



MWM Consulting

Alexander Miller, Huron at Western

This case was written by Jash Kalyani under the supervision and collaboration of Alexander Miller and edited by Richie Bloomfield, Shabin Pardhan, and Katie Oates. Final production of this case study was made possible by the Library and Learning Services team at Huron University College. The authors' intent for this material is to be used in a classroom or other management learning settings. Names or other identifying information may be altered to protect confidentiality.

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INTRODUCTION

Matt Parkin stared at his phone in disbelief as he heard the waves crash onto Tamarindo beach in Costa Rica. He had tried to avoid checking work messages, but the preview message “OUR CREDITS ARE ABOUT TO EXPIRE” was too difficult to ignore. What seemed like a great way to help give university students work experience was quickly turning into an unwanted challenge in the middle of his vacation.

HISTORY

MWM offered services like personal brand coaching, ghostwriting, and organizational group training to individual professionals and businesses. MWM’s goal was to empower businesses to effectively tell their stories, share their knowledge, and drive revenue.

Ghostwriting services were MWM’s largest revenue driver and had grown 65% in the past year. Ghostwriting was the process of writing a piece of copy under someone else's name.¹ Globally, the market for this service was expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.5% from 2021 to 2030.² With writers charging a rate ranging from \$0.35 to \$2.50 per word, ghostwriting was a multi-million-dollar industry in the United States alone. Companies and individuals often outsourced social media content to save time when it was not in their expertise. Posting regularly was important in most social media platform content formulas, and it was the fastest way to generate organic impressions. MWM offered standard packages that included eight monthly LinkedIn posts for personal accounts, or two long-form LinkedIn articles or blogs (approximately 500 words each) to enhance the credibility of the client’s LinkedIn profile or website.³

[1] Copy is industry jargon for a piece of literature (like a book or social media post).

[2] "Ghostwriting Services market Size | 2023," *Precision Reports*, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ghostwriting-services-market-size-2030-business-report-research/>

[3] LinkedIn is a professional social media network used primarily for career and business networking.

MATT PARKIN

Founder and CEO of MWM, Parkin had graduated from Western University with an Honours degree in Business Administration, and he was a passionate entrepreneur, sales executive, and LinkedIn enthusiast. Having worked as a consulting intern in the People and Change Department at KPMG Canada, Parkin understood the impact that people and their stories could have on their business and quickly started prioritizing personal branding within his professional networks. Although Parkin worked hard to impress KPMG and gain a job offer after graduation, he accepted a position as a Business Development Lead at a recruitment-technology startup in Toronto. Parkin strategically joined this role to learn more about sales and start-up firms to help him with his own start-up, MWM. As a Business Development Lead, Parkin helped companies generate millions of organic content impressions, attract inbound clients, job offers, partners, job seekers, mentors, mentees, and investors. His work gained popularity, and his “thought leadership” was featured in publications like LinkedIn News and HR.COM.⁴ His success subsequently led to an invitation to share personal branding strategies at schools and universities across North America, including Baylor’s MBA program.

JEREMY HUANG

Parkin had met Huang at a networking event earlier in the year, and had joined MWM as a second-year university student. Huang was hired as a marketing intern, eager to gain experience with a new and exciting start-up. In his few months with MWM, he built their outbound sales strategy. This helped MWM surpass the company’s 2022 revenues in the first quarter of 2023.

After several months, Parkin asked Huang to lead a team of temporary interns in a new program that he had been working with. Huang was responsible for designing and executing the program, and Parkin outlined a reasonable production level for the new interns.

LEAD GENERATION

Lead generation was the process of attracting prospective buyers to a business with the goal of converting them into a client. Common ways of generating leads included advertisements, blog posts, coupons, live events, and online content. Companies often employed dedicated teams, known as Business Development Representatives (BDRs), for lead generation. Representatives utilized industry-specific databases to identify potential leads and engaged in outreach through cold calls and emails. They also researched new prospects that aligned with their business’s product or service. The goal of BDR’s was to find and validate potential clients.

CANADA’S YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS PROGRAM

Canada’s Young Entrepreneurs Program (CYEP) was an opportunity for young people to gain paid virtual work experience with small businesses through internships. It had been designed to help entrepreneurs by paying the wages of interns. The program was advertised to post-secondary students as a flexible way to gain experience. CYEP allowed students to design their schedule, allowing time for school and other extracurriculars.

[4] Thought leadership is the expression of ideas that demonstrate you have expertise in a particular field, area, or topic.

In the program, individuals worked remotely in small groups to complete two-month long, part-time projects for small businesses. CYEP gave students a \$225 developmental fund for participating, and it paid them \$20 per hour for a 60-hour project over five weeks. Employers were required to provide enough work for interns to meet their hourly needs, while remaining flexible about interns' schedules over the two-month projects. CYEP matched interns with partner companies, who were then given the names of the student-interns joining their business.

In December 2022, MWM's application with CYEP had been accepted, and Parkin received confirmation that he would have five CYEP interns working with MWM from January to February 2023.

THE PROJECT

Parkin was happy to be selected for the program but faced the challenge of finding a project that could be understood and completed meaningfully within two weeks. He had worked as a BDR and collaborated with Huang to cultivate valuable leads. One of the first steps in this process was comparing the potential client list they received from third parties to current information that was publicly available, as lists often contained incorrect information. This was called "vetting," and it was completed before spending time cold calling potential customers.⁵

Huang and Parkin believed that vetting would be a good experience, and that it was a straightforward task that could be completed virtually with the short timeframe. This included reviewing companies from a database to determine if they could be customers for MWM, and researching and compiling a list of potential companies that might need ghost-writing services. Parkin was unsure if the few weeks of time was enough for interns to review all of the companies on their current list, and also build a new one, though he was confident that their contributions would be beneficial and result in new customers. He wished their term was longer but was excited to meet the interns and support their learning experiences.

THE INTERNS

James Macloy

James Macloy was a first-year student at the University of Toronto. He was unsure of the career he wanted to pursue, so his major remained undeclared. Having no prior work experience, Macloy was eager about the opportunity to work as a CYEP intern, and he wanted to learn about the work world.

Giang Mae

Giang Mai was a third-year Business Management and Organizational Studies (BMOS) student at Western University. Outside of school, Mai had multiple part-time jobs and worked a 30-hour work week to support herself financially. Having come from a financially difficult background, Mai was always looking for new opportunities and was not afraid of adding more to her workload. The CYEP internship was attractive to Mai because it paid well above minimum wage, and the development fund was an upfront payment.

[5] Vetting is a term that refers to verifying the legitimacy of information. Cold calling is an expression that refers to reaching out to a potential customer without them making prior contact first.

Maria Garcia

Marcia Garcia was a third-year student studying at the Lazaridis School of Business in Waterloo, Ontario. She had previous internship experience working in sales at a consumer-packaged goods firm and understood sales well. Garcia was an outgoing, determined, and outspoken person, and she expressed great interest and dedication about working for MWM to Huang in their first meeting. Outside of the internship, she was also a part of her university's dance club, multicultural association, debate society, and she played varsity sports.

Jay Zhang

Jay Zhang was a fourth-year Economics student at the University of British Columbia. He came from an influential family in Vancouver who owned a large real estate development and property management company that operated across British Columbia's tri-city area. Zhang wanted to add work experience to his resume, and appear credible to his co-workers and family members, as he planned to join his father's firm upon graduation.

FIRST FOUR WEEKS: THE CYEP INTERN TEAM

Launch

In their first week, Huang wanted to get the CYEP team started with a brief onboarding. Parkin was confident that the call process and the BDR role was fairly straightforward and was certain that a brief check in on their first day would set the interns up for success. He did not want to overwhelm them with too much information, since all they had to do was review the validity of the leads. Huang recorded several Zoom tutorial videos to help the interns understand the calling process and ways of using the database. He also sent them a PDF file on lead generation and the BDR role description in general, hoping this would help them understand their new role. The intern team also had a brief opportunity to meet one other over Zoom on their first day. They then used a Slack channel that Huang created for everyone to connect about the CYEP project, and he introduced himself on it to encourage communication.⁶

Huang also created a presentation that described MWM, and its core products and services. He set up an online Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to track the group's progress.

Early on, Garcia was the most communicative. She often emailed questions to Huang, and she requested vetting leads together to ensure she was doing it correctly. Huang was busy but happy to help and set up a 20-minute Zoom call to review the materials from the onboarding video with Garcia. Her questions made it apparent she was not sure what ghostwriting was but was trying to understand. She had asked a few overly eager questions, while the other interns were less communicative.

Huang was busy with his regular work and briefly checked Slack for questions, though the project seemed to be progressing fine. He checked the worksheet to see how far the interns had gotten and was surprised to see how little progress had been made. Huang decided to arrange a meeting with Parkin.

[6] Slack is an instant messaging program developed for professional and organizational communications. Slack organizes conversations into dedicated spaces called channels.

Week Four

Huang met the interns for weekly check-ins, so he had several updates for Parkin. Parkin noticed that the number of calls he wanted completed per week had not been accomplished by some of the interns. Huang managed the group to the best of his abilities, though he often faced difficulties. Macloy direct messaged Huang very frequently throughout the day with several questions on topics that were covered in the onboarding resources. Huang often responded to these by sending Macloy the resource folders again and asking him to review relevant pages. He struggled in this role, and with the research process, unable to complete his assigned tasks on time. While the expectation was to vet six companies per hour, Macloy sometimes only completed one. Huang presumed that Macloy was confused and did not fully understand the work.

Garcia insisted that Huang make three calls with her, including debriefing after, to ensure she was doing her work correctly. Zhang was often unreachable and harder to contact. Huang quickly realized that the three-hour time difference between him and Zhang made this issue worse. Mai was able to meet her weekly targets but often needed a reminder from Huang. On multiple occasions, Mai admitted to not having started the work. Her work was not thorough enough, but she met the minimum requirements.

Check-In

Parkin and Huang realized that only 40% of the work assigned to the team was completed over the past four weeks. They agreed that they needed to leverage Huang's upcoming weekly check-ins with the interns to offer support and encourage them to complete their work.

In his weekly check-in with Macloy, he expressed to Huang that the BDR role did not interest him. Macloy assured Huang that he had tried his best but he was unable to perform the role, as his skillset did not match the work expectations. Macloy said that he was enjoying his English courses at university and would prefer writing opportunities at MWM.

Garcia and Mai canceled their check-ins. Garcia mentioned it was because of a commitment at the debate society. Huang wanted to understand why she had not been able to meet her targets. Huang thought Garcia was their top intern, and that she had a fantastic sales background that could benefit MWM. He promptly connected with Garcia and rescheduled their call for 9:30 pm that night at Garcia's suggestion. During the call, Garcia expressed that the database software MWM was using was slow and not intuitive, which prevented her from working efficiently. She encouraged MWM to consider buying the paid version of the software to enable her to perform to her full potential. The upgraded version used a premium-credit system, which would give limited time access to better and more efficient call generation data. Parkin purchased this paid version by the end of the week. Once the credits were activated they had a short window before they expired.

In his check-in with Zhang, Huang asked if he needed any support. Unfortunately, Zhang indicated that he had decided to leave the role early. Zhang pointed out that he had initially underestimated the three-hour time-zone difference, and how that would impact his ability to coordinate. He also said that he and his friends decided to take a trip to Dubai the following week, since it was their last reading week in university, and they wanted to make the most of it. Zhang thanked Huang and asked him if Huang could be a reference on Zhang's resume, to which Huang unwillingly agreed.

THE LAST WEEK AND TERM EXTENSION

To start the next week, Parkin held a town hall style meeting, during which the interns could ask anything about the project. Garcia mentioned that the team had not used all the hours that they were able to with CYEP. Mai interjected that she had set her personal budget based on those hours. Garcia suggested to Huang that the term should be extended for an additional week so the team could use their unbilled hours and meet their targets. Macloy expressed his concerns about not fitting with BDR work and asked to write for his remaining hours. Parkin expressed concern that with his few remaining hours, the project would be over by the time he finished training Malcroy in writing. Garcia offered to help Macloy and pointed out that the new software upgrade simplified the work. The additional week would coincide with reading week for most universities in Canada, and the interns were confident they would be able to leverage the extra time to meet their goals and deadlines with MWM. CYEP agreed to the extension.

READING WEEK

Parkin planned a reading week vacation to Costa Rica, though he gave the interns his phone number in case he was urgently needed. Huang was in charge for the week and was feeling confident about the prospect and the interns finally being able to meet their targets. He knew that the project had not gone as planned, but he still believed that the experience was a fantastic learning opportunity for both him and the CYEP intern team.

Four days into reading week, Parkin was reading a book by the beach as his partner was swimming. His phone was silent, and he had not looked at it for a while, but when he glanced to check the time, he saw six missed calls, four text messages, and a forwarded email from Huang (see Exhibits 1 and 2).

EXHIBIT #1

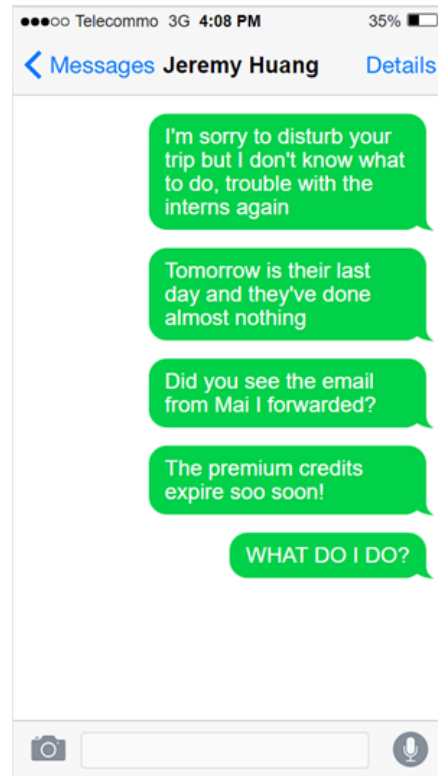
MWM CONSULTING
TEXT MESSAGES

EXHIBIT #2

MWM CONSULTING
MAI'S EMAIL

Hi Jeremy,

I was under the impression that the internship had concluded last week since I had only signed a contract for 5 weeks. I am unable to, at this point, complete any more assignments for MWM. I have also not claimed any additional hours.

Thanks for reaching out,

Mai