

DP05

Business Communication

12 OCTOBER 2001

1. Time allowed : Three (3) hours
2. Total number of questions : Six (6) questions
3. Number of questions to be answered : All six (6) questions
4. Begin each answer to a new question on a fresh page.
5. A blank page is provided at the end of the question paper for rough work.

ANSWER ALL SIX (6) QUESTIONS

1. Read the following passage and answer the questions below:

Malaysian businesses are more wary than ever about doing business on the Internet after the recent bursting of the dotcom bubble. This was the opinion of a business consultant who noted that although the failure rate among the dotcom companies was high (95% worldwide), this did not mean the demise of start-ups would spell the end of e-business.

He speculated that there would come a time, probably **two to five** years from now, when people would go on-line to do their businesses. This would gather strength and momentum, and it would swarm the business world.

The current shake-up, according to him, would only create stronger business models, which would have a longer lifespan than the first. Calling this the second wave of e-commerce, he remarked that the beneficiaries would be the brick-and-mortar companies, which were able to leverage on their existing businesses. They could capitalise on what the start-ups have unleashed, work on their fundamentals and make their companies even stronger.

The bubble burst for the start-ups during the first wave because their strategies were presence, revenue and profitability. It was a race to make as much as they could without much thought given to strategies. They never reached profitability. They survived for a time because somebody was prepared to fund them. But the funds used to create presence, soon ran out. They were young and unexposed, and not having been knocked around in the hard business world, they lacked management skills and were less cautious. Although there were successes, the number was very small.

Contrary to myths floating around, one strategy today does not fit all businesses, he said. Another myth is that bright ideas mean money, but it is not exactly so. The ideas need to be executed but more than that, there must be a long-term strategy, business vision and management skills, besides a feel for the market. Someone may have a brilliant idea today, but someone else may come up with a better one tomorrow.

Rather than being wary of the short lifespan of dotcoms, "**brick-and-mortar**" businesses could learn from the failures of others and take them to a different level. E-business has broken down the traditional barriers of entry into markets and opened up so many opportunities hitherto not thought of. E-commerce, it cannot be denied has created a new revolution and businessmen have to work on new ideas how to bring in new businesses. If they do not take advantage of new markets, their competitors would. However, their plan must always have a long-term strategy.

Malaysia is not rated high among the Asia-Pacific countries in terms of Net transactions. Less than **ten** businessmen in Malaysia have either embarked or have an e-business strategy. Many of them are unable to appreciate the opportunities that e-business can present to them. They also think that e-business means selling a product or service on-line. It is more than that. A brick-and-mortar business may have a successful e-business model without on-line sales. A retailer may run a business and his sales team may be linked on-line to the inventory level. That sales team would be more dynamic if they were able to give immediate feedback to the customer about work-in-progress, stocks and delivery time. It would be business as usual but with more dynamism.

Adapted from "The Star" 4 December 2000

Answer the following questions **in full sentences**:

- (a) Why do you think businessmen are so cautious about using the Internet to conduct their businesses these days? [1]
- (b) What was the main business objective of the dotcom companies? [1]
- (c) List **five** reasons why the majority of the dotcom companies could not sustain their growth or have a longer lifespan. [2½]
- (d) What remedial steps can e-businesses adopt in order to take advantage of new opportunities offered by the Internet? [3]
- (e) How can retailers have a more successful e-business model in the second wave of e-commerce? [1½]
- (f) Supply a phrase that best replaces "**brick-and-mortar**" companies. [1]

- (g) Summarise the whole passage on pages 1 and 2 in **130** words. [10]
(Total:20 marks)

2. (a) Read the memorandum below and answer the questions that follow:

MEMORANDUM

To : Danny Aban (PR Executive)
From : Edwin Raj (Project Manager)
Date : 12/01/01

Your working paper on the events of the launch of our new Visa credit card is at hand.

You have to see me as soon as possible. Work out the details and make sure that you are ready to present them to me.

The Management Committee found that your choice of the Johor Bahru venue was totally inappropriate as it is too far from the city centre and would certainly not yield the numbers we require. Needless to say, it is too presumptuous to expect thousands to flock to that small shopping area in the suburbs. Effect a change immediately to a city centre mall and inform all parties involved in the launch about the new arrangements.

The Management Committee discussed different aspects of this launch and concluded that you have been sloppy about many details. Perhaps you are in the wrong department and may want to think about doing something you may be better suited for.

You have not given any indication of the press and media coverage for this event. Are you aware that they are vital for the exposure of our products? I want to see the press release copies too. I need to know the following:

- Who are the guests of honour at these locations and what are their seating arrangements?
- Has the master of ceremonies been briefed?

Edwin Raj

- (i) Analyse the memorandum above by listing and describing **four** different aspects of poor communication. [10]
- (ii) Rewrite the memorandum using effective communication principles. [10]
- (b) List any **five** causes of communication barriers within the workplace. [5]
(Total: 25 marks)
3. (a) List **three** reasons why it is important to check out the meaning of the non-verbal part of the message. [3]
- (b) (i) A business executive is often late for appointments with you (her client). Identify any **two** possible interpretations you can have of her. [2]
- (ii) State the formula for a **four**-part "I" message. [4]
- (iii) You have decided to be assertive with the business executive in (b)(i) above.

Based on the formula stated in (b)(ii) above, write out the words that you would use to tell her that her lack of punctuality has affected your other schedules. [4]

- (iv) Identify **two** advantages of your feedback to the business executive above. [2]
(Total:15 marks)

4. (a) List any **six** characteristics of a poorly written short report. [3]
(b) State **two** occasions when progress reports would be needed in an organisation. [2]
(c) An indirect order of information is used in writing a progress report. State the **five**-point order of information in a progress report. [5]
(d) Using the **five**-point order of information in (c) above, write a progress report to your senior manager about the progress, **three** months after the launch of your organisation's credit card. [10]
(Total:20 marks)

5. (a) Identify any **five** characteristics of an effective meeting leader. [5]
(b) During a meeting, a vote was taken to increase membership fees by RM30.00. Many objections were raised, among which was the fact that members had not been given sufficient time to think about or discuss the issue. Despite the objections, the vote was taken, with **five** for and **four** against. After the meeting, those against indicated that they were unhappy and would not abide by the vote.
What **five** steps could the chairperson have taken to improve on the meeting process? [5]
(Total:10 marks)

6. (a) It is necessary to understand client base and their expectations, and to provide the expected level of service.
List any **four** features of a successful customer service. [4]
(b) Many successful customer-oriented organisations offer a customer value package.
List the **six** steps to create an effective customer value package. [6]
(Total:10 marks)

- END OF QUESTION PAPER -

OUTLINE ANSWERS

Question 1

This was an easy passage but the candidates did poorly in the summary section as they could not pick out the important points and arrange them in a cohesive and coherent manner. Almost all did not know what a “brick and mortar” company was.

1. (a) Many dotcom companies were forced to wind up their businesses and businessmen were afraid of failure should they invest in these companies with such a short lifespan.
- (b) Their strategies are presence, revenue and profitability.
- (c) The majority of the dotcom companies could not sustain growth because:
 - the money/funding ran out;
 - they were less cautious;
 - they lacked vision/management skills;
 - they lacked skills for survival; and
 - they had no long term strategies/fundamentals.
- (d)
 - Instead of being wary of the short lifespan of dotcoms companies, businesses could learn from the failures of the others;
 - Be open to execute new ideas/fundamentals but using long-term strategies; and
 - Have business vision and management skills.
- (e) Businesses could have their sales teams:
 - linked on-line to inventory level;
 - give immediate feedback to customers; and
 - relay information on work-in-progress, stocks and delivery schedules.
- (f) A brick-and-mortar company is a traditional business company that has its own premises or building, where it operates or buys and sells from.
- (g) Malaysian businesses are more wary than ever about Internet business after many dotcom companies folded up. These dotcoms flourished initially because someone funded them solely to create presence, revenue and profitability. But when the funds ran out, these companies, lacking managerial skills and experience in the hard business world, died. However, a consultant remarks that this shake-up should create stronger business models with a longer lifespan in the second wave of e-commerce. Rather than being wary of Internet businesses, brick-and-mortar companies could learn from these failures. Incorporating long-term strategies, business vision and management skills, businesses could have successful e-business models without on-line sales. Instead, they link their inventories on-line and thus provide more dynamic immediate customer feedback about work-in-progress, stocks and delivery time. (123 words)

Question 2

- Candidates provided insufficient points and incomplete answers in analysing the question on poor communication. Candidates should elaborate with examples from the letter, and not what they think is wrong.
- Candidates were unable to rewrite the memo correctly using the appropriate tone. Many candidates were just as patronising and directive in their memos, and some just copied the sentence without attempting to change the order of information or tone.
- For the causes of communication barriers, many supplied one-word answers that did not make sense as causes of communication barriers, e.g. “perception”, “tone”, “culture”.

2. (a) (i) Candidates could list any four of the following aspects of poor communication but they have to describe them too.
- date not written in full (may be confused with American form);
 - no subject line or purpose statement;
 - paragraph 1 is redundant and uses antiquated English;
 - tone is very discourteous and patronising, writer is very directive;
 - there is a veiled threat in paragraph four; and
 - ideas are disorganised and not structured in a sequenced manner.

(ii)

MEMORANDUM

To: Danny Aban (PR Executive)
From: Edwin Raj (Projects Manager)
Date: 12 January 2001

Feedback on Working Paper of the Yuppie Credit Card Launch

The Management Committee discussed different aspects of your presentation of the above launch and would like to give the following feedback:

- (i) The choice of the Johor Baru venue may not be a very practical one because, it is too far from the city centre and might not attract the numbers we have targeted for. Besides, not so many people may flock to the small shopping area in the suburbs. It would be for our own good to change the venue to a mall in the city centre immediately and to inform all parties concerned about the new arrangements.
- (ii) Press and media coverage are vital for exposure of our new product as well as the success of our launch. Therefore, I would like to know the content of your press releases for the launch as soon as possible.
- (iii) Please furnish a list of the guests of honour at these locations, together with their seating arrangements. The Masters of Ceremony at the different locations have to be briefed about the itinerary and how to address our guests too.

Please see me as soon as possible so that we can work out the details and also to ensure that the launch is an effective one.

EdwinRaj

- (b)
 - differences in perception;
 - differing attitudes and values;
 - inconsistency between spoken and nonverbal communication;
 - withholding information;
 - passing judgement by telling people their reaction is stupid; and
 - dismissing the concerns or points of view of others.

Question 3

- Part (a) of this question asked on the importance of checking out the non-verbal part of the message. However, many candidates misinterpreted the question as a basis for understanding verbal communication as the phrases “coding” and “decoding” were often used. Candidates listed down examples of non-verbal communication or cited cultural differences as posing problems in interpreting non-verbal message.
- Part (b) required candidates to deal with the problem of a tardy person. Many candidates put themselves down instead of seeing it as the fault of the offender for being late. Some even forecast how the business dealings will go on based on the offender’s tardiness.

3. (a) Nonverbal messages may:
 - contradict the message;
 - complement the message; and
 - substitute for spoken words especially in emotions.
- (b) (i)
 - a negative message if it is done deliberately;
 - a casual attitude; and
 - disregard and no respect for another’s time.
- (ii)
 - own the feeling;
 - describe in concrete terms the behaviour that is causing the feeling;
 - state the tangible effect of the behaviour on you; and
 - offer an alternative acceptable behaviour.
- (iii) I feel annoyed when you are often late and I have to wait because I am unable to reschedule my other appointments. I would appreciate it if you could call me to let me know that you would be late.
- (iv)
 - creates open and encouraging communication;
 - creates trust and open relationship between two people; and
 - may help listener to change attitude.

Question 4

- Candidates must be more specific in citing occasions for progress reports, rather than just stating “office renovations” or “wage negotiations”.
- Many were unable to execute the five-point order of information in writing of a progress report. Many reports did not follow the format of reports nor used heading/sub-heading to direct the reader to understand what they were writing about.

4. (a)
 - absence of clear purpose statement;
 - omission of clear purpose statement;
 - inclusion of irrelevant details;

- illogical structuring of information;
 - overuse of jargon;
 - poor use of white space/headings/sub-headings/numbering;
 - inappropriate choice of format; and
 - addition of irrelevant attachments.
- (b) Progress reports are written to inform management:
- about the rate of progress in relation to the schedule of projects;
 - by identifying the goals for subsequent time periods;
 - to provide forecast of projects;
 - about the current status, work or goals completed in planned projects; and
 - about problems and how they have been resolved or will be resolved.
- (c)
- Identify the report's purpose with a subject line or a purpose statement.
 - Open the body of the report with the current status, work or goals completed.
 - Follow with the positive features of the operation.
 - Present any problems and state how they are resolved or will be resolved.
 - Conclude with pointing to the future.
- (d)

To: Mokhtar Hashim (Senior Manager)
From: Gerald Kong (Marketing Manager)
Date: 13 October 2001

Subject: Progress Report for the Yuppy Credit Card Project

1. Background

- 1.1 The Yuppy Credit Card project was launched on July 1, 2001 to capture the credit card market among new executives.
- 1.2 The target population was new graduates who earn RM1,500 and above
- 1.3 The launch was carried out in major cities simultaneously targeting 500 cards a month, nationwide.

2. Current Status

- 2.1 The launch was well-received in the major shopping complexes and during the month of July, 350 new cards were issued.
- 2.2 Radio contests brought in the bulk of the response in August. Another 300 new cards were issued.
- 2.3 Free gift offers of Nolah! handphones and leather organisers attracted the majority of the new cardholders in the month of September. There were 450 new subscribers.

3. Findings

- 3.1 The response was very positive in major cities like Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Johor Baru. This was attributed to the fact that the concentration of the target population is centred only in major cities.
- 3.2 In the other towns, response was poor because the staff there were not adequately familiar with the product.

- 3.3 Publicity was insufficient for the smaller towns like Kuantan, Seremban and Malacca. In Ipoh and in Kuching, the launches were held in smaller shopping complexes.
- 3.4 The free gifts and radio competitions were effective in attracting new card members.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The response to the new card has been very encouraging and with the following steps, we should begin to attain the target number of 500 new card members monthly within the next three months.

- 4.1 The staff in the smaller towns need to be trained on the features and advantages of the product. Training courses should be held for this purpose.
- 4.2 In the towns of Kuantan, Seremban, Malacca, Ipoh and Kuching, publicity through the various media could be stepped up by aggressively pushing the product in major shopping complexes.
- 4.3 Since the promotions were effective, more should be devised. This can be done through competitions for Nolah! Communicators and free gift offers of electronic organisers or luggage sets.
- 4.4 Radio and television personalities should be involved in this campaign. Radio and TV commercials should be continued to update potential customers of our offers.

Question 5

- Some could not distinguish between characteristics/qualities of a meeting leader with the duties of a leader at a meeting.
- Some candidates cited Dewey's Reflective Thinking Process, or did not refer to the situation under discussion, when asked on how to improve the meeting process.

5. (a) An effective meeting leader has the following characteristics:
- has good human relation/people skills, can involve all participants in the meeting;
 - can keep meeting focused on the order of business in the agenda;
 - has good sense of keeping time;
 - can lead participants to problem solve and make decisions;
 - promotes goodwill among members;
 - has good planning and monitoring skills; and
 - is firm yet democratic.
- (b)
- Convince members of the need to raise fees by showing the accounts and the running expenses.
 - Give enough notice about intention to raise fees.
 - Table the motion during the second meeting after enough time has been given to deliberate the issue.
 - Find out during the meeting what the objections are all about.
 - Ask for alternatives and when sufficiently discussed, vote to take the vote.

Question 6

- Candidates gave rudimentary answers, vague suggestions, or cited current practices – did not focus on features of a successful customer service. Many candidates cited current practice in banks, or treated the question as “how to deal with problematic customers” and did not focus on the features required, i.e. that of a successful customer service.
- Most candidates misunderstood question on creating effective customer value package as an extension of part (a) and supplied irrelevant answers. They saw the question as providing customer-friendly services such as tele-banking, or as though it was a marketing question. They failed to see that the question required them to state the steps to create a value package.

6. (a) Some features of a successful service are:
- pleasant environment;
 - friendly and well-groomed staff;
 - informed staff with helpful supervisors;
 - willing assistance;
 - speed providing the service; and
 - politeness.
- (b)
- Ask the clients what they value by using surveys, listening to their comments and asking questions.
 - Set customer service goals.
 - Decide on the strategies to achieve the goals.
 - Decide on the service needed to give the customer value.
 - Decide what you will do differently.
 - Decide how you will let your customers know about the improved customer value package.