

Community Project Final Report

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Work-based Community Project: Taste Before You Waste, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Over the last six to seven weeks, I have been working closely with Taste Before You Waste in re-writing the initiative's website. A rapidly growing organisation such as Taste Before You Waste must ensure that its online presence is kept up to date and informative – it was my job to review and re-write the content that already exists on the current website and re-formulate it into a comprehensive package fit for publishing in the coming months. My job involved meeting with the other members of the board at least once a week to discuss the progress of the initiative, the direction we wanted to take it in, any important updates and reports back from functions or events that had been attended, and any ideas that we had for the content of the new website. I found these meetings useful in keeping me on track with my project. They also helped me feel integrated within the organisation after a relatively short amount of time – before long I felt part of the team and this encouraged me to contribute to the weekly discussions rather than just sitting back and listening. My community project tasks did not stop at just the website level, I actually involved myself in other areas of the initiative by helping out at the occasional dinner at De Meevaart, helping to organise and execute “Restaurant Day” in Flevopark (a day where anyone can open a restaurant in the city, in any location) and also by attending the meetings a few weeks before my community project commenced. I found this was a really useful method of becoming familiar with Taste Before You Waste before I had to start writing about the organisation. This is something that I believe proved to be invaluable – it really enhanced my confidence in my writing style and improved my ability to accurately capture the essence of Taste Before You Waste in the new website content.

As a final, concrete product, the new website will be mostly a portfolio of my writing with the occasional exception of external media such as infographics, photographs, quotations and manuals written by other members of the initiative. I feel that my activities have positively

contributed to the goals of Taste Before You Waste in that a considerably time consuming task of formulating new website content has been completed in a relatively short amount of time. With only a small board of less than five people, Taste Before You Waste relies heavily on the aid of volunteers and community projects/internships in order to achieve such goals. In terms of my actual accomplishments, I feel that the new website will tangibly launch the initiative into further growth, giving it the professional edge that it really needs and deserves, whilst hopefully providing a far greater body of information that will make it more accessible to those who are interested.

The organisation's goals are fundamentally based around spreading the message; "Taste Before You Waste!" Hence, it is crucial that they have the tools in which to expand their network and entice more people in. Through a well written, intensively researched and carefully constructed, professional website, I believe this goal will be far more attainable. In addition to this, I ensured that everyone who has been involved with the initiative, such as volunteers, partners, contributors, stores, charities and donators were mentioned or at least given a space where they are thanked for their co-operation. This will not only ensure that the relationship between Taste Before You Waste and the community in which they interact with is kept healthy, but it also gives something back to the local neighbourhood in terms of respect and gratitude.

I had never written a website in such a way before my community project with Taste Before You Waste. I am a keen writer, and I have blogged and written a small number of published articles, but taking on such a challenge was daunting. I realised upon starting the project that I did not have a great deal of experience writing in a non-academic tone. This initially proved to be a big obstacle, because rather than falling back into my comfortable, instinctive way of writing, like I would if I were to write a paper for example, I was forced to re-learn how to write for the task I had been given. I did this by doing some research into similar kinds of initiatives and reading their websites – I then decided to go ahead and start writing. The weekly meetings meant that I would receive direct feedback from the board members, and they would tell me if my writing style was suitable, if there was anything I was omitting from the content, and anything they thought could be improved. By the second week of my community project, I had become very comfortable with the new writing style, and began to get a feel for the new website. This is something I value highly, because during my studies at AUC I have been focussing more or less on academic writing styles, with the exception of a few creative writing tasks – I found it really insightful to branch out into journalism.

Another valuable skill learnt during my community project was time management. The nature of my role meant that I could work from home which gave me a lot of extremely appreciated flexibility. However, it did mean that I was at a greater risk of falling behind schedule and becoming miss-guided in my progress. I found that at the beginning my progress was far slower than it became. I think this was due to a few teething problems; getting used to the writing style, collecting information, organising myself and coming up with a schedule, and so on. However, I feel that I have really improved on my time management skills, self-discipline and motivation – something I desperately wanted to work on. It was very difficult at first to push myself to work when no-body was forcing me to do so. However, ultimately it was far more rewarding, and this sense of self-reliance is something I really value, particularly in my interest in perusing self-employment in the future.

As a Humanities major, focussing on the Philosophy and Culture tracks, I felt that working with an activist organisation such as Taste Before You Waste really gave me a more practical insight into real world humanitarian practice. At a first glance, Taste Before You Waste may seem to be merely a platform in which food gets picked up from one place and dropped off at another, a place where there are a few weekly events and not much else. However this is not the case, instead I realised that there is a whole philosophy behind the initiative. Luana (the founder) has spent a lot of time thinking about and constructing the way in which the organisation is grounded and how it functions. To some extent, it has grown organically into the organisation it is today, but there has been a lot of conscious thought and hard work in the process. One example of this, is the “pay as you feel” mantra that Taste Before You Waste is renowned for. This was implemented for the very reason that the initiative does not want to put an emphasis on money making – it is not a business – instead the emphasis is on experience and education. By shifting the attention towards spreading the message rather than making a profit, it keeps a tight grip on the “consciousness building” goal that always seems to be at the forefront of Taste Before You Waste.

In evaluating my own work, I believe that I have completed my tasks to a sufficient level. I would like to think that the board are pleased with my writing, and are as enthusiastic as me about the new website being published. I made sure to contact Luana at any point that I had a query regarding the tasks I had to complete, and I believe that I met the demands of the other board members who monitored my progress during the writing process and constantly gave me suggestions for improvement.

With the benefit of hindsight, and the skills that I have learnt throughout the project, if I were to do it again there are a few things I would have done differently. Namely; I would have done my research on the websites of other similar initiatives before the month of June began. This would have given me a head start and I would then have spent much less time doing this as I went along. Perhaps this would have allowed me to achieve a more uniformed writing style in the end. Because I was learning as I went along during this project, when I read some of the content written at the very beginning of the month, it is perhaps less confident and concise than the later content. This is to be expected, however with more time or better time management I would have been able to go over the entire content more than once to rectify and build upon it. On the other hand, this website is not static. It will be very easy to go into the website and modify sections is necessary, so in that sense, I feel that my attempt is a good starting point if nothing else.

In my proposal for this community project, I expressed my desire to balance my time between the work-based section of it (writing the website), and the more hands-on, volunteer aspect. Upon completing the month, I have realised that most of my volunteering occurred before I began writing the website, this was mainly a time factor, and the writing was far more time consuming than I had first anticipated. I did, however, get to embark on some more practical tasks that I had not accounted for, such as visiting the stores on Javastraat who donate food every week. I took photographs of the stores and went in to interview the shop owners – this was something I found quite challenging due to language barriers, but it was definitely a learning curve nonetheless.

In addition, I found the volunteer work that I did before the community project officially commenced really set me up for what was to come – if I had not worked for Taste Before You Waste before writing the website, it would have felt somewhat contrived and naïve. I would not have had nearly as much of the experience or knowledge that I gained as a result of first-hand experience, and I was able to write from the perspective of an insider and not just an outsider. When it came to sections of the website that really needed a lot of persuasive talk and passionate writing such as the “Our Story” section, I found that my experience with Taste Before You Waste, and also familiarity with Luana helped me to get a real grasp on the core principles of the initiative – something I would have perhaps overlooked if I had only come into contact with Taste Before You Waste at the beginning of June.

Another expectation I had of my time with Taste Before You Waste was a deepening of my knowledge of food waste and the food industry in general. This is something I can definitely confirm to be true. In writing the website, I have been simultaneously researching a great deal

into food waste and the surrounding issues and I now feel far more aware of the crisis, but also of the solutions. It was a very powerful realisation to see how many other similar initiatives are out there, and how many people seem to be changing their lifestyle's in the name of promoting a more conscious and sustainable planet.

My project partner/supervisor, Luana, provided me with an abundance of useful information and links to help me learn about the problem of food waste. She was also really great at communication, consistently responding to emails of any questions I had. The rest of the board and I would work flexibly, which meant that weekly meetings were frequently negotiable. While we all had very busy agendas in June, we managed to work around one another's plans whilst still maintaining a good amount of contact time. For someone who is less comfortable with this kind of set-up, I could imagine that they would not cope well with the sometimes last minute change of plan. However, this is equally something I believe to be a worthwhile skill, as things do not always go as they are expected, and it is important to be able to salvage these situations and overcome them with confidence.

In regards to my long term career goals, I believe that this community project has made me reconsider opening my own initiative similar to Taste Before You Waste. It is still something I would love to do, however having a more insider perspective, I have realised the huge amount of time, effort, and ideally money that is needed to ensure that such ventures are successful. Prior to working with Taste Before You Waste, I had made the mistake of assuming that it was a relatively self-sufficient operation that needed little monitoring or care. However, Luana still consistently puts a lot of thought and time into making sure the initiative is moving forward, whether this is through manual work, or visiting functions in other cities – it is not something that should be taken lightly. It has made me realise that as long as the passion and dedication is there, these kinds of initiatives can be fruitful – it is only when volunteers let you down, or some events do not go as well as you had hoped that things start to crumble – but this is all part of the process.

Overall, I have thoroughly enjoyed my community project/internship with Taste Before You Waste. I have come to appreciate the amount of dedication that is required for projects to be successful, and it has inspired me to push myself in the future in setting up my own initiative to make a change. Not only has my community project been insightful, but it has been a rewarding experience both for me and the community I live in, and whilst I still do not plan on cutting myself loose entirely from Taste Before You Waste, I hope the final outcome of my work (the website) helps launch it into the sensational growth it deserves.