



# Placement Report

**Leah Smyth**

Module Code: IXD306  
Company: Being Online  
Supervisor: James McWhinney  
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# Introduction

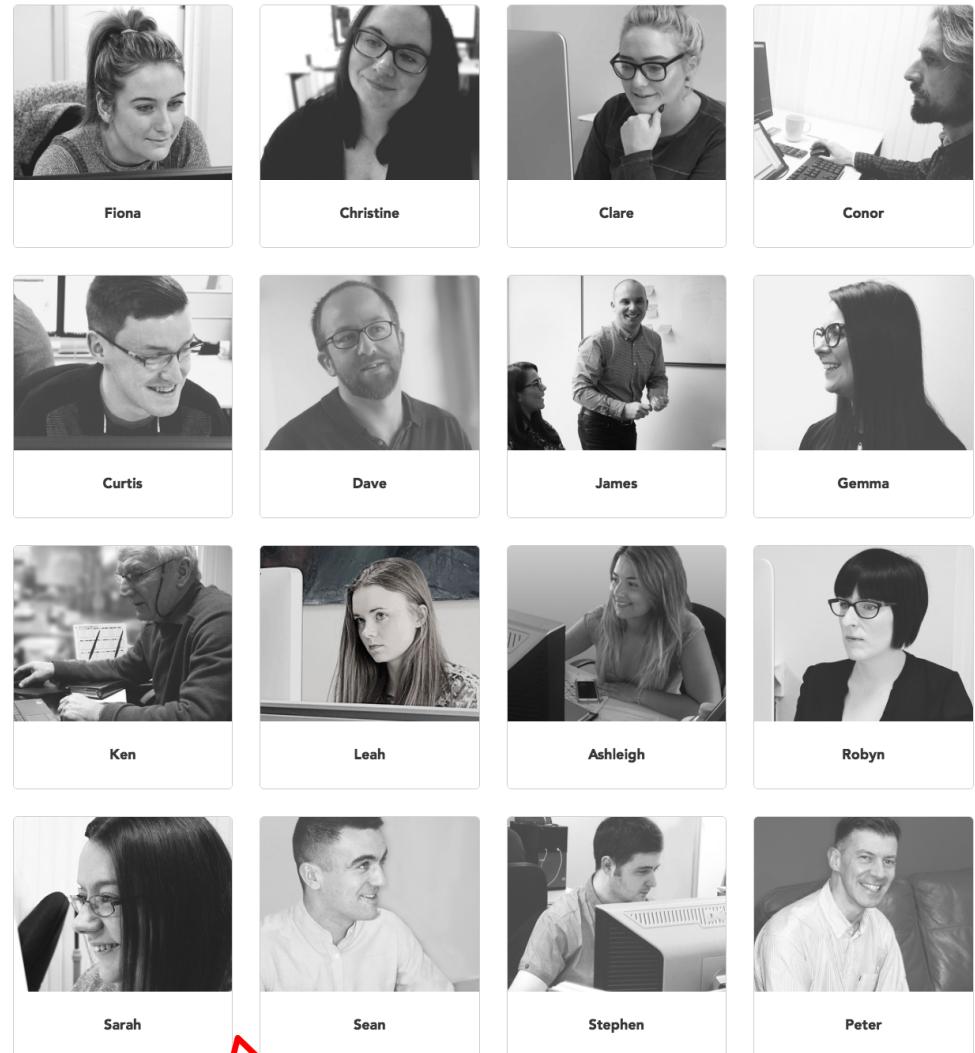
My placement with Being Online began on 3rd July 2017. Recruited as a Junior Designer, I would spend the next year working alongside the Design Team and some of the programmers to develop my skills and get a taste of what working in a digital agency is really like; this would include working on projects for companies such as Stena Line, P&G and Smiths Group PLC which would give me an insight into how digital design was used within these businesses.

## Placement Company

Being Online was established in 1999, it is a service-led digital agency that has offices in Belfast (Lisburn Road) and partners in London. The company delivers custom web applications, websites and software solutions to clients across the private, voluntary and public sectors.

Being Online works with FTSE 100 companies and a number of leading national and international brands, such as Stena Line, P&G, Smiths Group PLC, Power NI, Old Mutual, Translink, Belfast Met, Osbourne King, NI Water, Schiedel, Autoline and Southbank Sinfonia. The work undertaken for these customers includes web design and development, app development, digital strategy, and digital marketing (for example email marketing, social marketing and display ads).

The Belfast office has 16 staff which includes the Design Team, Programmers, Finance and Client Services.



## My Role

As a Junior Designer, my role within Being Online was to work alongside another designer, focusing primarily on design work for a major customer, Stena Line.

On joining the company I received a copy of Stena Line's brand guidelines, routes and image dimensions; I was given direction as to how these guidelines were applied and the processes involved. This work entailed designing marketing emails, web banners, webpages, display ads, and social media posts. For example, when an email is received by client services it is passed to a designer who creates a couple of mock up designs, these designs are returned to Stena Line who then select their preferred design; this is then built by the programmers. I received training on Dreamweaver (the required tool for building emails), this would allow me to build emails in the event that a programmer was absent from work.

During the first week of my placement I shadowed the outgoing placement student, this allowed me to understand what would be expected of me and of the variety of projects I would be involved with. During the following couple of weeks I had the opportunity to find out what other staff were doing, asking lots of questions to understand their roles, and watching tutorials to reinforce my learning. I was also able to practice various tasks using programs such as Photoshop, Captivate, Dreamweaver and Google Web Designer (programs I was fairly unfamiliar with, but ones which I would use during my placement).

The main design work I completed throughout the year was designing marketing emails for Stena Line (on occasion I also completed these for some of Stena Line's partner companies - Legoland, Alton Towers and Tourism Ireland).

Due to the large volume of emails required by Stena Line, the company has a Photoshop template that the designers use; this contains all the sizes and a header and footer to speed up the process. When designing an email, I was given a brief which included imagery suggestions, copy and notes of anything additional that needed to be included in the email, such as day trip panels or special offers. Often, I had to face the challenge of creating a design that would fit within the Stena Line brand guidelines; I would mock-up several options which I would send to Stena Line, allowing them to choose one, if amendments were required these were made before the content was sent to the programmers to be built.

After a few months of designing emails for Stena Line, I was taught by the programmers how to build these, using a Dreamweaver template. It took some time to become familiar with this tool, as it often didn't work for me and I had to restart the build. However, after numerous attempts, I mastered the art of building a variety of email designs, and was taught how to use the email manager to test them and send them to the public.

After the design of the email had been chosen, a webpage was usually designed to match the artwork used; this involved mocking-up a webpage which included carousel banners for the home page and an image for the special offer listing page. If a large campaign was launched, Stena Line would also need social media images for Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (carousel, open graph and link ads). Some campaigns also required the creation of display ads, this involved the creation of storyboards (normally in 7 sizes), which were then built using Google Web Designer, packaged, tested and sent off with back-up images.

**Stena Line**

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Quite early in my placement I was asked to assist with a project for Stena Teknik, this involved me designing an A1 poster which was used for their 'Open Innovation Journey', I also helped to design their monthly 'Open Innovation Ambassadors' update email. I amended various e-learning modules for Teknik using Captivate, and designed a PDF workbook to accompany this. I was also involved in the design of the new Teknik portal site, and proof reading after its development.

My most useful experience of display ads was gained while working on some for RLA; this involved working with clients such as Belfast International Airport, Spar, and Kia. This work included mocking up storyboards, exporting assets and building in Google Web Designer, then compressing, testing and packaging them. The display ads ranged from simple and straight forward jobs, to huge jobs which involved multiple people. When working on a project for Spar, staff provided display ads for their '12 Weeks of Christmas' campaign. A campaign for Kia involved the completion of over 160 display ads, which were built and tested by the design team due to the volume required.

During placement I also had the opportunity to design a number of webpages for SIA (Stove Industry Alliance), based on their existing site. I worked on several assets for companies such as NI Water and Belfast Met, mocking up accordions and web banners. I helped with a social media campaign for Power NI, this required me to create a map of Northern Ireland each week, depicting activities that were taking place each week-end across the country. The work I completed for Smiths Group PLC included gathering and resizing images for their new website, cutting out people for their profiles on the website, and creating a template for the Smiths Group PLC emails in Photoshop.

## Reflection and Evaluation

During placement I had the opportunity to learn how to use several new programs such as Google Web Designer, Adobe Captivate and Dreamweaver, in addition to gaining more experience in the use of programs I had a limited working knowledge of, mainly Photoshop and Illustrator.

When undertaking design work I predominately used Photoshop for this activity, a program I had used briefly before. To aid me using this program, I watched several tutorials, and gained advice from the other designers who taught me shortcuts and quicker ways of doing things; this helped to speed up the design process. I greatly improved my knowledge using Illustrator, again the designers within Being Online showed me features of the program I wasn't aware of.

I was taught how to use Dreamweaver to build e-shots, this was really useful as I had never used Dreamweaver before. Having templates in place was useful, these templates had strict measurements which were easy to follow and effective when using this method of coding.

I was introduced Captivate to allow me to create e-learning modules for both Stena Teknik and P&G. I used Google Web Designer to build display ads for Stena Line, Kia, Spar and BIA. Other online tools/websites were also introduced to me, such as image compressors, zip file converters, HTML validators (for the display ads) and a wide variety of image stock libraries and guidelines, such as the Facebook 20% rule which I had never used before, but are often vital when designing for a customer.

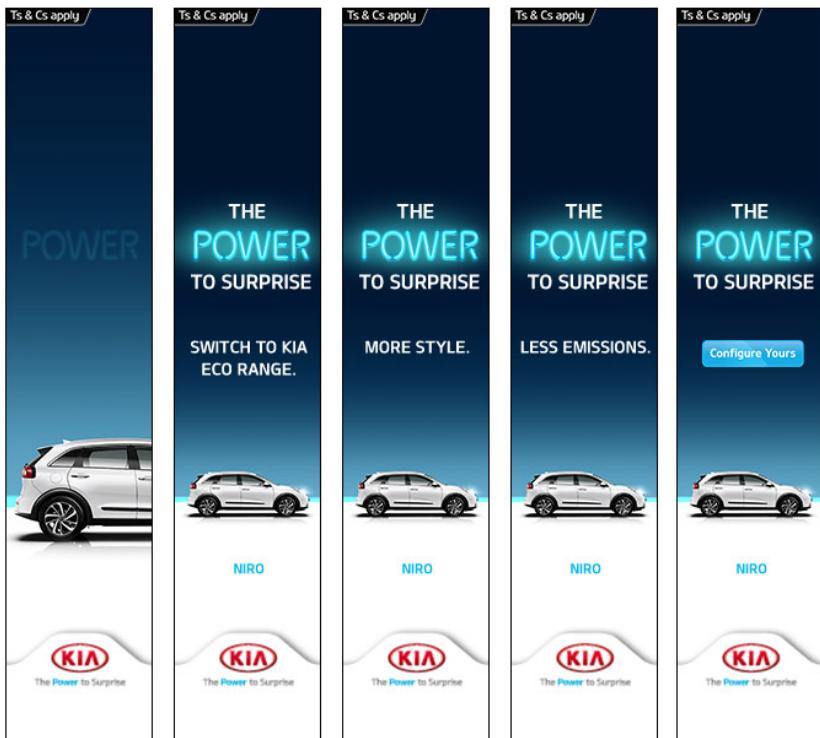
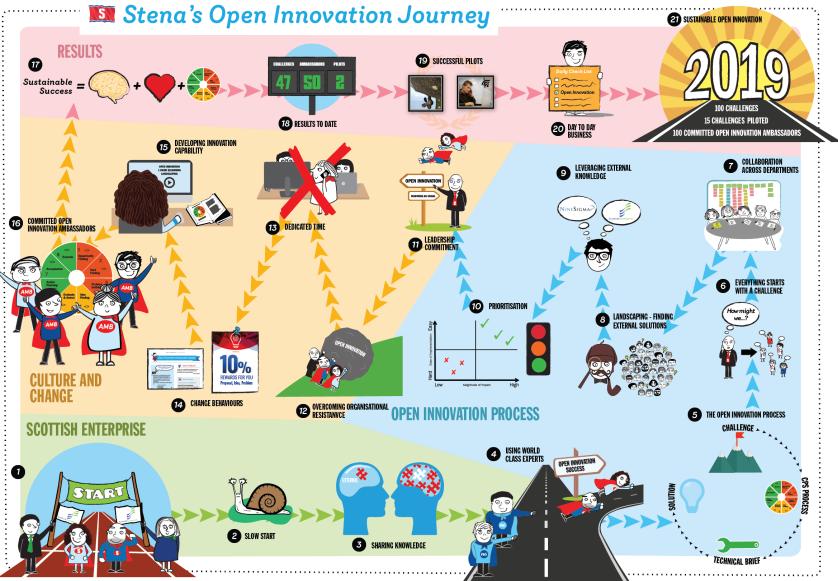
A great deal of teamwork and communication takes place within Being Online on a daily basis, this ensures the efficient running of the company.

Effective communication is vital within the 'sub-teams' of the company, this often takes the form of emails so that everyone involved in a project is made aware of its progress. I gained from this form of communication as it allowed me to see a variety of projects through from start to finish, seeing comments and feedback from the clients, for example the amendments that were required.

One aspect of work I struggled with at the beginning of my placement was knowing which jobs to prioritise when there were multiple tasks to be completed. However, whenever I was unsure regarding this I always sought advice and resisted the urge to panic. This usually involved completing the tasks I had received in order, unless they were marked as a priority within the email brief. This method helped me to gain confidence in my ability to be flexible as I was often required to jump between jobs that needed to be prioritised, or make small amendments to various jobs. I helped the other designers whenever I could, assisting them with various tasks, allowing them to move on to other jobs that needed to be completed.

Throughout placement I was often challenged with completing work for large companies that had strict brand guidelines, it was often hard to design something different yet aesthetically pleasing within the guidelines. I also found it difficult to create a design from a vague brief; some clients provide little information as to what they want included; however, the longer I was on placement, the easier this became as I got familiar with the customers and learned the different styles they preferred, and what would work for each company. On occasion, none of the initial designs I sent to various customers were suitable; while this was often discouraging, I was able to provide more options suitable to the customer after seeking advice from the other designers.

As a placement student I was made to feel welcome and included within the Design Team (4 staff), and also across the whole of the company.



## Conclusion

While apprehensive and wondering what the year ahead would hold when I commenced my placement, I quickly found my feet within Being Online and enjoyed the time I spent there. This experience has had a made a huge impact on my life, and not just from the experiences gained in the workplace!

Throughout my 12 month placement I learned a great deal, both in terms of design work and from the great people I had the privilege to work alongside. I learned many new skills, and useful shortcuts, which I will be able to use both in 'final year' and during my future career.

It was an absolute privilege to work with this company, in such a great environment.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the management at Being Online for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to complete my placement within their company.

Thank you to Robyn, Clare and Christine (Design Team) for answering all my questions, teaching me about the design industry, showing me the various photoshop shortcuts, and for support and wisdom in learning not to take criticism personally!

To Sarah and Stephen, thanks for guiding me around the Stena Line website (which is huge), for teaching me how to build emails in Dreamweaver, and for patiently assisting me every time I had a problem.

To Fiona, Peter, James and Ashleigh (Client Services) for giving me a variety of tasks which allowed me to broaden my skills set and for answering all my questions.

To Dave, Sean, Gemma, Paul, Curtis and Conor (Programming Team), they undertake incredible work that is way above my head, but who were a pleasure to work with.

To my family and house mates, thanks for listening to my ramblings about Stena Line and for giving me advice and support when needed.

And finally, a special thank you to Ken, for making sure I got paid every month!



# **Employer Sign-off Sheet**

## **BDes Hons Interaction Design PLACEMENT EMPLOYER'S REPORT (DPP/DPPI only)**

Name: Leah Smyth

Placement company: Being Online

Duration of placement: 9 months extended to 14 months

### **1. Attendance and punctuality and commitment to work programme**

Leah's attendance, punctuality and commitment to work have been excellent and a reflection of her mature attitude to her placement. Often we find that there is a period of adjustment to the discipline of work for placement students or recent graduates but have been delighted by Leah's commitment and discipline which allowed her to quickly be accepted by colleagues as part of the team. Her acceptance as a valued team member has been reflected by the extension of her placement to over a year.

*Mark: 4 Excellent*

### **2. Communication skills, written and oral**

In our industry communication skills are as important as technical and creative skills. Leah developed well throughout the year and is able to articulate herself both in email and orally to the level that we would expect of an experienced hire. Furthermore she is able to identify challenges or potential problems and present effective solutions and ideas clearly and concisely.

*Mark: 4 Excellent*

### **3. Creativity and technical development appropriate to the work programme**

Throughout Leah's time at Being Online she has become more confident not only within her work but within herself. When Leah started she had limited knowledge working within some of the main design programmes we as a company used i.e. Photoshop and Illustrator. She quickly picked up the skills needed to work alone on projects after some one on one training with a senior designer. Within weeks, Leah could confidently take on projects on her own using Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Google Web Designer, Dreamweaver and Captivate. Over her time here Leah has continuously expanded her design knowledge and technical abilities ranging from designing e-shots, webpages, social media campaigns and animations, to building e-shots with the programming team and in more recent months designing and building display ads for Stena Line, Spar, Belfast International Airport and Kia.

*Mark: 4 Excellent*

### **4. Teamwork and integration**

By including Leah in aspects outside of just design (Client Services and Programming), she was able to quickly gain a broad range of knowledge of how the whole company works. She was included in email chains throughout the company of various high-level client projects and was quickly able to see how a project progressed from start to finish, comments and feedback from clients and being involved in briefings giving her opinion on both internal and external projects. Leah easily slotted into the team at Being and has become an integral part of the design team, even training up new start designers when required.

*Mark: 4 Excellent*

## 5. Initiative, organisation and planning

Once Leah was confident in using the main design programmes, she confidently took on tasks and delivered them in a timely manner. On days when she was left to solely manage a client's design needs she quickly stepped up and planned her day round the needs of the client, always delivering creative and timely work. When sent a brief to work on alone, Leah always took the initiative to read through the requirements, mocking-up concepts and delivering what was asked of her. When workload was a little lighter Leah took initiative to ask other Designers / Client Services if there was anything for her to work on and if not, took the initiative to learn about new tools such as image compressors, zip file converters, HTML validators and a wide range of image stock libraries and brand guidelines. By the end of her time here Leah had worked on some of our biggest clients including Stena Line, Stena Teknik, Power NI, Translink, KIA, Spar and Belfast International Airport.

Mark: 4 Excellent

