Bericht – Auslandspraktikum

BA COMPARATIVE LITERATURE/ENGLISH STUDIES, 6th TERM

• **Termin des Praktikums:** 18 FEBRUARY – 11 APRIL 2008

• **Gastland:** UNITED KINGDOM

• **Angaben zur Praktikumsfirma:**

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  VAPORMATIC PROVIDES TRACTOR PARTS AND ACCESSORIES

  The most important task trusted to me at Vapormatic has been the translation of the recently launched website into the German language in order to make the company more accessible to German customers or end users and vice versa. The translation included for example the company history and mission statement, technical terms for the part search and electronic catalogue respectively, latest news and range threads, some German customer information and the Vapormatic spring 2008 newsletter as well as sitemap and buttons. Translating the Vapormatic website I had to pay attention to stick to a consistent method and terminology in order to sustain the corporate image. Intensive independent research on the agricultural parts market and being involved in the daily work routine by the marketing team of course helped me doing just that. Moreover I have been involved in the publication process of a workshop tools
catalogue that the marketing department will produce pretty much on its own until printing. I had to categorise all the different tools and workshop accessories from the electronic catalogue into a spreadsheet and later also compiled part of the pages using Microsoft Office Publisher for the catalogue to-be. Being involved in planning and working on the workshop tools catalogue has been a particularly good working practice for me. First of all because I could not only use the theoretical knowledge I gained in my public relations course from Student & Arbeitsmarkt but also what I have learned in a project management course about time management three semesters ago. That is for example in discussing the overall design and layout of the catalogue within the marketing department as well as taking part in customary meetings on the different stages of production. In these meetings we would discuss the state the publication would currently be in, the goals achieved in a certain time span on the way to the final product, problems that maybe occurred and indeed all subsequent tasks and deadlines. Being so significantly involved in this process has been a good experience especially in regard to the organisation of work when you will have an early final deadline.

Regarding the knowledge I required for accomplishing my tasks I would like to say that first of all a broad knowledge of the English and German language and a good German expression in particular is absolutely necessary when translating. I think it has been quite a lucky chance that on account of my studies I am relatively well-versed in both languages. Some basic marketing speech has been required as well of course, but the German terms I studied in my public relations course and I additionally gained some knowledge of the according English expressions when attending a course on International Business English only last semester. However, there was much more to discover while really working. Also I had to use the internet fairly often to make myself familiar with special tractor parts, certain tools; with the way engines work etc. Being used to online research this has not been a problem for me. Thus I could find out about tractor vaporising oil (TVO) for example, a British phenomena that did not exist in Germany and consequently with little information and no German term for it at all. Bringing the skill of working independently from university has been quite helpful for finding out about all the special facts on tractors I could not really have known before I came here yet still needed for a premier translation.

Then again I could develop certain skills during my placement of course. Especially my written communication skills were quite demanded, even though more my German ones when trying to appeal to German Vapormatic costumers in translating the website. I actually think it rather difficult to find the best German expression while speaking English the rest of the time. Very much to my satisfaction I have been involved by the marketing department in nearly every meeting they held during my stay. On my first day at Vapormatic I spoke to my supervisor about my upcoming tasks at Vapormatic, in which ways I would be prepared to do them (e. g. through a contrastive translation course I had just successfully completed or preceding work experience) and what skills I most likely still needed to acquire while working on special tasks. In a meeting about the newsletter that was to be introduced for the UK stockists I could even offer some own ideas about the size of textual elements and general design to appeal to customers because we spoke about that in the public relations course I attended back in Germany. It was very pleasant indeed to experience that what I have learned in my advanced courses from Student & Arbeitsmarkt would correspond so well with the working practice. Getting an insight in to the
communication strategies within the company as well as with customers has been really supportive to my understanding of marketing procedures in general. As I am aiming at the only recently introduced bachelor degree I am also quite familiar with tight timings and thus I did not have any problems organising my work time. Even though translating is a rather time consuming process I feel that I have managed to do a reasonable amount of work in the time and circumstances given. It has been really helpful that it was left up to me to organise my work individually. Thus I could start a swift translation in the morning, rework it a first time and then leave it alone for at least some hours or even until the next day to rework it a second time with a fresh perception and having a more lucid point of view with some distance to my own words. In those gaps on one text I would be either starting or finishing the translation of a different text and also work on the workshop tools catalogue. Obviously I have been using MS Office Word for the translation and for the preparation of the tools brochure I used MS Office Publisher – software I have not been using before. But as I am working with the Microsoft products all the time it was not too difficult to understand how it works and I was getting on quite well with it. I was also able to create my own suggestions for a newsletter with software called WYSIWYG. As I had never even heard of this before it was quite challenging but also extremely absorbing to work with it and thus being involved in the creative process of designing a newsletter.

As I could use the knowledge I gained in my public relations course in the summer term of 2007 only occasionally at my first study related placement in the Department of Arts and Culture of the city of Munich, I have been really eager to put what I have learned into practice this time. Apart from my main fields of study this very much caught my interest. I wanted to get an insight into the marketing strategies of a company as well as sharing my own knowledge on that matter. More precisely I wanted to get an insight on subjects like advertising, corporate design, internal pr, press relation, promotions and product placement in a real marketing environment. I have been quite excited about broadening my horizon by working in a foreign country and in a business I have not even been very familiar with. I just wanted to make the most of this challenge. That is learn as much as possible and get as much practice as possible just by being involved in daily work and life routine. After 3 months working experience with a British company in France and since then successively improving my English skills at university, I really wanted to put them to the test in an English speaking environment once more. And as the English language is so very important for my studies I certainly wanted to advance even further with it. But apart from enhancing my personal development I also wanted to see myself being profitably involved in the daily work routine. I have not been too sure about how much responsibility the company would give to a German student and likewise how much I could be involved at all, but I definitely wished for being of assistance to Vapormatic as well and thus make my stay a profitable interdisciplinary exchange for either sides. Especially one of my goals – that is to be profitably involved in the daily work routine – I think I have definitely achieved. By translating the company website into the German language I could help to make Vapormatic more accessible to German customers as well as making the German market potential more accessible to Vapormatic. Also practicing my translation skills will undoubtedly help me with my
further studies in the field of comparative literature. My language skills have been praised by a lot of people at work as well as by people I met for leisure time activities and also I am happy about noticing myself that I got better and better throughout my stay. It has been very helpful to me that everyone at work was so very kind and supportive. They would patiently answer all my vocabulary and comprehension questions. This has certainly been a very endorsing aspect in my progress. I have been involved in nearly every meeting that took place during my time at Vapormatic and thus I have been able to practice my communication skills and gain knowledge of further marketing speech. I wanted to discover what it would be like to work in the marketing department of a British company and if doing this would be an option for me in the future after finishing my studies. So I have. Even though I would certainly describe my experience at Vapormatic a very positive example of how it could be, I think I also got an impression of the overall living and working conditions in the UK. That is exactly what I came here for and what should definitely help me to make future decisions concerning my own life. In short I would say this experience has been very worthwhile and inspiring for me. I learned a lot of things about myself as well as general things that can help me not just in achieving my final degree but also in future work places. What furthermore endorsed my experience was certainly living with my host family. They were simply great. As well as all my colleagues they were very helpful and included me just perfectly in their daily life. When planning to do a placement abroad I would definitely advise everybody to try to stay with a host family rather than on one’s own because it makes life not only easier but also even more interesting and the stay much more rewarding.

Maria Redmer 24 April 2008