



Alumna Subject Charlotte Durrant
Graduated MSc Sustainability and Management
2008
Place of Work Weber Shandwick
Position Senior Account Executive



Weber Shandwick is a full service global engagement and communications agency, building and protecting brand and company reputations; creating movements that change attitudes and behaviours and transform businesses and bottom lines.

Charlotte works in the Technology practice within Weber Shandwick. She works across the Microsoft Regional HQ, Microsoft Advertising and Microsoft Worldwide Public Sector accounts.

Great minds *go on to* great places

What prompted you to apply for the MSc Sustainability and Management programme?

I had already completed a BA in History at the University of Birmingham, and whilst studying there had become more interested in sustainability issues through my involvement in People and Planet Society. As I was not sure what I wanted to do after graduating, I went to a Careers Fair where they talked to me about Corporate Social Responsibility. I became really interested in this area and so started researching Masters programmes in the field. Royal Holloway stood out as the curriculum was really varied and the institution has a great reputation. I also liked the fact that it was near to London but located on a beautiful campus and, having come from Birmingham, I thought that it would be interesting to try something different. Ultimately it was the course curriculum that attracted me, but it is great to have a good university on my CV as well.

What were the best parts of your course?

The lecturers got to know the class personally, and so to an extent the lectures were shaped around what we were interested in. Of course, their experience and research interests influenced the overall direction of the course, and this was interesting as you learnt from people who were really passionate about what they do. I think it is important for lecturers to imbue you with passion

for your subject as well. There were around 25 people in the class, so small enough to know everyone and bounce ideas off each other. The classes were interactive, and I liked the fact that we were almost coaching each other as well.

In terms of the classes, the Principles of Sustainability course was fantastic, incorporating a global perspective into what you were learning. I also found Business Ethics particularly interesting and, as a result of the course tutor's encouragement, I entered and won the post-graduate category in a national essay writing competition. My submission was on moral codes in the workplace in the context of globalisation. This covered issues such as if an American company moves into India, do they try to enforce their code of conduct on the Indian working population, or do they try to adapt their code to that culture? My experience in class certainly helped with this essay as the class was very diverse so you learnt to see things from multiple perspectives, to understand the different challenges you can face in China, for example, and coming up with solutions to those problems.

Were you involved in anything outside of your studies?

I was part of the Ballroom and Latin American Dance Society, which was great fun and a good way to relax. Part of the course involves a volunteering project, so I

was doing a few hours of that each week working on a special needs children's farm near Heathrow. In spite of being on the Masters programme I didn't find it so difficult to fit everything in; the workload was actually better than in my third year of university. I think that's partly because I was so passionate about what I was studying that it didn't feel like hard work at all.

What did you do after graduating?

After handing in my dissertation in September, the first job I got was working for a small online eco-retailer with overall responsibility for managing the website. Typical tasks would be working on a lot of the 'behind the scenes' elements like search engine optimisation, designing the graphics, writing product descriptions and creating content for the blog. It was a very steep learning curve, but at the end of my six month contract I felt like I had learnt all that I could and that it was time to move on.

I then spent some time looking around. I wanted to get onto a Graduate Scheme, so ended up working for Orange on the Graduate Sales Executive programme. Though I realised quite quickly that sales wasn't for me, it was nevertheless good training as you are pretty much working by yourself, generating sales, working with varied clients and businesses and learning how to present yourself well. Even if you aren't in a sales job, I think that it's useful to have those skills.



people with passion

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From there, I was offered a job through a recruitment consultant who had seen my CV online, working as a Community Relations Consultant at 3G Communications. Their clients include the National Grid, energy companies and government bodies, and my role was to provide a point of contact between the community who is being affected by the construction of a piece of infrastructure such as a pylon line, and the client. I was often out in the community, informing them of what was going on, hearing their views and trying to keep that line of communication open. It was quite hands on at times, dealing with a lot of complaints and irate people, but overall a good experience and I accumulated a lot of skills.

What do you do in your day-to-day role at Weber Shandwick?

I work across a number of different Microsoft accounts. What we are essentially trying to do is tell the Microsoft story in such a way that drives conversation and engagement from media, journalists, bloggers and wider influencers. They in turn will tell our story for us, not because we are paying them but because it is a good story to tell. My job might involve writing press releases if there are new product launches, or a by-line in which a Microsoft executive will talk about an area of interest, or planning for an event, or just generally monitoring the media to stay on top of the issues and flag anything important to the client.

You do have to have a fair amount of technical knowledge because we are part of the technology practice, though Microsoft has so many different products you couldn't know them all. Your knowledge of the sector, the media and the intended audience informs the strategy you advise your clients to take. You are often trying to think of an innovative angle to take on something to drive coverage; there are so many stories out there about the Cloud at the moment, for instance, so it's about how you engage your audience in a creative way that they might not have expected.

What are the best parts of your job?

I love the travelling. Last year I went on my first business trip to Barcelona by myself; it's fantastic that Weber trust you to represent the company and to interact with the client at a high level. I also flew in and out of Monte Carlo in a day for a business breakfast and lunch: the life of a jet setter! This autumn I will be seconded to Weber Shandwick in Brussels for six weeks, to work on the Microsoft EU Affairs account team. I'm really excited about the opportunity to live and work abroad for a short time, as well as learning about a new side to the business.

The best project I have worked on so far would have to be the Cannes Festival of Creativity, which took place in June. We worked with Microsoft Advertising and its PR teams globally to

formulate a complete communications strategy and generated some brilliant stories and got some fantastic coverage as a result. The week in Cannes was very hands-on and included orchestrating a press briefing with the footballer Ronaldo to promote a partnership with his agency around the World Cup 2014. It was hard work and stressful at times, but a great opportunity to get to know your client on a personal level, which is very important in PR. Our EMEA team was the touch point for the Global US-based team and domestic and regional teams across the globe, so in addition to writing much of the creative material and messaging, we had to make sure that everyone was telling the same story throughout the different markets.

My favourite part of my job is the creative writing, getting a brief from the client, coming up with ideas, and advising them on the direction to take. Sometimes it can be a hard slog, but finishing a project and getting great feedback from the client makes it worth it.

What are the benefits of having a Masters?

I think it does set you apart from the rest. Everyone these days has a good Bachelors degree, so a Masters can really enhance your CV. The skills you develop mean you are far more independent, have a higher level of maturity and are very good at managing your own time. My advice to people thinking about a Masters would be: if there is something you are really passionate about then do it, because it is a truly interesting and rewarding experience.

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