

3. Department of Sociology

Part 1: Runner at a creative media production company

Part 2: Client services coordinator at a media trends research firm

Introduction

The following report will give a detailed analysis of the invaluable experiences of my work placement year. Due to unforeseeable circumstances, the company where I was to complete my placement year went into administration after a few months, which led me to undertake a second placement for the remainder of the year. To provide the best reflection of my year in industry, I will analyse each placement separately and then evaluate my experiences over the year as a whole.

Description of Company 1

For my first placement I worked for a small production company. Due to the nature of their work a lot of the staff worked on a freelance basis. Although the company had grown considerably since its initial development, there was still only 17 permanent staff including four directors who owned the company. Predominantly male, the company consisted of young 'creatives' who were highly passionate about their job and great fun to work with.

The company was organised into four departments:

TV and Digital (Video)

Corporate

Mobile Television

Graphics

The main output for the company was in video production and Mobile Television. Corporate production had also begun to develop massively during my time with the company. Their impressive client list included: Disney, Nokia, FHM, Coke, Next and Yahoo. They also produced a variety of content for sky, channel 4 and channel 5.

My Role

I was surprised at how easy the application process was for getting a job as a runner. Although I had an interview, it was extremely relaxed, nothing like I had prepared myself for. I originally thought this may have been because the placement was unpaid, however I later learned that runners weren't usually interviewed as they were only contracted to work for two weeks. I was, affectively, a runner with an extended contract. As the weeks continued I found myself been given more responsibility, a perk the staff had alerted me to from the beginning.

My role within the company varied hugely. In the first few weeks I completed basic runner duties such as reception cover and assisting the permanent staff. This would usually involve booking couriers and buying props and equipment for upcoming shoots. Being a runner is extremely disheartening at times. You are 'on hand' to assist the staff in any way. I was one of three or four at times, which meant we would all wait at reception for someone to ask for help.

I was fortunate in that I was able to attend a variety of different shoots in my first few weeks with the company, allowing me to gain some hands on experience. My duties on shoots included assisting the talent and staff and helping to set up the necessary equipment. Although

being on a shoot was exciting and perhaps far more beneficial, experience wise than being in the office, the hours were very long and the majority of the work involved was physical.

Perhaps the best way to provide an account of my experience with the company is to evaluate my role within each separate production.

My first major production was a major sporting event—a titanic production that we were producing for Sky One. The event consisted of two football games, one with ex England players and the second with celebrities. Due to the scale of the production, our company worked alongside another freelance production team who were sited in our offices for several months. Although when I had first joined the company, the organisation for the event was in its final stages. I was still involved in a lot of the preparation. During meetings the Production Manager would delegate work to me such as organising travel and accommodation for the crew. This finally gave me a sense of belonging and after the event, a great feeling of satisfaction to see how the whole project had come together.

During the actual filming of the event I performed a variety of tasks. Aside from the general runner tasks mentioned previously, I was also called upon to sit in the commentators box and help name celebrities as the commentators were sometimes unsure. Admittedly, one of the highlights was having an 'access all areas' pass and attending the celebrity after-party! The event was however, to me, the beginning of my career in production, in terms of how my hard work was noticed and the experience I gained from working on such a large event.

After the major event, the staff began to ask for me specifically to help them. I was given more responsibility and for a period of two weeks I unofficially took over from the production Manager who was on annual leave. This was a great experience, as I had to make big decisions and deal with a lot of high profile people in the industry.

Another project that proved particularly invaluable to me was for a Sky website. This was another large project that we were doing which involved filming hundreds of cars and providing an evaluation of each, similar to the Autotrader website. For this I was in charge of finding locations for the cars to be filmed. Dropped into the deep end once again, I was sent off alone with a camera to various locations across the country to find a suitable place for the shoots. Although this was at times, great fun, it was my responsibility, which lead to me feeling pressured at times when it proved almost impossible to find a suitable location in such a short amount of time. At this point I was beginning to feel increasingly frustrated with my company for giving me perhaps too much responsibility for the little experience I had. It was also apparent that our company was having problems financially and with staff. This meant I was delegated jobs that were indeed out of my league, simply because I was the only person who was available to undertake them.

The reasons behind many of the problems I experienced, I feel, were due to the disorganisation of the company. This was predominantly because the company had grown too big too quickly and did not have adequate resources. There were unnecessary problems I encountered on a daily basis, such as not being able to book a courier, as we had not paid our account. This then had a knock on affect, which lead to a tense atmosphere within the company. My other colleagues were also becoming increasing frustrated with the lack of resources.

After I had been working there for just over four months, the directors announced that the company was going into administration. We had an official meeting with our administrator and were told to carry on as normal as we had a buyer interested and our jobs would be safe. Over the next couple of weeks I covered reception, which involved taking calls from angry suppliers

demanding payment. This was extremely unpleasant, as I was not allowed to give out too much information about our situation and was under strict instructions to not pass calls onto the accounts department. This was almost certainly the biggest problem I faced during my time, mainly because I couldn't fix the problem myself. After almost two weeks of being in administration, the two remaining directors announced that our buyer had pulled out at the last minute and we were all to go home. Luckily for me, the announcement came as a relief as I was already considering leaving the company. For my colleagues however, the news was particularly worrying as they had families and mortgages. I was lucky in that financially I had the support of my parents.

Extending knowledge and skills

Although the tasks I performed at my first company were predominantly specific to working in production, I developed many skills that can be applied to any working environment. These include; time keeping, self-presentation and organisation. Assuming the title of head runner, I also developed my delegation skills. I was in charge of delegating tasks to the runners on a daily basis as I had been with the company the longest and had an understanding of how it was run. I found having to delegate tasks to the runners relatively straightforward as most of the time it involved common sense, in terms of who was suited best to each role. I did however find the process difficult at times, as some of the tasks I had to assign to the runners were extremely boring and unchallenging. I managed to overcome this guilty feeling by realising that the jobs were instrumental to the industry and that I too had to complete all of these unpleasant tasks when I first started.

Perhaps the most important skill I developed or utilised most extensively was how to organise. I applied this skill everyday, organising runners, organising travel and organising large- scale productions. Working in post-production also involved using a lot of technical equipment. I often used software called Final Cut Pro, which allows you to edit footage. I also had the opportunity to use the camera on certain shoots.

In terms of extending skills from my previous two years at university, I used the content of my Sociology course in an everyday sense- noticing social patterns and recognising particular behaviours. I also extended more practical skills such as obeying regulations and respecting the nature of the industry.

Description of Company 2

My second placement company essentially was involved with 'trend forecasting'. Each quarter they publish an innovation report, which looks at the latest trends in the world of retail and hospitality. The company does not make the predictions themselves; they only report what is out there. The company also has a network of hundreds of design firms, which are recommended to clients for their projects.

There are three packages offered by the company; Platinum, Gold and Silver. As part of the Platinum package, the client has the innovation reports, access to the digital library, networking dinners and tailored- research on any topic required. Gold clients receive similar services but do not have the networking dinners and have less tailored research time dedicated to them. The majority of the company's clients are signed to a silver tier subscription. They receive the innovation reports and have access to the digital library and the network of designers.

The firm is a relatively new company due to its nature and has grown in size dramatically over the last four years. They have clients all over the world, predominantly in the US and the UK, and all over Europe and Asia.

The company itself is made up of two, all female divisions - the Research team and the Client Services team. The Research team consists of the Editor, the Deputy Editor and the Researchers. This division of the company produces the Innovation reports and completes any tailored research requested by the client. The Client Services team consists of the Managing director, the Senior consultants and the Marketing Executive. This division of the company works closely with the clients, presenting the report to the client each quarter after publication. The Senior consultants represent a different continent each: Europe, Asia and the US.

My Role

I worked on the Client Services team. My title was in fact 'Client Services Coordinator'. I began by assisting the Managing Director and the three other Senior Consultants. After a few months the Managing Director decided to employ her own assistant due to the amount of work that needed doing.

When I was assisting the Managing Director as well as the Senior Consultants, my role involved putting together heavy schedules for the trips to the US. Due to the majority of the clients being American, the Managing Director went along with the US representative. Although I thoroughly enjoyed organising such heavy schedules, the workload soon became too much on top of assisting the other Senior Consultants. Planning the trips to the US took a lot of work, as each quarter I would have to arrange three separate trips to the US for a week, sometimes two weeks depending on the clients. The US trips were to New York, the remainder of the East Coast and then the West Coast.

Planning for these trips involved liaising with the clients to find suitable dates for their presentation, booking flights and accommodation, and trying to set up new business meetings for the Managing Director. It became rather complicated at times when we had to fit in several states in one week and clients couldn't do the dates that we had suggested.

Alongside scheduling the US trips, I had to assist the rest of the team, and complete other office duties like answering the phones, ordering stationary, buying tea and coffee and speak to our technician when we were having technical problems (which was almost every day). It was also my responsibility to liaise with our accountant who worked part-time from home. Due to our accountant only working part time, it was also my job to chase our clients for money. This proved quite difficult at times with the time difference. Luckily I managed to resolve the debts with a couple of friendly phone calls the majority of the time.

Although I had to arrange travel and schedule meetings for the rest of our clients in Europe and Asia, this was not on the same scale as the scheduling for the US clients. The senior consultant for Europe would only go for a couple of days at a time and the consultant for Asia organised most of her travel herself. I would spend the remainder of my time assisting the Senior Consultants by carrying out mini research projects that they had promised their clients. This also included producing 'shopping lists' or 'city guides' for whichever city the client required. The lists were essentially travel guides in relation to innovation. I did enjoy the research I was delegated, more so towards the end of my placement when I knew which information sources to use.

I did encounter several problems at my time with the second company. I feel I joined during an adjustment period, where the company had grown but the amount of staff had not. I was essentially taking over from one colleague who had just been promoted to a senior consultant. Therefore throughout my placement there was some confusion over roles. This led to simple tasks not being completed and the other staff not understanding who did what.

As I mentioned previously, for the first three months I was assistant to the Client Services team as well as the Managing Director. This was highly stressful at times as I found it difficult to split my time equally. Although I could prioritise tasks in terms of importance, other jobs were constantly pushed to the back of my list and I rarely had a chance to complete them. Although these were not necessarily important, they still needed doing and would lead to further problems if left. I also felt at times that other colleagues would dump the unpleasant, mundane tasks on me because I was the most junior. I didn't mind that I had to do these tasks, I understood that it was part of my role, I just felt that some of my colleagues didn't know how busy I was and that I actually had far more important things to do.

Fortunately the Managing Director decided to employ her own assistant as she could see that I was struggling with the amount of work I had to do. When the new assistant started, I found it strange at first, adjusting to the fact that I had a big part of my role taken from me. Even though I was grateful that I had less to do, at first I felt I had too little to do. My workload then began to balance itself out and I could spend more time on tasks I had neglected at the beginning.

Towards the end of my placement, a lot of the problems I experienced in the beginning had been resolved. As a company we became far more communicative with each other, which weeded out numerous problems.

Extending knowledge and skills

Working for the first company prior to joining this company enabled me to utilise many of the skills I had newly learnt. I found the different atmosphere refreshing and relieved at the fact I was working for a company that appeared far more organised and stable. Still feeling confident with speaking on the phone to clients and being used to general office duties, I was able to demonstrate that I was fully capable of being given important responsibilities.

At the second company, I was able to exercise my organisational skills further. Putting together heavy schedules meant I had to be organised and extremely efficient. I also used Powerpoint frequently to present the research I had completed, and to assist my colleagues by formatting existing presentations. I was fortunate in that when I began my placement I already understood the basics of Powerpoint due to the fact that I had used the programme at university to give presentations. I also applied existing knowledge from my Media course to understand the industry better. I was able to comment on matters regarding the consumer society, a subject I had learnt in my previous two years at university.

Personal development over the whole placement year

In terms of personal development and change, this year has been particularly beneficial. I wouldn't say I have changed as a person so much, I still believe in the same things and have the same outlook on life; however I feel I have grown as a person in a number of ways. Both placements have certainly helped me clarify career plans. I was adamant before my placement year that I wanted to work in the media, particularly on the production side; however, after

experiencing four months of working for a production company, I have changed my mind completely. I found the industry highly stressful and the hours were extremely long. I could see how the job completely takes over your life and I didn't like the extremity of the commitment involved. Similarly, working for the second company has also helped me decide on which aspects of a job I enjoy and which aspects I don't. Although the second company was not as fun as the first, I preferred the less hectic atmosphere. In terms of what the second company does, I would not like to follow a career in retail research, as I don't feel passionately about the area.

Working full time has given me a great sense of independence and I feel I have matured in my approach to life. It is refreshing to work with people who feel passionately about their career and to see that achieving well at university has lead them to where they are today.