

Velvet RUN

Internship is an important part of a young person's education. Almost 100 trainees from 25 countries have done their Internships in Velvet over a period of 14 years. We knew that it could be done better.

The Challenge

The new internship programme started from the need to make Internships more efficient. The situation faced by Velvet is certainly familiar to many companies who want to invest in the new generation but don't have a good structure for managing these processes. They happily accept trainees, who may be left without attention due to the busy season of the agency and the related shortage of resources. Everyone has a different reason for taking an internship, and it may happen that there is a trainee in the office during busy times whose goal is to rack up the compulsory internship hours and who has no personal motivation or clear understanding of what they want from the internship. Thus, many of them just waste away the time and this is not useful to anyone. Velvet decided that there was no point in carrying on like this and something had to be done.

The Design Process

We set out to think through the entire process of applying for and supervising the internship process, including the time when it is carried out, the format of applying for an internship, the selection criteria, supervision and giving feedback. We also proceeded from the thought that the programme should be recognisably Velvet's, and we involved the team in the creative process by interviewing them.

The Research

Interviews with staff members, former trainees at different levels and with the internship organisers of other companies.

The Design

Considering the needs of Velvet and the trainees, the best periods for carrying out an intensive programme were selected, and a prototype plan was prepared.

The Pilot or RUN#1

Twenty-three people responded to the first invitation and most of them also participated in Pecha-Kucha, where the Velvet team assessed the applicants and selected seven trainees, who started with the Design Sprint process under the supervision of Joel Kotsjuba and Janno Siimar on the following Monday.

The task in the second week was independent work, where the trainees could use all the resources of Velvet and involve other Velvet employees if they chose to do so.

Every evening, we collated the feedback from the trainees and interviewed our staff members. Changes were made in the programme on the basis of the feedback and RUN#2 was announced.

The Analysis, the Understanding

We interviewed 10 employees in total – producers, creatives, designers and developers, plus five trainees and the leader of the internship programme in Pipedrive.

The two main characteristics that trainees are expected to have are motivation and goal orientation. A clear change that people wanted to see was the inclusion of other specialties in internship in addition to designers.

The most important points for trainees were: the opportunity to test their skills in challenging assignments, increased responsibility over time, to receive practical guidance where necessary and to be part of the local work culture.

The Result

The programme consists of four parts:

The Application Process

The participant fills in a form where they describe their motivation to participate in the programme and what they have done before. Twenty applicants with the biggest potential are then selected.

Pecha-Kucha

All 20 applicants are asked to prepare a presentation titled “Who do I want to be when I grow up”. The audience will include all employees of Velvet as well as the representatives of other agencies and clients. The employees of Velvet assess all applicants according to the criteria agreed in advance and seven trainees will be selected by the evening.

The **Sprint Track** lasts for two weeks and starts at 9:30 on the Monday immediately following Pecha Kucha.

During the first week, the trainees will work on a client project in DesignSprint by Google Ventures format, going through the entire design process very intensively and creating a working prototype of the offered product or service by the end of the week.

During the second week, the trainees will work on an independent project and can use any Velvet’s resources. The trainees must complete a tested prototype by the end of the second week as well.

The **Long Track** is an agreed 2-3 month employment relationship if the trainees are interested in continuing their cooperation with us and if Velvet sees that it can offer a specific value to a specific trainee.

The Impact

Going through the design process comprehensively allowed us to understand what the agency expects from the trainees and what the trainees expect from the agency. The created programme has given a fresh approach to dealing with trainees and due to the process of analysis, everyone involved in the programme understands what decisions are based on and what the goal of the whole thing is. Also, the work

done for clients has been widely used in further work with these clients.

During the two weeks, a trainee gets a very clear picture of what Velvet does. They can go through every part of a project and every minute of the internship is aimed at results.

The employees of Velvet get some excitement and the chance to learn with the trainees, because despite the work methods being the same, practising how to use them and observing how others use the tools is invaluable.

Feedback from client/user

Sasha (from Russia, Run #2)

“I’ve been working my whole life in an opposite direction. First you make things and then you think who will start to use it. Often this happens with projects in University – to get grants, you have to write projects in which you don’t think much about the audience. Velvet Run was useful in the sense that I learned things could be done thinking of users first and I hope I’m going to apply it to different spheres of my life.

It also helped me believe that I can be in different environments, not just sit in university and discuss theoretical things, but that I can put in some work and here I am – in a design agency – which is pretty cool. So, it helped me think of different places where I may end up.”

Sofia (from Mexico, Run #2)

“The two weeks were intense. We had to wrap things up very fast to proceed to the next step. At first, I was quite skeptical, because I thought maybe it’s too much work for interns. But going through this I think it’s interesting how much you are exposed to new thinking, new people, new way of doing things that challenge the way you do your work.”

Read more here: <https://bit.ly/2Po2vdH>