

HKIAAT Case Competition 2009-10 winners made their debut at Sa Sa

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Jump-start your career success with practical experience

Last summer, the winning team of the Accounting and Business Management Case Competition 2009-10, from Hong Kong Community College (HKCC) of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, was given a truly eye-opening experience. The team members were given a three-month internship programme at Sa Sa International Holdings Limited (Sa Sa), a leading beauty products retailer in Asia and the company chosen for the case study in last year's competition.



Irene, Janice and Natalie would like to thank Mr. Andy Choi, Sa Sa's Vice President for the company's wholehearted support during the three-month internship.

Exposure to every facet of the job

The finance and accounting team shoulders an important responsibility in controlling the considerable volume of cash flow in and out of Sa Sa's accounts every day. During the three-month internship, these studious fellows were rotated to four different sections of the team: accounts payable, accounts receivable, inventory control and reporting systems.

Chelsea Lee, the leader of the champion team, is currently a year two Integrated BBA student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Chelsea thinks that handling accounts receivable was the most intriguing experience for her as she could see the actual sales operations from each outlet and payment in various forms such as by cash, credit card and Octopus card. The task of monitoring the cash flow into the company gave Chelsea a firm understanding about the business.

A reliable accounting system is indispensable at a sizeable retailing group with complex data and operations model. The interns were all trained to use the SAP accounting software system in reconciling all the invoices, preparing cheques, and so on. "The SAP accounting system is part of the syllabus which we will cover this semester. I am really glad that I could learn about this accounting system in advance and through practical use," says Irene Wong, who is studying a BBA in Professional Accounting in Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Learning from failure

As the students moved on to another division to handle a more high-level job, they were given a critical task, which was issuing cheques to vendors according to the goods delivered and sold. Such a process requires great attention to detail and is frequently prone to human error. They all experienced the pain of making mistakes in issuing cheques that needed to be cancelled. They also learnt much from the long process of liaising with vendors in settling payments or clarifying each entry on the invoice lines. “It was through these small but crucial processes that we gradually grasped a full picture of the whole retail operation,” recalls Chelsea.

Job diversity was the highlight of this internship programme. Janice Lam, a current student on the BBA in Accountancy programme at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, had previous experience working as an accounts clerk. She was impressed by the fact that she could gain valuable experience in various accounting operation units over such a short time-span. Comparing her internship experience with her previous accounting job, Janice appreciated Sa Sa’s systematic work procedures where all accounting records are kept in place properly for auditing purposes.

Unlike her teammates, Natalie Huang chose to join the workforce after graduating from HKCC. She has worked as an accounts clerk in a management services company since October 2010. The internship experience not only added value to her resume, but also helped Natalie get her current job easily. “Through job rotation, we have an overview of the operation of the whole finance department. My current job is more related to accounts receivable and inventory control. The internship definitely boosts my confidence in my job even though I am a fresh graduate,” says Natalie.

Mentors at work

The learning process of the interns would not have been so fruitful without the support and guidance from their friendly colleagues. When they came across some tricky issues, for instance, handling invoices for a vendor that was filing for bankruptcy, their colleagues would proactively help them by taking over the case and explaining to them the proper procedures. These eager learners were also well taken care of in terms of workload – in one instance they were released early since they had worked late the previous night on a large-scale stock take at one of the company’s flagship stores.



The interns establish valuable friendship with their mentors at work.



Fruitful learning experience

The participants were impressed by this all-round internship programme and all learnt a great deal from it. The opportunity to try different accounting positions gave them an overview of different accounting functions. Through this experience some teammates



Janice and Irene enjoy their last moment in the Sa Sa office.

become more set in their determination to work in the commercial sector, in a company such as Sa Sa, while others realised they may need more specialised accounting training at a CPA firm. As much as the recognition from winning the Case Competition, they believe that this experience will be a big plus on their resumes during their job-seeking process.

In retrospect, these energetic young people with go-getting spirit are thankful to the HKIAAT for organizing the Case Competition which provided them with this internship that has added great value to their career life.