

BEN ELLIOTT

**UNDERGRADUATE PLACEMENT STUDENT
TO INTERIM E-COMMERCE CATALOGUE MANAGER**



In this interview, Ben tells us about his 12-month placement as an Undergraduate Placement Student to returning to Centerprise, post degree, as an Interim E-Commerce Catalogue Manager ahead of returning to University to complete a Masters.

When you returned to University, what knowledge did you utilise that you gained via your placement with Centerprise?

My general attitude changed quite a lot; I was on for a 2:1 but left Ci thinking I could get a First-Class Honours. Thanks to my change in attitude, a better work ethic, attention to detail and learning how to work properly, this helped me to achieve a First. As before my work placement, I didn't spend much time thoroughly analysing the questions, so by doing so, by breaking it down and planning my work, I could attack it one stage at a time.

I think speaking to other people on placement helped as well. I spoke to a former placement student who subsequently returned to the business in a permanent capacity, who advised me to take my work routine back into University life, because then you can do the full working days, be organised, disciplined and still enjoy yourself. Therefore, I worked 10-6 Monday to Friday, until the workload increased, and then it was 7 days a week!

Talk through what you have been doing in the past 6 weeks in E-Commerce as a Catalogue Manager.

I was invited by the Director of Defence to come back on a short-term basis to help review and update the online catalogue for Defence. This is where all Defence customers procure the technology items that they require, so I was updating the pricing, item descriptions and removing any items that are discontinued.

What is your greatest success at Centerprise either undergrad or as a graduate?

As an undergraduate, my greatest success was winning a £35,000 order within the first couple of months of starting.

I then worked on a tender project under the guidance of a colleague, which was about attention to detail, because the customer wanted over 100 items. This was the first tender I helped with. The task required hours of sourcing, looking at where I could get the best price from and factoring in the availability and delivery constraints. One of the suppliers accidentally delivered 10 boxes of products to our office in Basingstoke, so I had to figure out what to do to get it shipped on to our Production facility in Wales. Overall, it was a good learning experience.

What have you learned at Ci that has stuck with you the most?

Probably confidence and communication skills. I remember at the start of my placement that I was picking up the phones and talking to strangers about things I knew nothing about. I think it's about having confidence to ask for help, as every colleague I spoke to was helpful and gave me the knowledge I needed. The team were supportive.

When I started out, I remember having the approach that I didn't want to be doing minimal tasks, so I was learning about everything possible, being inquisitive and making sure I was asking as many relevant questions as I could. If I was unsure, then I challenged myself to figure out what to do.

What was your favourite part and most challenging aspect of your time at Ci?

My favourite part was speaking with our Defence customers and helping with their queries. I enjoyed the variety and each time it was a different enquiry or query to manage. In addition, just being in the Defence team was good fun and an enjoyable place to be.

The most challenging part was my lack of office experience, so adapting to this environment and learning the processes of the Ministry of Defence. The processes often varied between customers and so I had to try to overcome all this and work out the best way to fulfil their query/order.

What sort of scope for progression and development was there at Ci?

Well, obviously I was given the opportunity to return to Ci on an interim contract basis, which has been good. I have always had positive communication with the business about the potential of returning to Ci on a permanent basis, once I finish with academia.

What advice would you have for someone joining Ci?

The main one - be inquisitive and don't be afraid to ask if you don't know what's going on. If you don't ask, you won't learn. Be confident in what you are doing. We all make mistakes, everyone does. Enjoy every moment.

What are the tricks of your trade/ how did you succeed in your role?

Work hard and keep busy. Make sure you are being productive and inquisitive. Prioritise your workload. For Defence in particular, before you provide the customer with a quote, you need to identify if the item is in stock or can be delivered to the customer in the timeframe required. The delivery date can be critical to their projects so cannot be late.

What advice would you give to a graduates and undergraduates joining the business in a sales capacity, especially someone new to the industry?

Therefore, for me, I had never considered working with the MoD. I think because of that, it gave me a desire to learn because I didn't know the industry and I wanted to. So again, everything is linking back to being inquisitive and trying to learn as much as you can regarding the role to make yourself a strong asset to the team. You have to be productive, able to prioritise your workload and be confident in the way you communicate.

For undergraduates going back to University, I think it is important to understand that everyone can get a First. It's just about putting in those hours of work, whilst still making time to relax and socialise!