

## **4. Professional Training Story**

### **Department of Mechanical, Medical & Aerospace Engineering**

### **Marketing Assistant at a major international software producer**

#### **Introduction**

As part of my Entrepreneurship in Technology, IT and Business degree, I have undertaken one year of professional training within industry. I spent my year working for a major international software producer within their marketing department.

This report will look into my role within the organisation, some highlights from the year, an assessment of the differing leadership styles and a look at my own personal development and what I have learnt from the year.

#### **Company History**

This company in recent times has been known as the largest computer company in the world, offering hardware, software and consulting services. With 350,000 employees worldwide, the company is also known as the biggest IT employer. The company was founded in 1888. After being incorporated in 1911, the company changed its name in 1924.

#### **Application Process**

There is a large investment in the placement scheme and the process of gaining a job there is a thorough one in order to make sure you are suitable for a role within the organisation. After a series of online applications and tests, you are then invited down to an assessment day. The assessment day was made up of group activities and two one-to-one interviews. After coming through successfully I was put into matching. This is where they match your skills and preferences to the right job within the company structure.

The student placement scheme runs for 12 months in various locations across the UK. Around 7,000 people applied to be on the 2007-08 scheme, of which fewer than 400 were selected. I was offered a job as a Marketing Assistant to the company Software Group. The placement started in July 2007 and ran for a year until June 2008.

#### **Job Role**

Software Group Marketing is made up of around 30 people based all over the UKISA region. UKISA stands for UK, Ireland and South Africa. The regions in Europe are divided up depending on a country's spoken language and its working culture. Within this team, I was one of three placement students, all marketing assistants.

The software business is divided up into brands, programmes and channels. Brands are the different types of software sold; there are 6 in total. Out of these, I was aligned to help with two.

The programmes have various brands assigned to them and offer complete solutions for certain types of businesses and areas. There are 5 programmes and the ones I was aligned to were Enabling Business Flexibility (EBF) and Empowering People.

Within the channels area I helped with Volume Marketing. This involved working with our business partners who the company use to sell their more 'off the shelf' solutions to the market. The two other marketing assistants on placement covered the other areas of brands, programmes and channels.

As a marketing assistant you were expected to support your area of the business, which involved a wide range of activities. From events to reporting to advertising, the variety experienced within the job was a massive bonus. Looking back over the last year, I will talk about the main areas of activity that have sculpted my year and how these have allowed me to develop my business acronym and my own personal development.

### **Job Responsibilities**

As mentioned previously, my role was to support several areas of the Software Group business. Each area differed slightly in terms of my workload. The majority of my core time was spent supporting the Enabling Business Flexibility programme and Volume Marketing. These required daily attention and were where I managed to experience most of my sole management of projects. Along with my day-to-day areas, were several large ad-hoc projects, which were pivotal in my development this year. The major project was the 'Taking Charge of Change' event where I was part of 4-person project team. I was also involved with working at the Wimbledon tennis championships and events at Wembley, Manchester and throughout London. All these areas will now be looked at in more detail in order for me to evaluate my development and highlight the activities and projects that have lead to this.

### **Enabling Business Flexibility**

Enabling Business Flexibility is one of the software programmes which target specifically to IT Manager level with complete solutions. Enabling Business Flexibility hosts a new concept within the IT market, SOA. SOA stands for Service-Oriented Architecture and is a concept of organising your company structure so it is aligned directly to your IT infrastructure. This allows easier manoeuvrability to an ever-changing business environment. A lot of my work was involved in the marketing around SOA as the company endeavours to steal early market share from its competitors. Within my first month I attended the SOA Executive Event held in London. This was my first experience of hosting an event and allowed me to gain an insight into how large scale events are run on the day. It was an excellent experience to have exposure to executive level customers and enjoy some of the 'perks' that working at the company can offer by attending the dinner and staying the night in the hotel developing my networking skills!

Within EBF I had the chance to see many marketing plays from planning through to fruition. It was a valuable experience to be able to see every stage of the process and what was involved. I undertook the management of the SOA area of the EBF website, making sure that the content was comparable to the Software group and US versions of the website. Seeing the whole process enables you to appreciate what goes into a marketing play and to see firsthand what works and learn from the things that didn't work so successfully.

A large area of responsibility was helping with educational workshops that the company runs for their customers. I started off attending these sessions to assist with registration. By the end of the year I was running my own sessions and dealing with all aspects from planning, bookings and chasing attendees, right through to managing on the days the sessions took place. The largest educational event was the SOA forum for existing SOA customers held at a major automotive headquarters, with factory tours after the presentations.

The Enabling Business Flexibility programme has a tight interlock with one of the software brands, Websphere. The Websphere brand was celebrating its tenth birthday in 2008 and, to commemorate this, we set up a series of internal awareness events at various company locations. The purpose of the events was to drive attendance to enablement sessions for sales representatives on the Websphere brand. During these sessions they were given a presentation on why they should be including Websphere in their sales propositions to their customers.

To support these sessions we had made a birthday-themed booth and stand that we took to each location. The stand had various pieces of Websphere collateral as well as a prize draw. This was a good way of advertising the brand to all corners of the company, including those not in Software group, to raise awareness and to increase familiarisation with what the products actually do.

My role was to work with one of our agencies to create the stand and to co-ordinate the logistics of moving and manning the stand at each location. This involved working and briefing our agency, managing a £8,000 budget and making sure the stand, the collateral and all the giveaways were at the right location at the right time. We travelled all over the country with the stand, from Leeds, down to Portsmouth. The project was a great success and won the Marketing Directors Award for the second quarter.

Overall, Enabling Business Flexibility taught me a great deal about the principles of marketing. The team knew their target market and had become expert at rolling out successful, award winning marketing plays. It was excellent to be part of this and the team facilitated my development by getting me involved from day one, leading up to managing my own high level projects. This improved my confidence in my own ability and allowed me to improve a great deal in project management, communication, and teamwork. The range of activities was also a massive bonus, as we found ourselves with more freedom to try new techniques and technologies with our marketing which was extremely interesting and rewarding when it paid off.

## **Volume Marketing**

This is the area where the company sells through Business Partners to the market with their more 'off-the-shelf' software products compared to the other more complex offerings. The company does not have the resources to sell these cheaper products, so uses Business Partners who have call centres manned by people constantly phoning out to companies.

Here I have helped by attending Business Partners for product focus days. This is where the company goes in and provides training to the tele-sales teams on several of the software products. We then follow the training up with a focus day where the tele-sales team spend their day phoning out with the emphasis on a particular product. Our role on the day was to make sure lead forms are completed in order to gain opportunities for sales. We do this by employing 'carrot and the stick' tactics by providing prizes and incentives for the most leads produced by each member of the sales team. We also worked closely with one of our other Business Partners. They helped us to deliver the activities on the day and I would work with them to plan our future activities.

My largest project within volume marketing was the organisation and management of my own event. We hosted a Business Partner Executive Lunch at a club in Westminster. I was in charge of the event from the planning stage through to execution. The aim of the lunch was to reward our most successful Business Partners with an enjoyable day as well as briefing them on the future aims that the company has for them. It was an extremely rewarding experience to be entrusted to take control of such an important event. The feedback received was excellent with the whole event being marked either 4 or 5 out of 5.

This area of the business was very successful and we won several awards for continued success and impressive results.

## **Other major projects**

### **'Taking Charge of Change' Event**

The most memorable and challenging project of my placement was an event we held in January at the Emirates Stadium, London. I was part of a project team of 4 people to host an event for around 300 executive level customers to address the issue of a changing climate and how their IT systems would help support this change. The event had massive budget and there was a lot of pressure on us to deliver an event to a very high standard.

The event was a chance for sales teams to invite their customers for the day, to network, to listen to a host of high level speakers and to spend the afternoon with numerous hospitality sessions laid on. I was extremely fortunate to join the project team from an early stage to see how much detail you have to go into in order to make a large-scale event a success. There were 3 company executives speaking on how an IT infrastructure can drive business innovation. We also had three other companies talking about how our company has helped them to 'take charge of change'. This was followed by a lunch with speaker afterward. Then in the afternoon there were various hospitality sessions including stadium tours, one-on-one sessions with executives, presentations and demonstrations.

A lot of my work before the event was to advertise the event internally to sales people, in order for them to invite their customers. We did this by holding road shows around the various company locations, in order to give out invites and information on the event. Statistics were required daily in order to see which sales teams had sent invitations and which teams had not. This enabled us to target the appropriate managers to encourage them to motivate their teams to invite their customers. There were numerous major ad-hoc tasks that needed carrying out before the event, such as working with our suppliers for equipment in the 'fun zone' and working with Arsenal football club to purchase football tickets for prizes.

On the day itself my role was to manage a team of 10 individuals who had a number of roles throughout the day. I needed to brief my team effectively before the day and manage them appropriately on the day. This involved being very clear on timings and locations and being aware where everyone was throughout the day.

The event was a massive success. We met our attendance targets with 300 CIO level executives attending and we managed to create a buzz internally for our sales teams to use the event to continue their discussions and make sales. The event was such a success that the project team received the Q1 Marketing Directors award, resulting in the prize of a lunch at Restaurant Gordon Ramsey for us and our partners.

## **Leadership Styles**

During my year I was exposed to differing levels of management, from the Global Software Director at "Taking Charge of Change" to my own day-to-day Software Group Marketing manager. All these managers share similar traits of drive and commitment in order to work their way up to management level. I will now assess the leadership styles I have witnessed during my placement.

### **Action-Centred Leadership**

To evaluate the leadership styles present, I have researched the principles of ACL (Action Centred Leadership.) ACL is where leadership is centred in the actions that a person takes. <sup>[1]</sup> The leader must retain the respect of their team, as they will be judged by the actions they take in doing their job and dealing with their workmates. <sup>[1]</sup> There are three areas a manager needs to consider in order to demonstrate a successful ACL style. Firstly, they must assess task needs, what are the tasks the team needs to complete and how many people are needed to fulfil this. Next, they need to use their team members' strengths and talents in order to co-ordinate and group one person with another to create an effective working group.

The Software Group Marketing team had a great harmony about it. The team was split naturally into the brands and programmes. However, it was my manager who would be in charge of managing the resources, assessing the team's strengths and co-ordinating the sub-groups to create successful teams. I believe my manager had an excellent balance within each group. Each programme would have a programme leader and a programme manager. The leader works on the strategy, observes the market and plans for the future. The manager looks after the day-to-day running of the programme and implements the marketing plays. The same structure was in place with the brands. Every team was successful and constantly over performed and met targets. A lot of credit must go to my manager, who I believe demonstrated excellent ACL and lead from the front.

### **Company Leadership Style**

Our company is a massive global power. It has a long, distinguished history and has built a reputation for quality products and service. Being a large, American company, all the direction and guidelines get sent across from the US. This leads to a very bureaucratic leadership style. This style is very structured with many procedures which have to be adhered to. But not all aspects of the company can be described as being like this. They put in a lot of investment to innovation and new technologies to stay ahead of the competition. This branch needs to be slightly laissez-faire in that the inventors manage their own projects in order to develop new solutions and products. The bureaucratic style is prevalent within the business side. The sales,

marketing and human resources departments have many US lead procedures that have to be adhered to, stifling the ability to innovate and roll out solutions quickly, with appropriate marketing, in response to the demand from the market.

### **Team manager's leadership style**

My manager demonstrated a democratic style. This meant the team were empowered with the chance to make their own suggestions on their marketing plays and my manager would always listen to our ideas whilst still holding the authority to make the final decision. He held weekly conference call team meetings to listen to what everyone had done and to raise issues. These were excellent to bring the team together, even if was only by phone, as the team was spread out across the UK, Ireland and South Africa. He also held quarterly face-to-face team meetings to bring everyone together in person with social activities afterwards. This is why the team had such a strong bond and a willingness to be successful as one force. If you ever needed a question answering or help on a project, there was always a member of the team to help out. My manager would always encourage the placement students to come up with their own suggestions and ideas. The area where I felt I could control what I worked on was with event analysis. I came up with suggestions on how we could analyse all of our events and my manager allowed me to develop this idea and implement my own solution.

### **Things Learnt & Development**

#### **Things Learnt**

The fact that I have had exposure to the whole of the Software Group has meant I have experienced and helped with many different types of marketing activities. These experiences have increased my knowledge of marketing and business and have enabled me to learn a great deal about myself. I have learned that, with marketing, certain activities work better than others depending on what you are marketing and to whom you are marketing. Within the company, a large amount of time is spent marketing internally to the sales force. This is easier said than done, with sales people notoriously hard to engage with in order to communicate with them. The best way to market to sales people is either in person or on the phone. E-mails can be sent, but it is hard to get them to open and read the information. I have particularly seen this when advertising the Taking Charge of Change event.

The key to success within marketing is to do your research on your target market in order to see things from their point of view. This way you can appreciate what will work and what will not. If you can tailor your delivery to the correct people, the value and worth you are giving increases hugely.

#### **Development**

I have learnt a great deal from my time on placement. I have been given greater responsibility as the year went on and, in the end; I was taking sole management of big projects and learning a great deal from these. This has allowed me to further develop my management skills and everything associated with this. For instance, managing budgets, time scales, interacting with agencies, etc. These hands-on tasks have developed individual elements of my skill set, but I believe, as a result of this, my whole range of communication skills have been greatly enhanced. Dealing with so many different people in different areas of business and locations has increased these skills as a secondary knock-on effect.

Overall, the development from my year has seen a consolidation of all the elements I have learned throughout the year to make me a more effective employee. The smaller projects I undertook originally have led to bigger and better things and increased my range of skills considerably. I believe that, having shown I was prepared to work hard from the onset; I gained my team's respect and was therefore trusted to carry out my own tasks.

### **Future Career Aspirations**

The year at my company has allowed me to experience life within a large, multi-national company and to experience working within a marketing department. I would not change anything from my year but it has allowed me to see that the IT industry is not one I could now see myself developing a career within. During the year I managed to carry out a week of work shadowing at our advertising agency. This was an excellent experience, meeting many likeminded people in a younger, vibrant organisation. This is where I believe my next career step lies and it was only through my placement year that I was able to discover this. From this, I hope to set up my own company incorporating a business built on creativity.

### **Resources**

[1] The Definition of Action Centred Leadership - Jonathan Farrington  
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