

A MAGNUM OPUS? WINNING THE 2017 FLUX COMPETITION

Adam Price¹



First Round – The Faculty Competition

In 2016 a group of six Plymouth University Law students decided to take part in the Faculty of Business FLUX competition. Described as a fast-paced business competition, those who had participated in the past compared the day to a condensed ‘Apprentice’ task, with each team required to make a plan, conduct interviews and deliver a pitch within an incredibly tight timescale. One of the team members had to pull out, leaving them lumbered with me as an emergency replacement for our team, Magnum Opus – a somewhat ambitious claim (meaning masterpiece or best work). The team comprised of five Stage Three law students; (from left to right above) Jacob Cunningham, Vicky Broom, myself (a Stage Two law student), Ella Thorpe, Tom Faulkner and Sam Castlehouse. On the night before the competition, representatives from Plymouth City Council delivered our brief, which involved finding ways to raise awareness for, and therefore increase, recycling within Plymouth. The team immediately dashed off to the library to spend the evening considering and developing an action plan (this isn’t entirely true - as an ardent Plymouth Argyle fan - I deserted the group and ended up at Home Park to

¹ Adam is in his final year of the LLB Degree and is the President of the University of Plymouth Law Society.

watch the evening's football, but I thought it wise to keep this information from the professionals).

The following day started with refinement of the plan, ensuring that everybody within the team had a role to play. The way we decided to raise awareness of the benefits to recycling was through a three month campaign, with the key terms of reusing, reducing and recycling at the centre of each respective month. Our campaign would culminate in a major event where those engaging with various recycling projects could be honoured. The plans were grand, but also meticulously calculated to ensure we remained within the budget set by the Council. We were now in the best possible position to conduct interviews with a wide range of professionals and experts within the field. The advice here proved invaluable, enabling the plan to be further refined incorporating their expert advice and experience. This meant that, come lunchtime (and an amazing buffet lunch) we were in our position where we had formulated our pitch. Due to the fast-paced nature of the competition, the teams only had around an hour to prepare for the forthcoming pitches. The ambition of the team was not to use notes in our pitches so the hour consisted of us pacing around the Rolle Marquee reciting our speeches to ourselves, a sight that will no doubt have confused many a passer-by.

Our first pitch wasn't the most successful, the pace of the day had perhaps caught up with us a little leading to key pieces of information being forgotten in our speeches. However, we were still lucky enough to be named the winners of our 'stream' which gave us the opportunity to pitch again in front of every attending professional and the remaining competitors from the opposite stream. This also secured our place at the University wide FLUX final taking place within a fortnight of the Faculty of Business event. Far from being satisfied with our work and allowing a 'job done' attitude to sneak into our team dynamic, we applied ourselves once more for the final pitch of the day. We felt this ran much smoother than our initial pitch but, as we were able to watch our opposition pitch at the same time, we knew things would be tight. In the end, we were highly disappointed to discover that our team had narrowly missed out on being crowned the winners that day. Having been given the chance to network with the judges after the event, we were given feedback outlining that simple things, such as finishing within the allotted time and introducing the members of our team, could have significantly boosted our score. These words gave us the impression that the day was far from a waste of time, and provided us with the confidence that we could succeed after taking the feedback on board.

The University Final

Fast forward 13 days, and we found ourselves again at a pre-FLUX briefing, this time for the University-wide final. Our brief was delivered by St Luke's Hospice, who had plans to run a kite festival in Plymouth with the aim of raising as much money as possible for the charity, and our task was to find the best way to do this. Once more we spent the evening creating the basic outline of a plan to set in motion the following day. The brief itself initially caused us an issue. As we had been relatively successful planning an event for FLUX previously, it made sense to use a similar approach again but as we had already been provided with an event, we would be unable to stand out from the crowd by using our previous method. We decided our event had to be bigger, with a unique point that had the potential to blow the competition out of the water. The idea? A World Record attempt. A quick use of the internet found that the World Record for the most kites flown simultaneously stood at 12,350, interestingly enough on the Gaza Strip in 2011. As heart-warming a gesture as that was for the United Nations Relief group to organise such an event, we challenged ourselves to smash that, with 15,000 the goal our team had in mind.

The next rain-soaked morning it was time to put that plan into action. We got to work to form our grand idea into a coherent plan, once again with more than a close eye on the budgetary constraints we found ourselves working with. We were proud of the world record idea, but it wasn't flawless and we felt having a plethora of unique selling points would go a long way to giving us the edge over our opponents. This led to a decision being taken, possibly the one the team are most proud of, to raise money for St Luke's on the day of the competition itself. The team set up a Just Giving page and encouraged donations, no matter how large or small, to filter through over the course of the day. Eventually, we managed to raise £205 for the charity, something which gave us an enormous sense of accomplishment, and was the perfect 'thank you' we could have given to St Luke's for sponsoring the competition, as well as their more general work overall. It also gave us a sense that we were working on a real-world issue, rather than simply a hypothetical scenario made for the benefit of a streamlined task. As before we went through a similar process of conducting interviews, devouring lunch and planning for our pitch. We knew on this occasion that it would be even harder to win our stream and progress to the final pitch due to the ever-increasing standard of competition. We took the feedback from the last round and channelled it into our pitch, and fortunately that was enough to win our stream once more and progress to the final pitch of the competition. A momentous occasion indeed as it suggested that we had made significant progress, and at this point we truly believed we could win.



The final pitch was upon us – the last opportunity to showcase everything we had learnt over the course of the process. Again we had a 10 minute period to confuse our competitors by rehearsing our speeches one last time, and before we knew it the pitch was upon us. Once more, this presentation was in front of all the professionals present on the day and every other team competing, including our opponents. We managed to build a good rapport with the audience, dropping in one or two jokes about the British weather, before our opponents had the opportunity to pitch their idea. A lot of this appeared to centre around attacking our team's idea, which irked us slightly, but in the world of business, anything goes. After their pitch concluded, we knew once more that the judges had a difficult choice on their hands as they departed to deliberate. In the meantime, a number of the professionals delivered speeches in front of the assembled audience. It was fascinating to get this sort of insight through their words, but our anxiety levels at this point were sky-high; we just wanted to find out if we had done enough to win. After what felt like an age, the judges finally returned to deliver their verdict. In what will surely go down as one of the greatest moments I've experienced at University, team Magnum Opus were announced as the winners, much to our delight and some of our lecturers who turned up to support us (Editor's note: I was there and they were awesome). I also found myself lucky enough to be announced best presenter on the day, but the win was truly a team effort, and we all agreed that this victory would not have been possible without every single member performing as they did.



The experience was a true eye-opener for all of us, about how teamwork can allow people to get through even the most stressful of situations, and how crucial it is to take on feedback at any given opportunity. We were delighted to know that we had these pieces of knowledge in our minds to progress forward with, and could start applying them immediately. Well, perhaps after the celebratory meal and drinks which followed that evening.... We have also proved that we have earned our team name. There is also the potential for a grand legacy to come from this. Two teams consisting entirely of Law students have already confirmed their participation in the Faculty of Business FLUX competition in 2018 sponsored by Portcullis Legals. Doubtlessly, they will both be doing all they can to defend the title for all Law students next spring. And here are some of the team on the 2018 competition advert.

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