Walrus Advertising Internship

This summer I worked at Walrus, an advertising agency in New York City. This small agency has around 15 full time employees and specializes in digital and social content, but also works in more traditional channels. With clients like Pfizer’s Emergen-C, HBO and Bloomberg, Walrus works with a wide range of big names, but saves time for smaller operations like KnowMe, a mobile app startup, and non-profit operations around New York. In early June, Walrus celebrated 10 years since its founding by husband and wife duo Deacon and Frances Webster. The internship ran from June 1st to August 7th and I worked with the account and business development teams.

Working at a small agency like Walrus allowed me to get a sense of how every department in the agency works to produce content for clients. I assisted Frances Webster, the co-founder and Sewanee alumna who offers the internship every year, with business development. I learned the process of finding new clients, pitching to them and eventually earning their business. We had 6 business sectors that we were targeted for new clientele. My mornings were spent pouring over the newspapers, social feeds and online news sources attempting to find companies that recently received funding or were looking for an agency. That would also allow us to keep abreast on news surrounding our current clients. Frances and I would meet weekly to talk over prospects, who we think was serious about advertising and, more importantly, who we think we could do a job for. Once we narrowed down potential clients, I would dig up contact information on their marketing team and
send those people a poster-sized novelty coupon mailer. Learning how to work with business development was great because it answered the question of how agencies grow their business and keep finding new clients. On top of that, having to call businesses and talk to people in order to find a contact or gauge interest was great practice. I had really never had to contact a business as a business, and working at a big agency would not have afforded me the opportunity where I was trusted to speak directly to potential clients.

Working with the account team, I learned how an agency keeps the clients that it worked so hard to get in the first place. I worked closely with Tara Byrne on one of Walrus’ biggest accounts, Emergen-C, for which the team handles all social and digital content. The constant contact between the marketing team at Emergen-C and Tara surprised me at first. Every week, there was a new report to send or an analysis of a Facebook post’s performance to do. The biggest undertaking I was tasked with was the Q2 social/digital review. This was a lengthy, sixty-page presentation on what Emergen-C’s competitors were doing in the social and digital space. I was entrusted to create the entire presentation (or ‘deck’), which went through multiple revisions with Tara and another account director, Paula, to make sure everything was just right before its presentation to the Emergen-C marketing team. I also assisted Tara in the first steps on a new, top-secret ‘craft liquor’ brand, which required organizing visas and travel to Brazil and, more exciting, a 10:00AM visit to a liquor store in Tribeca to do some retail market research. The questionable
glances I got walking into a liquor store five minutes after they opened on a Tuesday were worth the entire summer. I’ve never felt more like an alcoholic.

When I wasn’t running around, preparing decks for Emergen-C or calling new business contacts, I was helping the production department with getting content out the door. Late in the summer, HBO, a former client, called up and asked for help promoting a baseball special they were running in September. The head of production, Val Hope, had me busy calling foam finger manufacturers, Big League Chew and every bronze plaque maker on this side of the Mississippi. This highlighted the fact that there was never an idle moment at Walrus. Always having something to do or someone to help was an aspect of the internship that I am very grateful for. Many friends were envious of my inability to text back during the workday while they sat at their desks with little to do.

I also worked with Clem Barker, another account director, and Chris Thielo, a freelance agency producer, on a big project for XOJet, a private jet company. XOJet had Walrus working on a TV commercial, which was being shot in August. Chris had me help him with the entire production process, from the search for directors, to the review of director treatments, to setting up shoot days, locations and everything else. This ended up being the most valuable part of the summer for me. I have always been interested in photography and filmmaking, but never really thought of it as a career option. Working with Chris, I was realized that people were making a living doing this and, as a bonus, I got a long list of names to contact from him.
Working here in New York compounded this serendipitous good fortune, as I was able to meet, in person, with many of the people Chris had introduced me to.

I am entirely content with my internship at Walrus. I was exposed to more aspects of ad agencies and the greater business world than I would have imagined. In the months leading up to finding a job for the summer, I was very conflicted in whether I should search for a career in something that I am good at and I can earn a lot of money doing, or a career in something that I love to do. Speaking with all the people in the production business made me realize that it is better to do something that really interests you, that way you never truly have to “go into the office” in the morning. It sounds incredibly cliché, but it was the most important lesson I learned working at Walrus.