

MBA Intern Goes to the Extreme

Ian Bergman dabbled at network engineering before coming to his senses and the UW Business School. “It didn’t take me long to figure out that I did not want to work in IT anymore,” says the second-year MBA who studied political science as an undergrad. “I’m no engineer or mathematician. But I *am* a geek. I love the gadgets. I want to work with brilliant engineers who are developing the technology in a way that I never could. I want to be the person who helps make these ideas happen, and gets them to the public.”

Bergman got his chance sooner than expected. Last summer he became the first UW Business School student to intern at IBM’s prestigious Extreme Blue program—working alongside 75 top MBA and engineering students selected to work in small, tactical teams on some of the legendary company’s newest technologies.

For three months Bergman led a team of three maverick undergrad computer engineers in fine-tuning a sophisticated IBM enterprise data-mining product called WebFountain. Actually, “led” may be overstating. “I had to figure out a way to lead without them feeling like they were being led,” he says.

The technical challenge was to build an intelligent filter to screen junk and pinpoint useful web data for WebFountain’s corporate research customers. The team dubbed its solution “netSifter.”

When not working directly with the engineers, Bergman was on his own to chart his own role. “The business issue in each of our Extreme Blue projects is loosely framed because we want to encourage creativity and innovation,” says Veronica Woody, site manager for Extreme Blue Almaden. “As a result, this program has developed a lot of intellectual property over the years.”

Bergman launched into market research that proved invaluable to netSifter’s development, and also co-authored the WebFountain marketing plan in use today.

Not bad for a summer job. And many of Bergman’s classmates spent their summers in just as interesting circumstances across a wide range of companies and industries. Jeff Tomlinson interned at Costco, Jennifer Nichols at Starbucks, Abhijit Deshpande at Philips Medical. Brian Lane worked for a start-up called Deep Blue Sky Group and Rebecca Lovell interned at an AIDS housing and health care non-profit called Rosehedge. Micall Rylander had an amazing experience at Merck Thailand, and Scott Werner helped HP restructure its corporate finance group. Aaron Katzman did some deep thinking at Cranium, Arkan Kayihan rocked a brand study at T-Mobile, and Aaron Lilly worked on strategy for Verizon. Christopher Natsuume co-founded an online casual game development studio called Boomzap in Singapore.

But none were quite like Extreme Blue, a kind of young-adult summer camp with deadlines, populated by student geniuses of the engineering and management persuasions who live, play and, mostly, work together 24/7. The internship challenged Bergman to ascend Yosemite’s majestic Half Dome and to present his team’s product to senior IBM executives at company HQ in New York. He emerged with his name on three patent disclosures, his fingerprints all over the WebFountain marketing plan and much more.



“My key takeaway was the exposure to the inside of a big company that builds technology,” Bergman says. “That’s what I really want to do. I learned volumes about project management, writing a business plan, writing a marketing plan, presenting to executives. I hadn’t done any of this before. I feel like I’ve run the gauntlet.”

“There’s a real transformation that takes place while the students are here,” says Woody. “It’s like shock and awe for them.”

“I wasn’t unique in having a great internship experience—a lot of my classmates had that,” Bergman adds. “But for my goals, Extreme Blue was pretty unbeatable.” □