose their business website with a clear specific target audience, as with bridal wear, found it relatively easy to match the design to the target audience and gain high marks.

(b) Selection of the right business website was also vital for answering part (b). The requirement was a comparison with a major competitor's website so the candidate needed good knowledge of both websites. The majority of candidate could do little more than give details of what made the first website effective and so limited their potential marks to 2 marks.

Q9

This question was very badly answered with 20% of students failing to score any marks and over 70% of students scoring 4 or less marks. The main reason for this was that students clearly did not know what the businesses they selected were actually doing in terms of changing their promotions in order to meet the different language, cost and currency situations in the UK and the EU. There were also a significantly large number of students who used examples from countries outside the EU, showing yet again the fault of not reading the question carefully enough.

(a) Most students gave very general answers for each of the three categories, with culture usually very poorly addressed. The development marks required actual details of how the promotions were changed to meet differences between the UK and specific EU countries. Most students continued to give general changes that would need to be made and not details of what the business actually did.

(b) This question was poorly understood and most students either scored 0 marks or gave fairly well thought-out answers and scored well. Included among those who scored 0 marks were students who completely ignored the fact that the business would be selling in different countries and said they would not need to worry because they were only selling in the UK, or only in Spain, etc. A significant number of students also argued that the businesses were already set up in different countries and therefore did not need to worry about these factors. They ignored the fact that the differences would still be something that businesses would have to address.

There were some good answers where students had thought about the potential uniformity of markets and applied these to one or more of the factors, with examples.

Q10

Despite this term being specifically given in the syllabus, there is still a worrying percentage of students whose seem confused as to what the term actually means, 17% of students scored no marks. Those who did understand the term, with either planned or accidental inclusion of product in a film, scored well on part (a) but with varying results on parts (b) and (c), generally based on how well they understood, and followed, the questions.

(a) This question only asked for distinct details of how the product was shown in the film. Most students had little difficulty in gaining full marks here.

(b) The question asked for the nature of the film and the nature of the product. Some students ignored both but the nature of the film was generally given. What students found more difficult was to identify the nature of the product. The inevitable result was that for many product placements students could not tie the two natures together.

(c) Where the right product placement had been chosen, and the way it was shown/portrayed in the film was well understood, there were some very good answers. However, many students either gave completely general points about potential negative placements, for example the film not doing well in the box office, or they clearly did not understand the aspects of the film, or the placement, that might have been detrimental in term of promotion.

Issues for future series

The points listed below repeat comments made in previous reports, but they are ones that are still **not** being addressed by many students – hence marks are being lost unnecessarily.

1. **The applied approach** – All businesses used in these papers relate to real businesses, either named or with the names changed. Preparation for this paper should, therefore, include as much study of the promotional techniques used by real businesses as possible.
2. **Terminologies** – Students need to know all of the terms given in the syllabus **and** common terms that relate to the real world of promotion.
3. **Reading the question/following instructions** – Many marks are still being unnecessarily lost, simply because students have not read the question carefully enough or have not taken the context into consideration.
4. **Questions requiring extended answers** – There will continue to be two questions with 11 marks in the future series. Students should be shown how to develop their answers so that they can provide in-depth and detailed answers for these questions.
5. **Questions based on own study** – Students must be able to use knowledge and understanding of a wide range of real promotional situations in order to answer questions on any part of the syllabus. This must be in sufficient depth to show clear details of the promotional campaigns.

Please also note the comments made about online marking in previous reports and the comments made about writing only to the space provided on the paper itself. Centres need to ensure that their students are not being disadvantaged simply because of the layout of the paper. Additional work outside of the specified area on the paper, or on additional sheets, is totally acceptable, but, when this is done, it is vital that the students **indicate** somewhere on their answer to a specific question that they are using additional paper or completing the answer somewhere else in the actual booklet. Preferably, they should also indicate where the rest of the answer is.

Grade Boundaries

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