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“Darn ... can't seem to connect to the school printer ...” I murmured to myself as I tried to print my latest Wealth Management lecture notes. Just as I was getting a little frustrated, ‘Bing!’ a familiar jingle ushered a ‘You Have Mail’ pop-up box to greet me. With an uncanny automation and a few clicks of the mouse I found myself reading an email titled ‘Asia Pacific PR Student of the Year’

“Hmmm ... an international competition,” I thought to myself. “Wow! Seems like a great opportunity to exchange ideas on a global level.” The timing seemed good as well, since it didn't clash with my examinations. Furthermore, being in my final year of studies here in Singapore Management University (SMU), it made me eager to experience life as a working professional.

I was elated to learn that my proposal had been selected as one of the top five in the whole of Asia Pacific and I won a paid-for trip to the annual Asia Pacific PR Awards ceremony in Hong Kong!

Considered the most prestigious regional event in the industry, business professionals throughout Asia Pacific gather there to exchange ideas, network and most importantly receive peer recognition for their achievements over the past year. For me, it was a once in a lifetime opportunity to meet with other key business leaders from around the world and to be immersed in an internationally enriching learning environment.

Looking back, this journey wasn't exactly a bed of roses. Coming from a finance background, I had to quickly overcome the growing pains in terms of learning to think and speak sensibly like a PR professional. It seems only yesterday that I was asking my marketing major friends, what is the difference between PR and marketing? Responses were equally enlightening as they were confusing. Some told me that PR was purely communicating with mass media agencies, while others broadened the definition a little. Nonetheless, the feedback helped a great deal as I rationalized and reconciled the various ideas.

Approaching the proposal was equally challenging. I decided to approach it by starting with the given consumer profile. I did surveys and spoke to friends that fitted the demographic to understand their psychographics and lifestyle patterns. After identifying campaign success drivers like viewership, duration, spend-per-media, lifestyle fit, and psychographics fit etc ... I decided to take a road less traveled, anchoring the campaign towards the use of digital media including the use of a virtual mannequin.

Little did I know that a small opportunity that I grasped with both hands would turn out to be one of the most exciting moments of my undergraduate life.

Upon our touchdown in Hong Kong, we were all warmly received at the Weber Shandwick office where finally we were able to put a face to many wonderful people who guided us along the way. It was amazing learning how a globally competitive firm like Weber Shandwick organizes itself to harness the power of leadership, communication and creativity of its people to establish its strong influences in the market it currently enjoys.

The award night was equally eye opening as we observed how seasoned professionals thought through each campaign they launched and how they executed these ideas to deliver outcomes for their clients. Award finalists had campaigns which spanned across diverse industries from slimming solutions to banking, and incorporated a variety of strategies stemming from traditional media application to new emerging trends in digital media.

As I watched each award recipient go on stage to take their awards, I received a much needed reminder of life that the CEO of Temasek Holding once shared “The statistic of large numbers hides the fact that each success story eventually boils down to the single individual creating the idea, taking the risk, making the decision, toiling against odds to make things happen whether for himself or for others... each of us also carries with us the power of one – the power to decide and make a choice, to make a difference.