

# Internships: making the right choice

 By [Charl Thom](#)

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It's that time of the year when the inboxes of HR departments and agency execs start overflowing with internship applications. Starting your career with the right agency is arguably one of the most important decisions you'll make. It will lay the platform for and possibly set the course for the trajectory of your career.

You need to make an informed decision, so research all the agencies that you're interested in, and figure out their key values and principles and how those match up with your own ambitions.

As a starting point, consider these four as non-negotiable:

## 1. Culture

Seek out an agency where people help each other out. We work in an industry where, most days, you have a lot of work on your plate. Some days it may be more than you can reasonably handle.

If you work in a place where people drop what they do to help each other out, you will learn the right way of doing things, and you will more than likely find yourself in a place full of people who are also generous enough to give of their time to teach you.

## 2. Courage

Find yourself an agency that does ambitious, brave work. If you go to one that doesn't display a track record of such work - work that makes you wonder how they pulled it off - you will probably learn fear. Or, at least, never learn how to overcome fear.

The best work comes from ideas that take courage to sell and create, and if you work at a less-than-courageous agency, those ideas will generally die a slow, painful death. And you will lose your appetite for your chosen career.

## 3. Vision

An agency with ambitious goals will, if you take ownership of your responsibilities, take you along on its path to greatness. Its approach to teamwork will ensure that your contribution to achieving each smaller goal on the way to the greater vision will be recognised and celebrated.

If you hop on board a rudderless ship, you're going to go nowhere fast.

#### 4. Brand

Once you've identified your ideal agency, you need to get in. It's a tough challenge. You're competing with loads of enthusiastic applicants and trying to talk to busy agency execs that are not the easiest people to reach.

But here's the thing: *it's exactly the same challenge your client brand faces*. And if you can't sell yourself, chances are that you may not have a future selling a client brand. So begin by thinking of yourself as a brand, and write yourself a brief that asks four basic questions:

- *Why have you targeted a specific agency?*
- *Who are you trying to talk to in the agency?*
- *What are you going to tell them about you?*
- *Why should they believe a word you say?*

Once you've answered these questions, you need to go about planning your campaign to reach your chosen agency target and, just like any other brand, you're going to need to cut through the clutter by reaching them in a brilliant but relevant manner that demands their attention.

In order to demand their attention, you need to get to know them. Read their opinion pieces online. Follow them on Twitter. Figure out what makes them tick. Then make your move.

#### Example of a cleverly prepared application

Two years ago I tweeted about my favourite brand of takeaway coffee as the barista fired up my regular morning Americano. A week later, an intern applicant delivered a cleverly prepared application, along with a steaming cup of &Union coffee. She had researched her target market and delivered her resumé in a way that stood out among the flood of other emails that week. She got the internship, tackled it with enthusiasm, and got the job.

Advertising can be one of the most interesting and rewarding careers in the world, if you find yourself the right home.

In the words of the inimitable MLC, good luck and don't \*\*\*\* up.

#### For more:

- Bizcommunity: [Interns, think before you send](#)

#### ABOUT CHARL THOM

Charl Thom has been group MD/partner of the multiple award-winning FoxP2 ([www.foxp2.com](http://www.foxp2.com)) since 2007. After completing a BComm (marketing) degree and a few seasons sailing around the Caribbean, he set out on a career in advertising which saw him working in media, strategy and account management for leading global agencies in South Africa and the UK. Contact Charl on tel +27 (0)21 424 4802, email [charl@foxp2.com](mailto:charl@foxp2.com), tweet [@charlthom](#) and read [charlthom.posterous.com](http://charlthom.posterous.com)

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