

Henry L Julicher
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Transport Clearing House Germany

University of Michigan

My CDS placement was with the German firm, “Transport Clearing House Europe GmbH”. There I worked from May 26th to September 6th, plus a semi-business trip to Moscow, Russia from September 6th to September 18th. Working for TCH Europe was very rewarding and I really enjoyed working with my colleagues and found the work I did stimulating and motivating. My placement was in Berlin, in the Friedenau quarter of the city. Our office was located on the second floor (first floor for Germany) of a modern five story residential building. Our windows looked out both sides of the building onto the busy Rheinstrasse and out into a pleasant courtyard. We shared our office with our former partner firm Berliner Flug Ring (BFR), and they used the other wing of the office. My office was located very conveniently on the U7 line of the subway and not far from a bus stop that would take you to the Hauptbahnhof and Alexanderplatz. Furthermore, there was the S-bahn only 10 minutes away that would also take you to Friedrichstrasse and Hackescher Markt Stations. The office was easy to get to and my commute to work in the morning would only take 30 minutes door to door.

My company was relatively small, with only thirteen permanent employees. We had a total of five rooms in our office plus the shared copy and conference room that we shared with BFR. We also had a small kitchenette for preparing lunch. My eleven colleagues varied in age from 24 to 60+. Also, I must note that they were not the standard German colleagues you would expect. We had six Germans, six Russian Germans (really more Russian than German) and one Polish woman. I also had three supervisors, as I would call them, even though they were the directors of marketing, business management and the CEO. Eileen, the director of marketing, was instrumental in helping me find my way in Berlin in the beginning. She offered to help me look for housing, drove me to Ikea, and showed me around the city. My other direct supervisor

was Igor, who himself was a temporary worker from Russia. I shared Igor's office. Thirdly, Günther, the CEO, only required that Igor, Eileen and I reported to him about our week's work.

TCH Europe has four divisions, Sales, Marketing, IT and Programming, and Management. I worked dividedly in Marketing and Management. At the beginning of my internship, I was given simple and basic tasks, but I immediately delved into learning the business model and the advantages of TCH Europe. In the beginning, I worked closely with Eileen in marketing and helped her at the German Russian Festival working, dissemination information, and setting up our stand. My first impressions were very positive, and I even thought that I would get away working a standard work week for Germans, but since I had eagerly said that I would be willing to work at the festival, I ended up working the entire weekend. Fortunately, the festival was very interesting, and had really helped me understand the differences between East and West Germany, even though those borders don't exist anymore. The German-Russian Festival took part at Karlshorst, located on the fringe of Berlin in East Berlin. During the GDR times, Karlshorst was a famous horse racing venue much like Iffezheim near Baden-Baden. However, after the reunification of Germany, much of East Germany has fallen into decay and disuse. The German-Russian Festival was really more an event for Russian Germans. The different types of people that visited the event really helped clarify the differences between East and West. Since I was handing out flyers and running demonstrations of our website for viewers. I spoke to many different people, and was amazed first as to how many Russians were actually living in Berlin, and also at how much poorer and in worse health many former East Germans were. Many seemed to find it difficult to adapt to the new society and stayed within their confines, foregoing any adventures into modern Berlin, which for the most part has accepted capitalism. Oddly, our stand at the German-Russian festival was too advanced

and too sophisticated for this festival, and many people couldn't be bothered by our advertising. However, the words free flights to Russia, which we raffled off, were very popular and garnered interest.

Working in marketing was interesting, yet much more challenging than I had expected. The problem being was that our clientele was very specific and also situated across several countries. Our product was highly specific and had several weaknesses in comparison to our much larger competitors, and high clientele was very price sensitive. Furthermore, airline tickets are a large ticket item for many of the Russians living in Germany, and they are skeptical about purchasing flights over the internet, using a credit card online, and flying with an electronic ticket. All these skepticisms had to be thwarted and we had to win over our public. To make things even more difficult, we had only a limited budget, and with the summer season in full swing, our weakest quarter of the year, getting clients to book with us was challenging.

In marketing, some of my job tasks included contacting many states in Russia and the CIS and writing to them asking whether we could host a link exchange on their website. The belief was that if we could place our link on their site, anyone looking to visit that particular city or state would see our link and book with us. At work I would visit many of the city and state website, and most were hardly updated or very simplistic. Coming from the US, where we expect the latest and more relevant information to be posted online, it was difficult operating websites that were so basic and outdated. Many city and state website in Russia are developed locally and have lots of advertisements, old information, and poorly work using decoders for Cyrillic. Nevertheless, I contacted several of these cities' and states' in order to see if we could do a link exchange, but my efforts were mostly fruitless. I was able to put our link on some sites in Kazakhstan because their websites allowed you to add them yourself.

My other marketing project involved Google Adwords, and was a much larger assignment that ranged the entire length of my internship. TCH Europe started using Google's products in March, and only Igor, who usually was always on the phone and extremely busy, did not really have time to do much to our campaigns. At first glance, Google Analytics and Google Adwords seem very complicated to work and effectively use. Luckily, I had my mother send me a book on how to set-up the right and proven campaigns for TCH Europe. After just playing around with the system for a couple of days and learning the capabilities of the system, I started brainstorming effective campaigns in order to increase sales and visitors to our site. I learned to begin simple, and I drew up a plan of campaigns, adwords, and keywords that I believed would be good in attracting visitors to our site from google searches. I consulting with a fellow intern from Russia working with us for one month, and she helped me come up with a list of keywords in Russian. Luckily, the German keywords were already in use. I modified and streamlined the campaigns over the course of my internship, and I was able to increase traffic from online searches by two fold. We also started advertising in other geographic locales where many Russians live like the Toronto Metropolitan Area, Israel, the Baltic States, and New York. Using the information on Google analytics, I was able to create an excel spreadsheet highlighting the number of goals (i.e. visitors who booked a ticket) from each country, the number of visitors we had daily, the number of pages each visitor viewed, and the time the spent visiting our website. These statistics is very important, and details the growth of visitors on our site. Using this data, I compiled data graphs representing trends in visitor traffic from a select number of popular countries.

Another project that I completed was the overseeing and writing of the business plan along with Eileen and Igor. This task was very monotonous, I must say, but very vital for our

company, as we were trying to secure investments from foreign investors. This task really got me into analyzing our business plan, and making a lot of suggestions as to how TCH Europe should proceed with its product in certain markets. I also suggested changing the structure so that the flow of the business plan was more cohesive and less repetitive.

Finally one of my last major assignments was the design and structure of our latest website. This was very interesting, as I was analyzing many other online booking engines to see what type of features we should incorporate while keeping the website simple and easy to use. Since our demographic varies significantly, it was vital that it be easy for elderly and novice computer users to book travel, while also allowing the flexibility and convenience for travel agencies and business clients. I also had to travel to Moscow, to speak with our website designers that we hired, where we discussed the layout and the function of the website to cater to clientele in Russia, but also in Europe and North America.

Overall, I really enjoyed my internship and experiences with Transport Clearing House Europe. I felt very welcomed to collaborate with them, my ideas and thoughts were encouraged, and we were very communicative working together in the office and out of the office.

In Berlin, I lived in a 7 room shared apartment with 5 other German housemates. We had three guys and two girls, one and a half bathrooms and one large kitchen. My apartment was in an alt-bau type building which was not destroyed during WWII. Our apartment was on the third floor of this grandiose building and our windows looked out onto the street and into our courtyard. My apartment was on the first line, which during the nineteenth century was where the wealthy lived. My room was approximately twenty eight square meters, and had a design pattern in my 4 meter high ceilings. I had two windows, parquet floors, and a French door for my

door. Although my apartment was large and big, it was a little dated, and when I arrived, my housemates and I needed to replace the oven, dishwasher and some other big ticket items. But we managed to find used appliances to replace our broken ones.

My apartment was very well situated in Berlin. Although technically located in Moabit, it was closer to Hansaviertel, which is where the Tiergarten is located. From my apartment, I could walk eight minutes to the S-bahn, or ten minutes to the U-bahn. Outside my door downstairs, I could take the bus directly to the hauptbahnhof, which actually was only five minutes away. That was very convenient on Sundays, as the supermarket inside the all-new train terminal was open on Sundays. It never took me longer than thirty minutes to travel anywhere, and one convenience feature about living in Berlin, is that the public transportation system works all night on the weekends.

I decided to live in this apartment, although I was skeptical about living with so many unknown people, was that I believed it would help me make friends in a completely new city to me. I proved right to take this method as I always knew that it would be temporary. My roommates were very friendly and helpful as I began my new life in Berlin, and for the most part we got along very well. I was the only foreigner in my WG, and this was great. Although my housemates wanted to speak to me in English, I counter argued and asked them if we could speak German. With my housemates, we would go out to clubs, the cinema and bars in our free time, but since I worked a lot in the beginning, it was hard to get organized all together. Also, I was one of the first people to move in, and later in June, my other two housemates Nora and Anne moved in.

I made some friends during the Eufa Cup Soccer Tournament. I was surprised at how much of a soccer fan I actually was, and Berlin really had three teams to cheer for because of it's

high number of immigrants. Germany of course, was always cheered for, and many people attending the outside viewings at the Brandenburg Gate and the Berlin Fan-mile to watch the soccer games in a mass of people. However, also the Turkish and the Russian teams were adamantly cheered for, as the number of immigrants in Berlin is high enough to celebrate the victories of these teams. Of course, I was split between Germany and Russia, and I believed that either way I look at it, Germany or Russia winning would be good. When Russia was to play Spain in the semi-finals of the UEFA cup, I went with my housemate Andreas, who dressed-up as a Russian Fan (although he's totally German) to watch the game with me. There we met some other fans, although also German. These friends that I made became some of my best friends in Berlin. Two of my friends, Robin and Laura, spent a lot of time with me, and showed me parts of the city that they knew and enjoyed the most.

In my spare time, I mostly met with my other CDS participants, or with Robin and/or Laura. I really enjoyed living in Berlin, just for the sheer fact of the number of activities and events taking place in the city. One of my favorite day trips that I took was to Potsdam, where I went with my friend Richard (from Darmstadt) to the Sanssouci Park. I found walking through the gardens really relaxing and I enjoyed looking at the different flora and fauna. The Schloss Sanssouci is very magnificent, but much smaller than I had expected. However, what amazed me the most was how during the almost forty years of the GDR, how quickly and differently the East and West developed. Potsdam is a good reminder of the splendor of Prussia, and the simplicity and dullness of the GDR. It's a very striking contrast.

The scholarship that CDS awarded me for my internship was very helpful, as the Euro reached new levels against the US dollar, so any additional help made a difference. I used the money that CDS awarded me to visit some of Berlin's more interesting attractions. My favorite

attraction that I visited in Berlin was the Pergamon Museum. On the evening when all the museums are open, it is amazing to see so many residents out and about visiting the museums. It reminded me of the opening of the new wing to the Detroit Institute of Arts, when the museum was open all night, and locals were encouraged to see the changes and new addition.

The time I spent in Berlin will shape me to work better with people of different nationalities and cultures. I also learned a lot about how small business operate that deal on global scales, and that start up firms require a lot of work, but work that can be very rewarding. I enjoyed all the aspects of my internship, and I'm pleased that I ended up working for TCH Europe. I also think that my employer enjoyed my knowledge and expertise and were impressed with my language skills, especially Russian, so that even interning proved very beneficial for the company. At the end of my internship, TCH Europe even extended me an offer to stay as a temporary worker for two years.



