

Introduction

Starting Winter 2021, I began a virtual internship with a travel and hospitality organization based in Twin Waters, Australia. My role these past 12 weeks has been as a marketing intern for the company. This company hosts corporate and leisure groups for team-building activities and are looking to expand their company, so I was able to assist with their expansion initiatives. I am currently studying to earn a Hospitality Management degree but due to COVID-19 restrictions there are not a lot of opportunities for hospitality or tourism internships at the moment, so this was a good alternative internship since I have had a little bit of experience with marketing. After completing the internship, I have learned many skills that can be applied to my future career in hospitality since this company works closely with the tourism industry along the Sunshine Coast.

Question 1: What was your first week with your host site like? Did your pre-program expectations match the reality?

When going through the process to start my virtual internship, I did not have too many expectations because working remotely was still fairly new to me. After my interview and I had been accepted to work with my host company, I did not hear anything back for a couple of weeks, which made me nervous that something had gone wrong. Turns out it was an email issue where the email got stuck in an outbox. After following up with the many people involved, I was able to get that taken care of as well as get all the information about credits, hours, and dates matched up. While I was not expecting that, I learned right at the beginning that when relying on email, open communication will help solve those issues and it is better to send an email to ask for clarification, rather than waiting for someone to reach out. I also learned that being proactive and communicating with everyone helped me be productive and helped the internship go smoothly.

For my first task, I was asked to research venues between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast and input that information into a CRM database. I received an email of instructions to get me started. I was very excited to have the opportunity to learn more about Australia. I have never been before, so I had little prior knowledge about the different areas in Australia. To get more familiar, I looked at different maps and tourist websites to understand the areas I was going to be researching a little better. I was given incorrect log in information for their CRM software, Capsule, so I was delayed getting started with my first project. Once I was given that information, I watched the training video that showed me how to input information into Capsule. It was very clear and straight forward, so I began the research. At first, I was not sure how many businesses I was going to find, but I quickly realized there were actually a lot of venues that fit the description of what the company was looking for. The goal, once I was done collecting this information, was to market to these companies to try and grow the business by having more people sign up for team building.

Question 2: How did your impressions of the host culture and internship site change over time? What are some of the biggest differences you encountered?

My initial impression of my host organization is that everyone there is fun, friendly, helpful, and accommodating. This seems to fit the type of business they are running since the company does team building that includes activities like laser clay shooting to outdoor movie nights. I have talked to Peta once during my interview and Dani through email and every interaction has been very pleasant and understanding. When I had any questions, Dani responded with helpful answers so I could continue with my work. Also, when I needed to clarify and reduce my hours from 20 to 15, she was very accommodating and understood that I had other priorities and wanted to make sure my experience involved learning but was also fun.

As the internship progressed, I noticed they also valued freedom since the tasks I was given were open-ended and I could make decisions on how I will follow it through. They gave me the log in information to the CRM database and their Google Document for their sports team database and let me do the work as I saw fit. I decided to recreate the sports team document and turn it into an Excel sheet because it was over two years old and hard to copy and paste the information. This seems different than my home country because I feel that managers here can sometimes be overbearing and always looking over your shoulder.

My initial impressions about the culture were a little harder to come up with since I was remote, I was not fully immersed in the culture. By being removed from the culture, it is a lot harder to get an accurate understanding of what Australia is like. The main way I learned about what their culture seems like was done through research on the internet so my top priority cross-cultural goal for this program was to learn more about Australia by becoming more familiar with different locations around the country. When I was first learning about this internship, the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast were mentioned, and I honestly did not know where either of those places were located. Once I started my internship, my first task was to research venues from Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast. By doing that research, I learned that the Sunshine Coast is to the north of Brisbane and the Gold Coast is to the south. I have also learned that they are in Queensland, which is a state in Australia. I also learned that these areas rely on tourism to help their economy, so I know these are popular travel destinations. This information will be helpful because now if my host company is ever talking about these areas, I will have the knowledge to know where exactly they are talking about. I have also picked up on different terms and practices while doing the research. I have mainly learned about how they use different terms regarding weddings because a lot of the venues I have researched host weddings. I may not be able to apply this cultural information to where I am at currently, but I believe knowing all of this information now will be extremely beneficial when I visit because I will already have an understanding of different areas and will be able to travel more easily within the country.

Question 3: Considering the entire experience, what were the most important benefits of your internship - personally and professionally?

When I started this internship, my top priority professional goal was to learn more about what are the different steps it takes to be able to run a business. Before this internship, my work experience only involved working for a company and I had no input or exposure to what decisions were being made in order to operate the business. My hope was to be able to expand my knowledge about running a business because I will be able to take these skills and transfer them into a leadership role. This way I will have gained some experience before I graduate from OSU-Cascades. This internship allowed me to see what it takes for a company to expand their business through marketing. I put many hours into research exploring which businesses the company can reach out to so they can market to them and expand. I learned of the importance that marketing has for a business. My goal shifted since I am focused on the marketing side of the business so now my goal is to learn more about what goes into marketing so a business can successfully expand.

Another professional benefit of this internship is realizing the amount of labor that goes into developing marketing databases, especially starting from scratch. I have had to learn to be creative when it comes to finding businesses like using destination management websites, recommendations of similar businesses on Facebook, and Google searches. It is a very satisfying feeling finding these businesses and inputting all of this information into a CRM database and watching it grow. I entered in 250 businesses along the Sunshine Coast that could be potential future clients of my internship company. I also created a marketing database of all of the different sports teams in that area. Also, I created a SEO document to help my host company get recognized when people use Google searches. This will help the company reach out to potential clients as well as clients who are looking for them. Having become familiar with CRM databases and SEO phrases are definitely transferrable skills that I can take with me and apply to the hospitality industry.

My top priority personal goal was to have a manageable schedule that allowed me to complete all of my tasks without too much extra stress and allowing for some time to decompress. To do this, I started at the beginning of the week by writing down all of my tasks and assignments that need to be completed so I knew when everything was due. I also planned out when I would be working on different tasks, like my internship, since that is hours based, rather than deadline based. This made me become more organized, which helped my work-life balance. My biggest takeaway was that even though I prefer to not be staring at a computer all day, by creating a schedule that includes both personal time and work tasks, I was able to get through the tedious tasks because I knew I had something fun to look forward to.

Question 4: Describe your daily routine for workdays. How did you manage your time between the internship and your daily life?

My work schedule was broken down by week and my weeks were Monday-Sunday because it aligned with my school schedule. My agreement with my host company is to work 15 hours per week for four days a week. Since my host company is very flexible, I first created my own work schedule to work Mondays-Wednesdays and on Sundays. This worked best for me because I have two other jobs, one on campus that I work Wednesdays-Fridays, and another one in Sunriver that I work on Saturdays. This helps me spread out my workload, so I am not working 10-hour days. To prepare for work, I always light a candle and play lofi beats on YouTube. I also make sure I have eaten beforehand and have water and coffee or an energy drink next to me. This lessens distractions because I have everything I need and will not have to get up while I am working. While my original goal was to spread out my workload, I found that by working every day, I did not have a lot of time for myself or if an emergency came up. I ended up readjusting my schedule to have a day where I did not do anything school or work related so I could instead do something for myself. By making this change, I knew I always had one day to look forward to where I could relax and do something for myself, like sleep in or go on a hike. This allowed me to recharge and prepare me for the rest of the week.

Question 5: What were the biggest challenges you faced during your internship? How did you overcome these?

My biggest challenge was working from home. Even though I have been doing it for the past year with remote learning, this was different to me because it was done by myself. With my classes, I was still attending zoom classes or meeting with friends to study, so I felt like I had some sense of community. With the addition of a virtual internship, it just increased my time on the computer staring at a screen. To help balance this, I made sure I had times where I got outside or met up with friends. Another challenge working from is how easy it can be to get distracted from work. Sometimes it would be by my phone, my boyfriend, my dogs, etc. Preferably, I would have liked to have a workspace at a coffee shop or the library because sometimes the act of getting ready and leaving the house would help get me in a productive mood but with the COVID-19 restrictions, finding a place has been difficult. To overcome this challenge, I would put my phone away, take the dogs to the dog park before working so they would be ready for a nap afterwards, or work while my boyfriend was playing video games.

Question 6: What steps did you take to make sure that you became an asset to the organization? With whom were you able to develop strong relationships?

In order to be an asset to my host company, I made sure I was very thorough with my tasks, starting with research. When researching which venues to add to Capsule, I made sure that they would be a good fit for my company to market to. I did this by making sure that each venue fit the description of what my host company was looking for by looking at each venues' website, reviews, and pictures. I also made sure it was in the right location and plus I also tried to find contact information for the person who oversaw the venue. I wanted to make sure each entry was correct and thorough so

my host company would not waste time or resources marketing to the wrong businesses. I ended up reaching the maximum amount of entries I could add to Capsule at 250. I also recreated their sports team database because it was last updated in 2018 and switched it from a Google Document to an Excel spreadsheet. This made it easier to read the information and copy/paste it. I believe these steps made me an asset to the company because going forward, they will have easy access to hundreds of different businesses to help with their expansion initiatives.

While communicating through email, Dani was the only person I corresponded with. She was very friendly and welcoming through her emails and I was able to tell it would be great to meet her in person. She always included what they were working on as a company and which businesses they had hosted for team building. It made me feel included and I appreciated that. She also assigned me tasks to make sure I always had something to work on. I appreciated that she wanted me to learn more while working with them and have that work be enjoyable.

Question 7: What guidance did you receive from your academic faculty at home (if any)? What projects did you complete for credit?

While I did not receive any guidance from my academic faculty during my internship, I did take a few classes that were beneficial to me and the work I was doing with my host company. First, in Fall 2020 I took an online marketing class and that is where I first learned about SEO or search engine optimization and how it is utilized in marketing. I also took a mini course as an assignment that went through how to use SEO through Google, so when I was asked to create a document to help them use SEO, I was already familiar with doing that and made it easier to create. Also, during Winter 2021 I took a marketing class and we practiced creating advertisements for assignments so that helped with the task of creating promotional videos for my host company to use. By taking these classes, I felt more prepared to complete the tasks assigned to me by my host company.

Throughout my internship, I completed several projects for my host company. First, I conducted research on venues and created marketing databases using CRM software and Excel. Next, I created a SEO document that listed different phrases or terms people use that could help my host company optimize their listing on Google. The company hopes that by knowing which phrases people could be using to search for their business, it will pop up as one of the first listings so people will see it and click on their website. Another project I worked on was researching business expansion and how it is viewed in the United States. Finally, I created promotional videos and advertisements that my host company can use to help bring in more clients for team building activities.

Question 10: What tips do you have for future interns working with your same internship site, host city, or country? Consider discussing how you managed remote work, all electronic communication, etc.

For future interns, there are many ways to prepare for a virtual internship and here are some tips that I learned from my experience that will hopefully provide some help to them and their internship. My first couple of tips are in regard to the remote nature of the work. First, one tip I have for future interns is to create and stick to a schedule. For my internship with my host company, deciding when to work was completely up to me. I was given tasks to complete, and I needed to work 15 hours each week. Since I had pretty loose requirements, it was up to me to create a schedule that would allow me to meet those goals and make sure it fit into my schedule. While having that freedom was nice, it meant I was the one responsible for holding myself accountable, which could sometimes be difficult, especially if I had a deadline for a school assignment coming up. It could be easy to put off the internship because the work could be done anytime, while the project had a strict deadline. In order to combat this, I created a schedule so I knew when I was going to sit down and work on my internship. Since I was working 15 hours a week and working four days a week, I divided my hours into either three- or four-hour chunks on the days I worked. By having smaller chunks, it helped me break the hours down into manageable time periods each day. I also worked on days that I had few other obligations so I was not working all day and wearing myself down. By creating a schedule, I was able to stay organized with all of my obligations and make sure I had enough time to complete everything. My second tip about completing the work would be to find the things that help them get focused on working. For me, it was lighting a candle and putting on calming music, while for others it may be certain lighting, working by a window, etc. Also, it is important to limit distractions. I would recommend clearing off the workspace, closing extra tabs, and putting away the cell phone so there are no distractions to take them away from their work. By creating a space where they want to be and can focus on working, it will help make remote work more enjoyable and less stressful.

Another couple of tips I have are regarding working with a company in Australia. Since Australia is on the other side of the world, it is important to remember the time difference between Oregon and Australia. My company is located near Brisbane, which is 17 hours ahead of Oregon, so it is always the next day in Australia. That is important to remember for meetings and deadlines. I made the mistake during the interview process (with a different company) of not remembering that the time difference put them a day ahead, so I wrote down my interview as a Tuesday, which it was in Australia, but it was still Monday in Oregon. I felt awful missing that interview and after that, I added a clock that showed the time in Brisbane to the home screen of my cell phone so I would always know what time it is there. Second, I would recommend that interns research the area they are going to be working in. For my internship, I was researching venues between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast and when I first started, I had no idea where that was located. It was very helpful to look at Google Maps and tourist websites to get a better understanding of where I was going to be researching and what areas that encompassed. When doing the research, a lot of times, venues would be suggested that were not actually in the area I needed so it was nice to already be familiar with that

area. To me, it also felt like a way to get more immersed in the internship because I now know the Sunshine Coast and someday when I visit, it is on my list of places to see!