

Student's biggest sales job was himself

Persistence and a viral video pay off for former door-to-door peddler in landing his dream occupation

JENNIFER LEWINGTON

When Ryan Ing graduates from business school next spring, he starts his dream job at IBM Canada selling its products and services to business customers.

But the 24-year-old is already a hit at IBM and on social media for the video he produced to share tips with other students on how to turn job rejections (for lack of experience) into victory – in his case a 2017 IBM summer internship and a job offer for 2018.

For Mr. Ing, a fourth-year commerce (technology management) student at Ryerson University's Ted Rogers School of Management in Toronto, the journey is as rewarding as his ultimate destination.

In 2016, with just one three-month internship on his résumé, he applied to a dozen companies for a summer position in technology-related corporate sales. IBM and Cisco Systems Canada, his two preferred employers, were among those who turned him down.

Undeterred, he sought advice from professors, fellow students and friends on potential jobs in sales. When he heard that Vivint Canada Inc., which sells residential alarm systems, was on campus hiring students for the summer, Mr. Ing pitched recruiters on his work experience to date, the business books he had read on selling, and his own desire for a career in sales.

"Within 48 hours I had a job offer," says Mr. Ing.

After receiving company training, Mr. Ing quickly discovered the challenge of door-to-door product selling: 100-per-cent sales commission and long hours over six days a week.

Initially, he received only rejections from homeowners. "I sat on the curb and had my forehead in my palms and thought, I can't do this," says Mr. Ing. Then, triumph still ringing in his voice, he says, "On my fifth day, I got my first sale."



Rogers undergrad Ryan Ing hopes his quest for employment serves as a template for other students launching their careers. He found success by narrowing his focus to two firms rather than dozens. JENNIFER ROBERTS/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Mr. Ing says the summer-long stint taught him how to make a sales pitch without sounding like a salesman and the value of perseverance. "It showed me what it means to work hard," says Mr. Ing. "[Now] when I am given a new task or new job, I think I can do this because nothing will ever be harder than working door-to-door."

Last December, with door-to-door sales on his résumé, Mr. Ing again set his sights on landing a summer internship with IBM or Cisco. He customized his LinkedIn profile to reflect his goal and sought out recruiters at the two companies.

Brandon Lewi, leader of IBM Canada's Summit Program, which includes four-month summer internships for students, found himself on the receiving end of repeat

ed e-mails from Mr. Ing.

"To the level he was persisting, it was definitely unique," says Mr. Lewi, who interviewed him for the 2017 Summit Program. "That, in and of itself, warranted a discussion. It made me feel he was serious about this."

He also was impressed by Mr. Ing's diligence in managing customer relationships. "He had built out a process in his door-to-door sales role that mimicked what sellers need to do today," says Mr. Lewi, who says the topic of sales is a low priority in business school curriculum.

"Schools don't give sales the time of day," he says. "It has been [treated] like a fall-back."

After his interview with Mr. Lewi, Mr. Ing made a final short list of

candidates whose test included a 60-second presentation to IBM recruiters. For that, Mr. Ing drew on his experience in student business competitions, especially those few with a sales focus.

"When I left the [IBM] interview, I felt like a million bucks," he recalls. "I knew what I did last year [in door-to-door sales] and on my application, and I knew I had done my absolute best."

Once in the Summit Program, Mr. Ing posted his tips-focused Facebook video.

"Have you ever felt like you were never just good enough to get that job?" he asks the camera in an opening monologue. "I decided if I was not good enough this year I would become so successful next year they [recruiters] wouldn't be

able to ignore me."

For fun, he added a "business student bet" in which he offers to shave his head if he fails to land the desired internship, while those betting against him treat him to an inexpensive meal in downtown Toronto.

In the video, he describes the pillars of his plan: gain experience through an entry-level sales job, read books on sales, and participate in case competitions.

He also took a targeted approach to his job search, concentrating just on IBM and Cisco. "When people apply for a job, they apply to 50 companies and put in one hour [of preparation for each]," he says. "But I spent 50 hours on one job."

The video took 50 hours to complete and racked up 10,000 views and 75 shares in 24 hours.

"Anyone could do that, but Ryan is the person who actually will do it and that is what differentiates him," says Mr. Lewi.

Among those who posted a comment on the video, with 24,000 views as of the end of October, was IBM Canada president and general manager Dino Trevisani. "You are a winner," he wrote. "We are so proud to have you."

Rogers dean Steven Murphy, another fan of the video, says that today's students no longer wait until after graduation to secure their careers because they can discover their interests through co-op and other forms of work internships.

"It's about knowing who you are and what you want to do," he says. "Ryan happens to be one of those people who knew his [preferences] and was able to develop that."

Last month, Mr. Ing tasted victory: the offer of a full-time position in sales at IBM beginning next year.

"I think the hard part is finding out what you want to do," he says. "The easy part is getting there."

Special to The Globe and Mail

Schools using social media to get more followers

ADAM STANLEY

Canadian business schools are following a global trend of spending money on digital and social media to recruit prospective MBA students.

According to a recent study by the London-based Association of MBAs, an accreditation organization representing 245 schools worldwide, \$3 of every \$10 spent on marketing MBA programs globally is earmarked for social media advertising.

For schools, the investment is a simple acknowledgment that they need to reach would-be students in new ways as the digital era deepens. In-person recruiting hasn't been replaced, but tweets, likes and shares are part of the marketer's new vocabulary.

"For me it always comes down to where are peoples' eyeballs," says Neil Bearnse, director of marketing at Smith School of Business in Kingston.

"You walk down the street and see people's eyes are glued to their phones, and they'll walk right past the bus, let alone the ad on the bus shelter."

Smith, at Queen's University, has increased its investment in social media outreach over the past few years through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other channels, Mr. Bearnse says.

"We want to make sure our messaging, content and brand are in front of their eyes, and different platforms allow us to get at them in different ways," he says. "We've really integrated our social media strategy to match our recruitment strategy, and a lot of our efforts are designed to create that first touch point."

That first touch is increasingly important to grab the attention of prospective students, who are growing in number but have more study options than ever.

According to the U.S.-based Graduate Management Admissions Council, 261,248 people worldwide wrote the GMAT (graduate management admissions test) in 2016, an increase of 6 per cent year-over-year.

"The war for talent amongst business schools is extremely competitive, especially when it comes to domestic candidates," says Julia Michienzi, the global relationship manager for MBA recruiting and admissions at Ivey Business School in London, Ont.

Ivey, at the University of Western Ontario, has found success using LinkedIn to drive awareness of its programs, she says.

"These LinkedIn campaigns allow us to target candidates who may not have otherwise been thinking about Ivey for their degree or perhaps weren't even thinking about purs-

uing higher education until we reached out to them," Ms. Michienzi says. "First-mover advantage is critical in this market."

Diana Luu, head of LinkedIn Marketing Solutions in Canada, says schools are using the platform because it provides an opportunity to engage with the best audience interested in MBAs.

"We have robust first-party data so we make it easier for schools to find that quality candidate that they are looking for," says Ms. Luu, noting that 170,000 of LinkedIn's 14 million members in Canada have "MBA" listed on their profile.

Ms. Michienzi says Ivey also has Twitter accounts for each of their undergraduate and graduate degree programs (four total) along with two Instagram accounts and a YouTube channel.

Boots on the ground

But as much as social media has become part of a recruiter's role, it hasn't replaced hitting the road. Ms. Michienzi, for example, travels about 65 days a year to in-person meetings and fairs around the world.

With 77 per cent of Canadian MBA programs reporting increases in international applications, according to GMAC figures, international recruitment, especially, is as important as ever.

Amber Wallace, director of communications and external relations at Smith, says while fairs are shrinking in number globally, the school still wants to connect with people in person.

"We have a presence all over North America, but if we're recruiting in India or England, the recruiting fair is a great way to tap into that audience," she says.

Dan Shaw, director of the MBA program at Dalhousie University's Rowe School of Business in Halifax, says it's unlikely people would commit to a five- or even six-figure degree entirely online.

Rowe now spends approximately 70 per cent of its marketing budget on digital advertising, an amount that's increased every year since Mr. Shaw began with the school in 2013, "but [we] encourage people to go to grad fairs or information sessions, and we also do a lot of class visits at schools in Atlantic Canada," he says.

"If people are going to do a \$50,000 purchase, they're going to want to have a face-to-face meeting or a Skype call. There may be one or two in a class that have completely had a computer-based interaction, but it's rare someone in the office didn't meet with an MBA student face to face."

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"The MBA has helped me realize a more holistic view of the business by learning facets of every department from HR, to marketing, to finance, to operations. To be able to bring it all together adds tremendous value to any organization."

Len Hoang, MBA '17
Operations Manager
Nando's Canada