

Lappeenranta University of Technology

1.5.2010

International Center

**Travel and Internship Report
September 2009 – August 2010**

Strategy Analysis International

Petteri Hilska
petteri.hilska@gmail.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. SAI (STRATEGY ANALYSIS INTERNATIONAL)	2
3. JUNIOR CONSULTANT – FROM DIFFICULTIES TO VICTORY	3
3.1 Core Tasks: Consultation	4
3.2 My Projects	5
3.3 Additional Tasks: Marketing	6
4. PARIS AGAIN – QUOI DE NEUF?	7
5. CONCLUSION OF THE YEAR	9

1. INTRODUCTION

Yet another internship experience almost over. This time the target was Paris; the company had just changed from my last experience. You can find my previous internship report also from this website and I highly encourage you to read it, since I try to cover different topics in this report. In terms of my own learning, I intend to cover the later part, life in Paris, from the point of view that what had changed from my last visit: Did I manage to do things better this time or did I fall into the same traps.

This time the push to go abroad came while finishing my Master's Thesis in summer 2009. I needed to find a job after finishing the thesis and by chance I stumbled on this ad at Aarresaari (or lut.news, can't remember which). A consulting agency in Paris was recruiting an intern for a minimum of 6 months for internationalization related tasks. The ad described the post to include a lot of traveling, interviews in French and other tasks. The description sounded very tempting, even though there was no reference to salary, I just needed to trust it would be higher than during the last internship. I sent in my application and quite soon I received a call from France and ended up speaking in French during that phone call which was sort of a surprise for me. Quite soon after the initial call I got an interview at Helsinki and after quite a hassle of communication back and forth, I realized I was on my way to France again.

After certain arrangements, slight panic and careful organization at the end of August, I found myself in the RER train on my way from CDG airport to Paris. The time of my internship had arrived.

2. SAI (STRATEGY ANALYSIS INTERNATIONAL)

Strategy Analysis International, SAI for short, is a consulting office in Paris that has been running for almost 30 years. SAI office in Paris is located close to Champs-Élysées in the 8th district, so in a very well known business district. In addition to Paris, SAI has offices in all the main continents: Americas (Montreal), Europe (Paris, Düsseldorf in Germany and Helsinki) and Asia (Hong Kong). The core interest of SAI has always been internationalization; in the earlier years the clients were big corporations, in the recent years the competence has really been with the small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and the development of their international operations, especially in France. SAI is a small company as well, there were from 5 to 6 employees during my internship and each had his/her own projects. The national division of the employees was quite interesting, as we Finns were almost a majority at one point when there were two French interns, two of us Finns and our boss was Canadian. In addition to France, our countries of interest have included Canada, Germany, England and Sweden. The clients are mainly Finnish SMEs but we have other nationalities as well.

SAI offers their clients a sort of standard program (at least for France), but in practice each project is adapted to the needs of the client. During my internship the programs had standardized into one-year projects, during which the clients receives a short market study if wanted (the importance of these diminishing all the time) and also a contact matrix in the chosen country. This matrix is the core of SAI and the client is able to use the contacts even after the project. For the most part of the projects, the purpose of the program was to find a partner in France, so for many of the projects the duration was indeed only one year that it took to find the partner. But for others the partner search was a much longer process

since one partner alone was not sufficient, or the company wanted to use us as an agent in France.

When I started SAI had shifting language weeks: every other week was an English week and every other French week. In the beginning every French week was a pain to endure for me, as I understood about 50% of what was said in the office, but towards the end it became a lot easier. During the spring 2010, the English weeks became less and less often and we used mainly French in the office (plus some Finnish between us Finns). We had office meetings almost every week and they allowed everyone to be aware of the progress of each project. These meetings took sometimes even two hours since there were always more than ten projects and in addition we had some other current affairs. From time to time this frustrated my Finnish work side, since my own projects usually took only a short time to cover so I spent the most part of the meeting listening to others.

3. JUNIOR CONSULTANT – FROM DIFFICULTIES TO VICTORY

My title was a pain all through my internships, as my boss did not want us putting any title on our business cards. However, due to my status as an intern and my job in a consulting office, I deducted my title to be Junior Consultant.

Originally my tasks were indeed that of a consultant: market studies, client meetings and interviews. In the beginning most of my time was indeed spent with market studies and direct client contacts concerning visits. Towards the end of the year I got oriented more and more into the

marketing of SAI, as it was done quite unsystematically and even poorly before my arrival. My boss gave me the responsibility to improve our CRM-system that up till that day had run through Excel. I spent a lot of time on this few months around the turn of the year until in March I received more projects and my projects in general started to fill my schedule a bit better, so marketing was left secondary.

3.1 Core Tasks: Consultation

My core task in any case was consultation. Our boss however always gave the real consultation, the contribution of us interns was in the work: market studies, contact matrixes and organized meetings. Quite often we provided translation aid to our clients, since French is not very well known in Finland (though there are some exceptions).

The market studies, as I said, were one of the core parts of our product offering in the beginning and towards the end remained an important part. The focus however was always in the creation of the contact matrix and the market study was formed to aid in this: definition of the size of the market and finding the key players. We worked on formalizing and standardizing our market studies as well as much as possible, so we created various models and formats for the outputs.

Lead generation and contact matrix maintenance was our core task. In order to generate a matrix, we used information provided by our clients, industry magazines and most importantly various trade shows. If an interesting show came to Paris (some times even outside of Paris), we attended it. One of my colleagues visited an interesting trade show in Munich, Germany for one of our clients. We took care of the initial contact between our client and the interesting parties in France, with the aim of

organizing a meeting between them either at an appropriate trade show or visit on site.

We kept contact with our client on a weekly basis, sometimes even more often than that if there was a visit coming up or the contact matrix expanded rapidly. The new contacts added by SAI were revised with the client so we learned while going along.

3.2 My Projects

During my internship I worked independently on six projects. I started in September with four projects, two of which ended at the end of the year. In March I finally received two new projects so I had four projects again during the end of my internship. Most of my projects were quite industry based, as my clients included manufacturers of light cranes, lifting platforms, sawn timber and bio energy boilers. In addition I worked for a while with an ERP-software house and a personalized horoscopes website.

Out of these six, I worked the most with the light cranes and lifting platforms manufacturers. The light crane company was in fact an old client from several years back, so with them I basically continued from where my predecessor had left. They were in fact using us as a vehicle to find new distributors in France, as they already had several partners in place, but each brought only little turnover to the total turnover from France. In addition none of their partners needed exclusivity so this kind of network of partners suited their business. Their project included one or two show truck visits per year in France at the premises of interested companies and this is where most of my work was spent. The lifting platform company was a new project so with them I started with the market study, which was quite quickly followed by the generation of

contact matrix as the company was visiting France already in the beginning of November due to suitable trade show. Creating the contact matrix for them was relatively easy as they already had some cold contacts in France so all I needed to do is reheat them.

An additional client was a sawn timber company, part of a Lappish export ring, and the horoscopes company part of a Middle Finland export ring. I took part in the admin of these two rings more and more towards the end, learning the ropes with the Lappish export group and taking almost full responsibility with the Middle Finland export group in spring 2010. I also aided in improving the administration of our main export groups.

3.3 Additional Tasks: Marketing

As I mentioned above, my tasks expanded to include half-officially some of the marketing of SAI. I managed to share the load with the other SAI Finn. In addition I was given responsibility to improve the SAI website, therefore Dreamweaver was installed on my computer, so I needed to learn some basic html quite quickly. I managed to update the site a little, but the most important thing was that we learned we needed to renew the whole structure of the site, therefore quitting the old html-structure. The importance of the site in our business was quite little at the given time, so the investment required was not supported at this stage.

Concerning the SAI service marketing I was to find a suitable CRM-system. Based on recommendations from my friends and my own research, I ended up trying vTiger-software, mainly because it happened to be free. With the help of certain forums online, I finally managed to install the vTiger server on my on computer and start the data import. The whole process took some four months of me to complete, mainly

because I was never able to do it full-time, but alongside my projects. In addition the models I used kept changing as I went along, as I was beginning to understand the real needs for the program a bit better. The final outlook for the software was reached just a few days before finishing with update of the imported files. The range of usage for the software kept changing as well; mainly concerning what kind of information was added. The focus was to allow easy usage but gather as much information as possible.

The new CRM-system was meant to ease and systemize our own marketing and I spent a great deal of time on it the beginning of 2010. Based on solely the new system, we had not yet gained any new clients in April 2010, but at least we were better kept informed at which stage our prospecting was.

4. PARIS AGAIN – QUOI DE NEUF?

This is my second time in Paris as a “Parisian”. Certain routines came naturally therefore, even though certain stuff I did differently this time. Finding an apartment and moving around was definitely easier this time than it was the last time, even though it took me again quite some time to find an apartment and currently am living in my third one already. This time around I also tried shared apartments for the first time in Paris. The first such was with a French family, which was not such a functioning solution based on lockless doors and a much too nosy, slightly challenged son. The later experience is with another Finn and the first two months (almost) have gone really smoothly and I have strong faith that the remaining four will go as smoothly. Based on the experiences this time, I learned that a rental contract is really important, as usually they are not made with foreigners.

Another thing I learned is that bank affairs in France are still almost decades behind Finland, even if the French are really proud to have invented the chip cards. Cheques are still widely used and online banking is by far inferior to the Finnish one in terms of security and functionality. For example in order to pay someone online I needed to verify the receiver and the first time the verification code came by mail, the ones to follow could be verified by sms. It was also interesting to discover that the banks do not have any money in them, so it is pointless to go there to whine about it if an ATM refuses to give you money.

What else. This much I can say about given instructions that no registration or such is required apparently. I tried to inquire if I needed to let the French officials know I'm living and working in Paris, but apparently they will contact me if they are interested to find out. The same applies to the taxation in France, which in any case is handled afterwards. It is wise to be prepared for that and to remember that those over 20% of deductions from the salary are just social charges. Taxes are paid as a whole and afterwards, but since I'm in Paris only for one year I do not have to pay any taxes, or so I'm told. The social charges in France are just very high, over 20% of the salary

5. CONCLUSION OF THE YEAR

Again I can say that the experience was amazing. The tasks were more closely related to my studies than the previous time and in addition they were changing enough and included quite a lot of traveling so I remained motivated throughout my internship. My language skills in French got a lot better as well thanks to "la semaine française" every other week. I got into contact with many Finnish SMEs through my work; so finding a job after my internship should not be that hard. It is not excluded to continue at SAI after my internship.

I continue to highly recommend internships, especially international ones. Unfortunately the funding has to come mainly from your own pocket as there are surprising expenses and the salary is rarely high. In fact I kept a ticket budget during the fall months and I managed to save enough to take it easier during the spring. I have also kept a blog during my trip; the link should be available at the time of publication at lut.fi. Blog is a nice way for the blogger too to be reminded what has happened during the time abroad as this short report is really not sufficient!