Case Study: Making Local Papers Pay

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Describe the project in your own words

The aim of our project was to produce a report or business plan which would help local newspapers to increase their profits in what is a very tough time for local media. Working closely with The York Press, we had to thoroughly research the problems local papers were facing and come up with useful suggestions which would help them grow as businesses in the technological age of today. Our finished report was then passed on to the editor The Press.

Why did you apply for a team volunteering project?

I was already planning to enter journalism as a career when I leave university, and this project seemed to me a great way of gaining knowledge and vital experience of working in the media industry. It presented a great opportunity to get to know our local paper, The York Press, and look at journalism from a different angle – one of economic survival, seeing what goes on behind the headlines, examining the newspaper as a profit-making business.

What were the highlights of your project?

I really enjoyed our group discussions about where The Press might improve to make more money. We had so much freedom with the task that we could have taken the report in any direction we pleased and it was really interesting and rewarding discussing with the group our ideas about the company, as we could look at the paper from a young person’s perspective. The meeting with the editor of the newspaper was also really interesting and helpful.

Were there any surprises?

I don’t think I was expecting to get as much business information about The Press from its editor as we did. When we went to meet him he was really friendly and willing to share information in a lot of detail, for example specific figures for profit and revenue gained from different areas and how much each was varying each year. Although we were asked to include percentages in our report rather than the specific figures to protect the privacy of the company’s finances, it really gave us a good idea of the problems facing the paper and where it specifically needed improvement if it were to survive financially – it helped us a lot with the report and was also fascinating.

What did you gain from your project?

The main thing I’ll take away from the project will be a great insight into the local print media industry which I hope will help me in later life. But I also gained great skills in team-working, organisation and research.

Did the project influence any future career plans?

It certainly reinforced my desire to have a career in the media. Seeing how desperate the situation is for local media, it’s really made me want to be a part of the revival of this sector of the industry, and has given me a great experience to help achieve my goal of becoming a professional journalist – it’s certainly something that will stand out on my CV.

What advice would you give students considering taking part in a team volunteering project?

Go for it. Even if you’re not sure what professional field you want to enter later in life, all of the projects available give you masses of transferrable skills which could really make you stand out from the crowd when it comes to applying for jobs. And who knows, you may even discover something you actually want to pursue as a career, in which case the experience will be truly invaluable.