Holiday Extras

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My Year in Industry

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Engineer

Abstract

This report will detail my journey as a placement student, all the way from finding and securing my placement through to completing my year. It will cover information about the business itself, the teams, the major projects I’ve worked on and touch on many key experiences that have contributed to an enriching year. I will explain what I’ve learnt throughout the year and how the experience has shaped me as an Engineer and even more so as a person.

Placement Details

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**Placement Dates:** 3rd July 2017 → 31st June 2018 (Contract extended until 31st August)

**Job Title:** Engineer

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# Introduction to my Year in Industry

During the university selection process, the year in industry programmes really stood out to me, making it easy to say that I was excited for this year. It became one of the most pivotal factors in my decision to turn down King’s College London and come to Kent. The placement scheme sounded so much more fleshed out and enriching here. Having this passion before I had even made it to the year in the industry really fuelled my anticipation for the year.

## Why Holiday Extras?

It’s fair to say that before Holiday Extras came to present at the university I had never heard of them, so what was so enticing? Whilst it’s hard to honestly be excited about selling airport parking; the role, benefits, and emphasis they placed on their placement program really stood out. They also told us they only source students from Kent and that a lot of them had kept graduate positions, meaning that I’d already be surrounded by people of similar experiences.

Their entire presentation conveyed an image of an extremely relaxed and fun workplace with all the vibes of a start-up. They boasted about all the awards they’d received acknowledging them as one of the best places to work in the UK. They also had current placement students give their stories and experiences of their placement, all of which told tales of many learnings and great opportunities at HX.

Whilst all of this was promising I was initially reluctant to settle into a web-based role. I wasn’t completely against the idea but work closer to the back-end had always interested me more. Due to this I initially passed up the opportunity and only came back to apply when applications re-opened. By that time, I had realised that the work environment, benefits, and opportunities were too good to ignore.

## Journey to Holiday Extras

Having come into the placement process with no previous work experience I was at a complete fresh start without even a CV prepared. Luckily, by the time it came to my application at HX I’d already sorted out my CV, sent applications and even had an interview.

### Initial Interviews

The interview was with a company called SquaredUp who are a small start-up close to my home in London. Whilst it was useful to gain experience the process also knocked my confidence a little, they asked some fart-assy questions that put me on the spot more than expected. However, it also showed me that interviews are a two-way process, from those questions alone I knew that company was too ‘hippy’ to be a good fit for me.

### Application + Interview with HX

After putting in an application to HX I received an invitation to an assessment day. This day consisted of a group task, presentation, and individual interview. On the day I remember feeling nervous before arriving, but the relaxed environment helped me to settle in quickly once there.

We started with the group task which required us to plan out the handling of travel disruption caused by snow. We had to plan an email to customers as well design a system for the call centre to use as a means of reporting contact with customers. At first this was a little daunting to be working on with three unknown peers, but I quickly became distracted in trying to make the best impression possible; engaging with the group, conversing about ideas, and turning them into a full solution. When it came time to present our work the calm atmosphere helped me present confidently and I went to lunch pleased with my performance so far.

This quiet confidence in my performance so far really helped me going into the individual interview. In a complete contrast to my experience with SquaredUp this seemed to go a lot smoother. I didn’t feel that many questions really put me on the spot too much and I was able to be open about my initial reluctance to a web role. They had many re-assurances for me that there was enough modern technology in use to keep things interesting. This made me feel that they really understood where I was coming from and saw that my focus was on learning as much as possible. I appreciated what they had to offer in that regard.

I eventually left the day feeling pleased with the impression I’d given as well as being sure that this type of environment was for me. I began to realise how much this role would resonate with me despite my initial feelings.

### Offer from HX

After about a month I received a phone call telling me that HX would like to offer me the position. I accepted the role then and there because I’d spent all of the time since the assessment day feeling sure that it was the right fit for me.

## Holiday Extras: a brief overview

Holiday Extras started its life as the Apple Booking Company (ABC) when it was founded by Gerry Pack in 1983. It came to fruition when Gerry noticed a gap in the Airport Hotels market, they had previously been targeted to business travellers and never towards leisure travellers. Initially this was achieved through a simple booking platform in partnership with travel consultants who latched on to the idea; the new market area provided lucrative and convenient business.

Throughout 35 years of growth and a rebranding as Holiday Extras, the company’s offerings have expanded hugely, and they now specialise in a vast array of travel products. This includes airport parking, lounges, insurance, car hire, resort transfers and more. Now having around 800 employees situated across offices in Kent, Germany and Bulgaria it’s fair to say the company has grown with its success.

During those early years the company strived as a platform for travel agents to make bookings for their own clients, but April 2000 saw the launch of the HX website. Along with it came the ability for direct customers to make bookings. This was a large step at the time as most travel companies were only targeting one market or the other, not both. Nowadays over 90% of bookings come via the website with less and less reliance on the call centre for business.

### Should get something about awards in here somewhere? Might be in Section #2

## My Job Role

When joining my official job title was as an ‘Engineer’ which kept things open to interpretation. It was difficult to predict exactly what that might encompass initially. However, it soon became clear why it was left open with each team serving different purposes through different platforms. It was clear there would be many opportunities for me to learn across all of these different areas, platforms and codebases. I understood why ‘Web Developer’ didn’t truly fit the bill of this job despite that being the main throughput.

During my time with HX I managed to gain experience across a variety of systems and I ended up truly appreciating the fluidity of my role. Not only did I have the opportunity to work on the front-end of the site, but my manager actually planned my second team to be a challenging back-end focused role. This gave me a taste of both worlds and really helped to push my learning to a higher level, I’m thankful that my own development was such a focal point for the company.

# Working for Holiday Extras

This section will detail the structure and process of HX as well as how I feel about my time spent interacting with it.

Firstly, to pre-face, despite the fact HX has ~800 employees there are ~150 of us in the actual web team where I’ve spent all of my time. Therefore, the majority of what I speak about will be the structure and process of this web team as a subset of the entire team.

## Team Structure

Whilst HX has a vast number of employee’s they still place a large emphasis on the web team.

Loose bibliography

<https://www.holidayextras.co.uk/about-us/company-history.html> - HX info