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Students Gain Real-World Experience in Marketing Case Competition

By Allie Jeppson



It's not every day in the business world that men and women are encouraged to sport beards.

It happened on Friday, Nov. 30, however, when students participated in the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business's first-ever Marketing Case Competition, for a client whose specialty just happens to be beards.

Beard Beanie, a local company that produces beanies with knitted beards, was the client in this competition that heard and judged five marketing pitches from participating student groups who had only just received the case-study information the night before.

With only about 18 hours to put the pitch together, each group did very well in its presentation, said Mitch Duffin, who founded the company with his wife Taralee.

"USU really has some talent," he said. "Everybody had great ideas about how we could move forward, and that was exactly what we were looking for."

Though each team had valuable ideas and insights, one team, named Team Handlebars, rose above the rest and took home the first-place prize of \$500. Adam Stewart, Andrew Loaiza, Douglas Ward, Matt Miles, and Michael Gallacher, the members of Team Handlebars, received their very own Beard Beanie, as well, for their hard work.

This team not only had great ideas but they also had the research to back it up, said Sterling Bone, a Huntsman assistant professor of marketing.

"The winning team, within the time constraints, didn't just brainstorm new ideas, but they conducted survey research and customer interviews," he said. "The research and interviews supported the direction the team took."

To gain insight and information on the product, the team of five men, who are all roommates, worked through the night with very little sleep. During that time they conducted surveys, interviewed people, and practiced until their final presentation at 1:30 p.m. the following day. Though there was a lot of work involved, the team members said it was worth the effort.

“We actually provided some real help and assistance to the company,” said team member Adam Stewart. “To be able to give them some tips that they can actually use is pretty rewarding.”

Providing students with real-world experience was one of the goals of this first case competition, Dr. Bone said.

“Our goal was to bring relevance and reality to Huntsman students,” he said. “I wanted to challenge our students in a way that simulates the real world. A case competition deals with a company’s real-life situation and challenges what students understand about business and marketing within a time restriction.”

Brynnly Bagley, a senior graduating in marketing, and MBA student Ross Menlove, who both helped to organize the event, agreed with Dr. Bone.

“It was a really great learning opportunity,” Brynnly said. “It’s really amazing what the students can do for a company by applying the skills they’ve learned in the classroom.”

With the success of this first competition, the Huntsman School of Business hopes to host the marketing case competition once every semester, Dr. Bone said.

“It’s building a tradition and creating a culture where learning happens outside of the classroom,” he said. “We sometimes don’t understand how great our students are until we expose them to these types of settings and real-world challenges. Watching the students succeed was our biggest success in this competition, and they’ll continue to excel each semester.”