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Experiential Learning Final Report: ScrumGenius

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SASAH Experiential Learning

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Experiential Learning Final Report

Last summer, I completed a content marketing internship with Tharshan Muthulingam and his Scrum-based startup, ScrumGenius. ScrumGenius is a digital standup platform that integrates with chat platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams so teams can submit their standups online. This gets rid of some of the wasted time in-person standup meetings tend to create, all by asking employees a few simple questions to get easy metrics on their tasks, goals and blockers.

I was hired as a Content Marketing Intern for ScrumGenius in late April of this year. The goal of my internship initially was to work directly with ScrumGenius' founder, Tharshan Muthulingam, to help boost the online presence of ScrumGenius and set up a foundation that would carry the site forward into the future. Admittedly, working with ScrumGenius was something of a learning curve. I have worked in many different jobs over my university career—most of them in retail or customer service—and while I have always prided myself on being flexible to change, the first few weeks in this position were hard. I have a little bit of experience in a lot of the different areas I was working in, but most of my job was very new to me.

Even the location—the Propel Entrepreneurship Center in Western's Student Success Center—was a bit of a shock. Until this job, I have never worked in a co-working space like Propel's; I have always been a part of a team in a small room, or doing remote work, or a traditional retail setup. The co-working setup of Propel was something that took me a little

longer than I expected to adapt to, and one I still occasionally found to be strange even as I neared the end of my internship and would hear someone across the room talk about promotion for their jewellery line as I researched for a customer case study.

Yet as my job went on, I found myself enjoying Propel's setup more and more each day. Being around people who were working hard helped push me to work harder, and the Propel Entrepreneurship Centre was filled with highly motivated people. I was also pleasantly surprised to find that the space was not nearly as distracting as I had feared it would be. As someone with ADHD, I find that working around other people can be difficult. Simple things like the person next to me tapping their pencil off-beat or the person behind me in a lecture hall swinging their foot in my line of vision can break my focus. But despite a few snags and loud noises from some of my coworkers, I barely noticed the difference. And in the few times that the environment around me did become distracting, I could simply put on my headphones and play music to drown it out.

Much of the ease of this transition to a new workplace setup was due to the people I was working around and with. I got along well with all of the people I shared the space with, and we all worked very well with each other; often, people from different companies would ask each other for input or advice, which was nice to see. I got along especially well with one of the Propel Entrepreneurship Centre interns, Lisa, as we often worked alongside each other for marketing tactics. At one point, we even collaborated together on a blog post, an experience that allowed us to both learn from the other.

I also learnt a lot of new things from the companies and people around me that I found quite interesting and useful for my future. Simply being around all the different entrepreneurs I was exposed to and listening to them discuss their companies and competitors was very

fascinating to me. I learnt a lot about different business and marketing tactics I would otherwise not be aware of, like retargeting for ads and the built-in cost of shipping for many items.

But the learning I did within Propel did not just come from the other companies I worked with. There were also workshops held in the space about once a week where local businesspeople from various job sectors would come in and talk about their specialization. This includes marketing experts, the head of an advertising company, and several startup leads. For instance, in one workshop I learned about different leadership and team styles and how to best cater to these different types of people to maximize their potential. Learning these stories and how these successful businesspeople started, grew, and now run their businesses was quite fascinating to me. I know that later in life, when I enter the workforce and possibly have my own team to manage, this knowledge will also help me become more successful.

Furthermore, my internship was also quite different than expected. When I was first hired, I was still overseas on exchange at the University of Liverpool and would be until the beginning of June. Thankfully, Tharshan still decided to hire me, so this meant that for the first month or so of my job I was working remotely. Most of this time was spent getting up to speed on the platform and industry as a whole, as well as setting up all of the resources and applications that I would come to rely on throughout my job.

As it turned out, a lot of the tasks I ended up doing were not ones that were in my initial job description. I was hired primarily for copywriting and marketing content; this included writing blog articles, marketing copy and researching topics for the future. While these tasks were a prominent part of my role throughout the summer, my responsibilities changed as my job went on. Often times, I found myself switching between different fields. I did everything from running site audits to contacting potential leads to writing blog posts to creating website

graphics. Often, the tasks I was doing also varied significantly from week to week. During some weeks, my role was almost entirely in copywriting. During others, I was contacting the marketing departments of similar apps to suggest collaborating, and in still others, I was creating marketing content and putting together customer case studies.

For the first half of my internship, the focus was on gathering materials for the new version of our site and promoting it. This included rewriting old pages, writing copy for the new blog, and transforming pre-recorded interviews into case studies for email and for the website. One of my first tasks, and one that I began while I was still working remotely overseas, was rewriting the Product Feature pages on the website. This meant taking what had been a paragraph or two on the landing page and stretching it into a 500-or-so-word piece, complete with screenshots and other relevant information. For this, I relied heavily on the support documents for background information and the screenshots already included within them, but I also went into ScrumGenius' platform to gather my own first-hand knowledge and screenshots as well.

The process of refreshing the Product Feature pages was very much an on-going one. I would pull all the necessary information into a Word document, create a first draft from it and then upload it to a platform called Notion, where Tharshan would look it over and add comments as needed. I would then make those changes and upload it to our website's studio where it would go live on the site.

I also started to write customer success case studies around this time. I would get sent audio files and transcripts from phone interviews done by Lisa and transform them into a case study that outlined what the customer's problems and pain points were, how our product helped solve those issues, and what results the client saw from that. These interviews were sometimes up to twenty minutes long, and I often had to sort through different bits of information to find out

what to prioritize. Again, I would post these drafts on Notion and Tharshan and I would review them together, often editing them through several drafts as our ideas of what the final product should look like changed and we developed a template format. Often, the first draft template was very simplistic, and looked essentially like a simple wall of text. The second template was arranged into three sections: The Problem, The Solution, and The Results. The third and final draft template, which can be seen in the case studies currently uploaded to our website, tightened up the second's format and added a quick highlights and summary section at the top.

The format of these case studies also went through several different iterations. By the end of the summer, our case studies were recycled into several different formats to fit different audiences. Initially, the case studies were just articles on our site, but as the summer went on, we began to reformat them into stylized PDFs that could be sent to prospective clients. Later, they were also remade into email newsletters and custom block formats, the latter of which could be input as a small preview into web pages.

The largest task of my writing responsibilities, as well as the task I am focusing primarily on currently, is blog content. In the beginning of June, Tharshan and I put together a list of potential blog topics for posts. I would find ideas by researching the kinds of posts similar products were writing about as well as any relevant questions searched on Google and Quora. From that, I was able to come up with a rough list of keywords and general topics from which I could pull titles, bullet points, and eventually whole posts from.

I covered many different themes and areas in these blog posts, all of which related in some way back to Agile/Scrum organization, the platforms ScrumGenius worked on, and different styles of working in teams. Some of these blog posts included themes like Slack app roundups, tips on working in remote teams and different Scrum styles.

Through the course of this blog writing, I developed a sort of process for the posts. After roughly sketching out the posts as well as finding any resources that could aid me in writing, I would write my first draft and then run it through an online editor called Hemingway to help me edit for reading level, as the recommended reading level for blog content sits somewhere around grade 9. After this, the edited posts would be put up on Notion where my manager could look them over. He would add any comments and make suggestions, and then I would make any changes needed and put them up on the studio along with any last-minute SEO stuff such as tags and alt-image text.

This form of content creation was more familiar territory to me, as I have more experience with writing than anything else, but I still found I had a lot of room to grow. Finding the right balance between an academic or professional style and a more casual one took a few tries, and I found I often had to run my copy through Hemingway a couple times to fix it before uploading it to Notion. I am used to writing either personal blog posts or academic essays, but I think I managed to find a good midpoint fairly quickly.

My tasks changed the most in the second half of my internship, when the new site was being launched. During this time, my duties switched over to more of a monitoring role, instead of an active one. While I still wrote copy for the website, I began to spend more time monitoring social media, optimizing backend details, and creating graphics and images.

Graphic creation was the task I was most apprehensive about, because I was not very familiar with it. As with SEO, I have had basic Photoshop and photo-editing skills for a few years, but I have never really had a need to move past that. As long as I could subtly edit photos for my own blog, I never had a reason to learn more, and so I never really bothered to educate myself. Yet, over the last month or so, I found myself creating vector images basically from

scratch—something I never thought I was capable of. And while this aspect of my job proved more difficult than copywriting, I enjoyed it more than I thought I would.

For these images, I learned how to take icons and illustrations from free websites and make them into something that began to resemble a brand aesthetic. I learned what fonts to use and built a bank of common colors that made our images look cohesive and professional. I learned how to create drop shadows and utilize negative space as best as possible. As I continued in this job, I got a better idea of what looked good on the site and what my employer wanted, and so I grew a lot more confident in my own work. While it may sound small, it is something I am proud of learning to do. I tend to just not bother learning how to do things I think I might be bad at due to my own perfectionism, so I am glad I learned that it is worth the risk sometimes.

In the last few weeks of my internship, my job focus shifted once more. This time, I was tasked with managing email in addition to my other responsibilities. I was given my own @scrumgenius.com email, and I sent emails both to other digital marketers asking to collaborate with them and to potential clients in order to check up on their trial status. Emailing potential collaborators to boost our views was the much larger focus of the two, and while the execution largely stayed the same for both tasks, I carried them out for several different goals.

In the first email campaign, I was charged with contacting the marketing departments of the apps I had already featured in several Slack and Microsoft Teams application roundups for the ScrumGenius blog. This process was done in several steps: first, I had to create a list and table for all these apps and then locate standard press or information emails for each. Then, I found each app's LinkedIn page and, from there, managed to get the names and contact information of individual marketing employees to contact them.

In the beginning, this task was very difficult, and I did not have much success. I was doing everything manually, which took up a lot of time. Oddly, many sites did not have a readily available contact or press email. Furthermore, I was working from my own LinkedIn account in the beginning, which limited the information I was able to see about people. Later, Tharshan allowed me to use his account, which let me see more details about people with less hassle. I also used several email tools to pull individual company email addresses from the web, like Hunter.io and Snov.io—the former of which let me pull information directly from LinkedIn to find marketing emails. I then put all this information together in a table database, wrote up customizable email templates as well as shorter templates for LinkedIn and Twitter, and began contacting these people.

This process was difficult and occasionally frustrating, yet it was also highly rewarding at times. In one case, I had to find the email of an app's marketing coordinator when all I had was her job title and a headline on LinkedIn. I did not know her name, and her profile was highly secure so I could not see anything else, either. In the end, I had to Google her headline in quotes to find her name, which brought me to her page, and then search her name in the search bar so I could run it through Snov.io. Although my friends told me that was kind of creepy how I could find her information like that, I was still proud of myself.

Later, I applied the techniques for different campaigns. After I finished emailing the Slack and Microsoft Teams apps, Tharshan showed me a webinar he had watched that suggested contacting the webmasters of posts that were relevant to our website and had good viewership but utilized old or broken links. For instance, I found a few pages with fairly high traffic that linked to an old HubSpot article. Though the article itself was good, it had lost two whole

sections since these pages had linked to it, so there was opportunity for us to request that the pages instead link to us.

While the basic description of these two tasks are largely identical, I will admit I felt a little more awkward in emailing these old links connections than I had before. While I know in retrospect that it was simply my own self-consciousness speaking, I felt that emailing companies and asking them to replace one of their links with ours came off as arrogant and pretentious. But as I got more comfortable in my role, it became easier and easier for me and took less time, and it became something I am confident in doing as well. Furthermore, it also helped me further develop my soft skills and learn to persevere in situations that might seem tough or pointless.

The most recent email campaign I took up was centered around guest posting. Over my last week and a half in my internship, I put together a large database of Slack, Microsoft Teams, and other web-based apps and their information as well as the information of two or three individual contacts for each. These were adjacent apps who had blogs with similar interests and topics to ours, and it was my goal to contact them and see if they wanted to write a guest post for our blog or vice versa. While I have only recently begun emailing these contacts, I have had a lot of success in doing so thus far, and the experience has allowed me to boost my communication and persuasion skills.

Finally, for emailing the ScrumGenius trial clients, I familiarized myself with CRM management software such as HubSpot, which I used to contact potential clients who had signed up for a free trial but had yet to connect a team to our service. While this aspect of my job was short-lived, as I was focused more on emailing other apps, I was interested to see more of the sales side of a business, and it is something I would like to explore more in the future for any potential sales and marketing ventures.

In addition to all of these tasks, I also ended up doing a lot of background and backend optimization, especially around SEO tactics and keyword marketing. Although this was a field I already had some experience in due to prior jobs, I have learned so much more in this position about it than I could have anticipated. It is funny to look back at what you knew before and compare it to what you know now, because in this case, it is a very stark change. It turns out I thought I knew more than I did about keyword targeting and SEO, but I am glad to have been proven wrong.

I learned what tools to use in order to best measure and analyze inbound links and keywords, like Moz, SanityCheck, and Ahrefs. I learned how to cut down page times and optimize images. I learned how to find the best keywords to use to get the maximum number of impressions and where to use them. This, in turn, let me know which of our competitor's keywords I could "steal" and use to boost our own content—and I was successful at it. These tactics are ones I can take with me into the rest of my life and any other jobs I decide to take up in marketing or content creation, and I am glad to have learned them.

As for the results of my internship, I was able to accomplish many of the goals outlined at its start. By the end of the summer, I was able to boost the online and social presence of ScrumGenius with the new content I created and managed. This can be directly seen in our Google Analytics and Google Search Console data, as both our amount of Google clicks and new users to the site rose significantly; in fact, we have managed to almost double the amount of new visitors. As for the specific content I created, I was able to put together a decent bank of content for the website. This includes twenty-two blog posts, six case studies in several different formats, seven new feature pages, and roughly sixty-five graphics as well as many more screenshots for the site. I also learned to use roughly fourteen new applications and platforms in order to do my

work during the summer, many of which I can use going forward with my career. Lastly, I also created many interpersonal relationships with the marketing departments of related companies and platforms that will help us build our brand going into the future.

While my role in this internship required more flexibility and self-directed research than I have needed to do before, I liked having all these different tasks. In a lot of my previous jobs, I tended to get bored after a while. I found the tasks repetitive, or I just ran through them too quickly, leaving me scrambling for things to do. But there was rarely a shortage of things for me to do here, and I was never bored, even when I was searching for contacts or doing opponent research. And while I was pushed out of my comfort zone frequently, all my tasks were still familiar enough that I never felt wholly out of my element, something for which I am very grateful.

Furthermore, all the tasks I did in this internship were important, and my boss, Tharshan, always made sure that the work I was doing was meaningful. He was a great mentor and always made sure I had the tools I needed to succeed, pushing me to become better and work harder without making me feel like I was not up to snuff. I learned a lot from him, and I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to work for him. I have had a lot of subpar bosses and managers before, some of which significantly undervalued both my work and my abilities, but in this role, I always felt like my contributions were valuable. While the position was initially supposed to end in August, Tharshan decided to extend my contract throughout the school year so I can continue to do work for ScrumGenius part-time. I am excited to be able to continue this role throughout the year and look forward to learning even more as time goes on.

While I have already briefly mentioned how some of my previous jobs and my self-taught experience prepared me for this role, I should also note that a lot of my education at

Western also helped me. As it turns out, a lot of what I have learned in SASAH and in the Arts and Humanities also prepared me for this job. On a surface level, being an Arts student greatly improved my writing skills and gave me the tools I need to create better work. But more specifically, one of my SASAH classes, Digital Humanities, greatly prepared me for the coding side of my job. While I do not work directly with any code writing at ScrumGenius, knowing how to read code and make simple changes like I learnt in that class has given me an unexpected edge and made my job much easier.

All in all, I have truly enjoyed this internship and am glad to have been given this experience. Since I began in this job, I have grown significantly both professionally and academically, and can visibly see my improvement in many different ways. While it was difficult to adjust to the role in the beginning, I learned to adapt and ended up thriving in the process. I can say with confidence that almost everything that I have learned in this role is something I will be able to take with me in my later life, because it has given me the knowledge and the tools to promote my work. Even better, it has given me the confidence of knowing that I *can* promote my own content and do it well.

To conclude, I have learned a lot these past couple months, and I am excited to see how much more I grow as I finish university and enter my professional life. Though I still plan to go into a journalism-adjacent field, the content creation skills I developed and got better at during my time with ScrumGenius will definitely help me promote myself and my work to further my platform. I look forward to new opportunities and experiences as they come in the future and cannot wait to find out where my future takes me.