

Fall 2008

Internship Journal – Example 2

September 1 10an-2pm

I always wanted to learn how companies form, develop and grow. I wanted to see how an idea evolves in something real, with a structure, meaning, and purpose. This is why I choose a new environmental-centered start-up xxxx as my internship organization. I believe that work in this organization will fulfill my curiosity and expose me to different aspects of business world.

Environment rapidly becomes more and more important issue for our economy. As a consequence, companies are trying to decrease their negative environmental impact, and often they need help to make this change. I thought of it long before I found out about xxx, and after I learned what this company is attempting to do, I became interested in working with them. Since I not yet formally work with them, I will describe what I think so far about the company, and lay out my expectations.

Before I start my actual work, my supervisor sent me some very intense reading material and asked if I can elaborate on the topic. Overall, the reading was difficult, but very fulfilling. This was a report prepared by the University of Michigan for Pew Center on Global Climate Change. The main theme of the report was key studies of a few large corporations in their attempts to address climate change by cutting GHG emissions. The participants were Cinergy, Swiss Re, DuPoint, Alcoa, The Shell Group, and Whirpool. As seen from the list, some of then are major environmental pollutants and destroyers, while the others are very neutral. The reading gives a lot of insider's information on how the goals to cut emissions were set, implemented and executed, followed by results and conclusions achieved by the companies and authors of the report. For me this was a whole new world of views, risks and concerns. In school, we learn about corporations and how they do their business, usually portraying them in a negative light because of their limitless hunger for natural resources and huge amounts of waste they create. This is all addressed in the report, but the center and front of the report was describing how these companies are struggling to stay competitive, cut costs, and enhance their public face by implementing green technologies and adjusting their business models to environmental policies and goals to cut their emissions.

Perhaps, the most interesting was a notion of one of the CEOs that in the race to cut emissions and be environmentally friendly companies try to be one step ahead of competition, but not two steps ahead because of the enormous risks of such leadership. I just think that this is very important for us, as environmentalists to understand when we demand from companies to do their business in more environmentally friendly way. To be more effective, environmental groups should adopt certain aspects of corporate thinking to wisely see where and how the change can be made. Understanding of corporate risk management strategy it makes it easier to compromise with companies or implement a policy that would satisfy needs of the environment, people, and business.

Looking at Xxx's methods and business strategy, I see that they heavily rely on technology as a solution to green up their clients. I am not necessarily agree with this

notion, but I see that for businesses this is a number one solution. Even though technology will not solve any of the problems, updating old, inefficient methods and widgets that a company uses might bring immediate benefits. This could be a good start for many of the companies, and Xxx is positioned well to offer its services to the customer.

Organization:

Seems like the stuff consists of a very few employees one of whom I have already meet. Brandon, the CEO is a very knowledgeable guy who worked as a lawyer before he decided to open his own business. I know that there will be a few more interns whom I am going to meet next week for our kick-off meeting at their office. And even though I do not know anyone yet, it seems like Brandon is aiming to keep the atmosphere in the office very relaxed and informal. No suits and ties are required, which I very much like. As I was explained, interns and staff will work on creating a large scale project that will suit certain segment of business world to cut their GHG emissions or lower their environmental impact otherwise. This project will be something entirely new from what is available on the market right now. I like this because it gives me a feeling that I will be working on something entirely new. Brandon mentioned that perhaps we will be researching about some new, underrepresented technologies that can be further developed and brought on the market. These technologies of production or maintenance should lower corp. impact on the environment. Educational part of it also excites me because I will learn about new innovative technologies and techniques.

Teamwork:

I do like working in team, but rarely had a chance to work on something large that involves a long commitment and great responsibility. Seems like at Xxx I will get enough of this experience. I just hope that my team members will be nice. To say the truth, I am a bit worry about it because I have no idea who my team members are. It would be perfect if we have some common shared understanding of what we are doing, but healthy diversity of opinions is always a plus.

September 7th. 9-2pm.

10am-2pm

This is my first day at the office. I missed the initial meeting last week, so my supervisor and CEO of the company gave me an overall presentation about what the company is aiming to do. In a messy conference room (they just moved in a new office) Brandon explained me the simple core of their business model, drawing charts and writing on the white board. Although details are important, Xxx business is simple: find a client (small-mid size business), make necessary assessment of their business, calculate their carbon footprint, inefficiencies, and find solutions how to decrease the impact and even cut costs on saving electricity, water and everything else.

Field assessment is perhaps the most interesting part as it involves going out to a business (office, manufacturing plant, etc) with a camera and a notebook, and gathering as much useful information as possible. Interviewing business owner is also a challenge, as it requires preparing questions beforehand. It is also challenging because some business owners tend not to be interested in any improvements that require large investments. Some are just non-believers. After the initial assessment, research is conducted. First, research concentrates on finding the "low hanging fruit" in saving costs and reducing environmental impact. Math plays a large role in this process. Then, the research goes deeper as it is highly specific for each client.

Overall, the first meeting went very well. At the end, I received an assignment to try to calculate our office energy use and try to find appliances that would save us energy. It was educational and allowed me to experience with my knowledge.

September 9th

10am-2pm

This day was a continuation of what I have started. It began with a briefing with Brandon, who gave me some new material to research. I had to surf eco-web sites in search of green products and calculating costs for one of their clients. I was surprised how few green options are out there for some products. With all this green washing, very few products on my opinion truly stand out and meaningful to recommend. Maybe I am just too demanding, but when I searched for replacement of packaging peanuts, I found very few options. The rest of my day, I spent searching for more eco-friendly products and entering them in to our database.

September 14th

10am-2pm

Today, my supervisor and I decided on a research project that would ultimately be my focus for the time of the internship. This project is a large-scale research of one alternative green technology. I had a few things in mind like PVC solar, but we decided on Geothermal heating/cooling. Brandon gave me a two weeks deadline to put together an initial report of my findings. This, I will do at home when I have free time, which is nice since I have a very busy schedule. I am planning to devote approximately 5 hours every week for this project. A few questions that I will concentrate on are: what is geothermal, how does it work, what is it used for, how does it help the environment, what types of locations can have it, who is ideally suited for it, where should you not install it? Installation issues: how do they do it, where, how long does it take. Costs: how much does it cost to install, maintain, operate. Cost savings? Tax incentives? After I complete my report I will attach it to this journal.

I like this format of work, the combination of office/home/field work. I think this is healthy and this is how I would like to work when I will get my job. Times at the office can be depressing sometimes, but I am allowed to listen music. So far, I like it, but wish I worked for a more established company that has more staff and a nicer office.

September 16th
10am-2pm

Brandon previously sent me a packet of readings issued by companies that implemented green approach to their businesses and sustainability consultants similar to Xxx. Working from home, I read lengthy reports from business like Wall-Mart, Alcoa, Exxon and other polluters. Although these key studies included big names, some approaches are similar for all businesses. Big companies just have more aspects of concentration, but all share some similarities when it comes to offices and employees. All businesses use electricity to power and light their buildings and processes and all companies consume materials and produce waste. Therefore, similar solutions exist to help all businesses regardless of their size.

After I covered all the readings, I have put together a report - reflection of what I have learned. It helped me to look more deeply into what Blu Map is attempting to do. What is obvious is that cutting emissions and being more efficient is already in many companies' psyche. Public, investors, law and policy, competition, and just common shared consciousness are pushing companies to look to become more environmentally friendly via cutting GHG emissions. The basic mechanism that is pushing companies for this sort of change is out there. Large corporations are trying to keep their leadership positions in every aspect of their business, including the environment. This is seen from the example of Wal-Mart and their very radical goal to use 100% green energy and become waste-free. This sets up standards for other big-box retailers to follow, and creates possible opportunities for Blu Map to help other retailers to do something on their end. This does not mean that everyone have to jump on and try to copy Wal-Mart's goals. Everyone is unique, and so requires unique, carefully planned solutions.

Managing risks is another important factor. One of the strongest quotes from the reading was by one of the Dupont executives who said, "You should always remain one step ahead of the competition. But if you are two steps ahead, you lose the crowd. The ideal is for you to be the leader of the pack and everyone pulling in the same direction." This, I think, describes main risks and fears of almost any company. Companies will not do more than is expected by the mainstream, and real success is to find this ideal state in which company's

actions to decrease their ecological footprint are environmentally meaningful, economically vital, and publicly well regarded.

Such improvements are important for stakeholders and potential investors because they show that a company is able to adjust to a new situation and create positive public relations. It is even better, when environmental non-profits and NGOs are endorsing this success, making it more credible.

Very soon a new wave of environmental laws and policies will appear. This is the best time for companies that are falling behind in cutting their emissions to start moving in this direction, and for leaders to advance their success. Luckily, the world is full of experience and determination to achieve this advancement.

*September 21st
9am-1pm (Field Work)*

Today was a big day for me and my supervisors as we all went to do an assessment for one of our clients, a large event-planning and catering company in San Francisco. This was my first experience of this sort. The owner of the company was truly a businessman and knew a lot about his trade. He spoke a lot and basically told us what he wants, in which areas he is ready to go green and in which areas it is not good for his business. For example, his best lamb he buys from New Zealand and is not willing to change that simply because there is no local supplier who has lamb of this quality. For me, this was educational. Now I know more about sorts of lamb, not that I care that much. He also said that he does not like spiral CFL lights for his dining rooms because they create very bright light and plain ugly. He gave us a good, long tour over his facilities during which I tried to document as much specific information as I could. Numbers and types of light bulbs, models and makes of refrigerators, carpets, motors, generators, and many other things. After the tour, I had to organize my data and put together a report for my supervisors. Also, next day I received an email from Brandon asking to research a few items for this project including energy-efficient light bulbs, and eco-carpets.

*September 23rd
9am-2pm*

I researched eco-options for the boat. I visited Environmental Defense Fund web site to find necessary light bulbs. The web site has a great resource for finding good energy-efficient products and can be useful for personal use.

*September 30th
(Office closed. Work from home)*

I continue working on the project researching and calculating benefits of green options for the client. This work is productive and educational. I learn a lot about products that are available on the market. However, the variety is not as great as I was expecting it to be. Some products are very difficult to find and are not listed on major web sites. A customer who searches for specific products goes through pretty harsh green washing. It is easy to forget the main focus of the research and fall for the most advertised options that are not necessarily green. One should think critically evaluating possible options. I can see why some busy businessowners and managers need help of a consultant to green their business, most of them just do not have enough time or knowledge to make right choices.

Tuesday 4th

9-2pm

Thursday 6th

9-2pm

Researching bio diesel market in San Francisco and Bay Area. Comparing costs and benefits. I found out that bio diesel is more expensive than regular diesel and is available in just few location in the Bay Area. However, I learned that used oil can be easily transferred into bio diesel.

While I have mixed feelings about bio diesels, I think that using post-consumer cooking vegetable oil to fuel cars is a wonderful option. I found out that many people are actually collecting oil from restaurants and use it to make fuel for their cars. I also found a small machine that would make oil into fuel. This can be an inexpensive option for any small-scale business, like a restaurant that has excess of used oil. This would benefit environment in two ways. First, it would guarantee that the dirt oil is not flowing into the sewage system, and second I would give environmentally cleaner fuels for diesel cars. It is also free! I wrote a report where I offer this option for a business that uses frying oil and has diesel cars.

Next day, I researched hotel industry and found out that the small soap that every hotel room has is getting wasted in huge amounts. After a few hours, I wrote a report where I explored ways of recycling the soap.

This example brought me back to reality of our wasteful lives. How much our society waste every day is hard to imagine. Looking for small things like the hotel soap, and finding ways to reuse it can be a small step towards the sustainability. It seems natural that there should be a law to prevent waste on local or national level. Industry should be required to take care of some of their waste because most of it can be recycled or reused by a business itself. For example, the hotel soap can be easily cleaned, melted and made into new soap on site or by some other party. Right now, however, it is going to the landfill.

Activity Log and Reflection Journal, Part 3

Tuesday, October 21st

Thursday, October 23rd

I did not have to come to the office on Tuesday as my boss left to meet a client. On Thursday, we continued working on finding greener solutions for the hotel chain. Honestly, I found this part of my work very boring and fruitless. I realized that I am performing better when I have a larger goal and I see an urgent importance in what I do. This is why I was very resistant searching for a better solution to hotel cheap plastic cups. Get glass ones for god's sake! However, there were obstacles such as: the hotel did not have a dishwasher to wash the glasses, the franchise would not like glass because by some stupid law it has to have the corporate logo on the cups, each cup must be wrapped in plastic, no dishwasher on the facility, potential theft... I was very mentally tired doing this ridiculous research, so I found a company that provides biodegradable cups and that was end of it. The problem was is that I felt I was participating in greenwashing. I handled it pretty good and did not show my frustration.

Tuesday, October 28th

Thursday, October 30th

It was a quite week in general. I researched options for our company to store all our information online. There are storages that work just like a computer, with a only difference - information is kept online on servers and is accessible from any computer. We decided to do this because amount of information that we accumulate is keep growing.

I also used DSIRE.org web site where all possible government incentives for installing energy or water efficient rebates are listed. It has Federal and State rebate forms, and information. Very useful for anyone, from large businesses to a individual consumer.

Since nothing extraordinary happened this week, I will write about teamwork. I briefly mentioned that I liked working in team with Brandon when we were putting a report together. I liked the spirit of collaboration. Because we were both interested in what we were doing, we were eager to help each other and offer better solutions. In the beginning Brandon told me what he sees should be a final report, and then we just divided all tasks between us. I liked that I could concentrate and just work in my own rhythm. I could ask questions when I

felt I needed help and could always receive an answer. After we did our individual assignments, my boss began putting things together on his computer and I was assisting him with design tips. Therefore, my ideas along with his became at the end a final paper that I could see and touch. I felt empowered by the responsibility I was given and happy with the final result that had my own touch. It left me happy because I was a part of work process and could see the result. Some people work every day on their small tasks and never see the result. My roommate once was complaining about it. He is an accountant in a large firm, so he has very little idea which impact his work has on overall company performance. I realized how important this is to see the result.

Tuesday, November 4th

Thursday, November 6th

Working with the database entering new sustainable products. Again, I realized how few really green products are on the market despite all seemed abundance. The Green Festival was a fresh breath in my research. Milk-based, water-solvable paints, grey water systems for home and offices, and many other useful products all went into the database. Nevertheless, usefulness of some products is questionable as not many businesses can actually adopt it. For example, I found out that the gray water systems that go under the sink couldn't be installed in bathrooms because sinks become inaccessible for wheelchair users. This is how unexpected some obstacles can be. A business cannot afford doing these mistakes. This is why a throughout research is needed. I wonder if anyone could foresee all obstacles. Green products and techniques are new and slowly making their way into our lives. However, we should be cautious implementing everything that has a green label on it because we might have to deal with even worse consequences. Not all conventional methods and products today can be replaced by "green" versions. Who claims that is perhaps absolute ignorant.

Midterms and my trip to San Diego for Thanksgiving forced me to ask Brandon to give me some time off until December. Therefore, I will conclude my journal here, but continue working with Xxx until I feel I am learning and contributing into work of the company.

The End.