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End of Summer Reflection

From end to end, my summer program was one full of new experiences, struggle, learning, and growth. I completed a nine-week internship in Budapest at a startup that made vertical gardens and composting systems for urban areas. It was not through a specific school program, instead I designed it myself with the Shuford Program in Entrepreneurship at UNC. I found a startup I would like to work at, contacted them and worked out the details, and then hopped on a plane to Budapest in late May.

A brief description of the product would be helpful before I delve into what I worked on throughout the summer. The VermiGo is a combination of a vertical garden and a vermicomposting system, which is a composter that uses worms to break the organic waste down faster than normal composting. It can grow fruits, vegetables, herbs, and any other type of small, potted plant, and is meant to be placed in a kitchen or on a balcony in urban areas. This gives people with limited space living in cities the ability to compost and grow their own food. I thought this was an interesting concept, and I hoped to help this early stage startup spread the word to its target market in preparation for its release.

I worked on several different projects as an intern for VermiGo. During the first week, the team and I travelled to Slovakia to present at an environmental film festival. We set up a booth and prototype of the product and informed attendees how it worked. It was interesting to see people interact with the product and how they excited they were for its release. Hordes of people were signing up for the pre-release list, which was surprising considering Central/Eastern Europe has not widely adopted green practices yet. The next task I worked on was to develop partnerships with worm distributors in the target market areas across Europe so they could be

sold alongside the product on the website. After that, I contacted sustainability/green lifestyle Instagram influencers about promoting the product. The team and I decided that influencer marketing, coupled with Facebook ads, was the most effective way to reach the target market.

For the second month of the internship, I focused on creating specific Facebook ads, boosting the website's rankings in Google using search-engine optimization techniques, and tracking site traffic using Google Analytics. These tools were incredibly useful in connecting with the target audience and gathering data without having to even leave the office. I was alarmed by how much data about Facebook users is available through these ad campaigns, as users can be targeted for an advertisement based on their interests determined by their activity on the site. VermiGo was also part of an accelerator program while I was there, so I was able to attend events like pitch competitions, demo days, and mentoring sessions with experts. We attended several sessions with a digital marketing expert where we learned about all the different opportunities available for startups to advertise their products in a more effective way.

All of the projects I worked on provided me with some good insights into marketing and partnerships, which will serve me well as I approach my entry into the job market. Gathering data about the customers through online and in-person interactions and using it to improve the product and marketing efforts is the lifeblood of a young startup, and I saw how important it was first hand. Being able to work with a business of this nature also solidified my interest in sustainability and green practices. Not only is it better for the environment, but consumers are starting to look for environmentally conscious practices in the companies they buy from too, making it a smart business decision as well.

Since I was in Europe for the summer, I took advantage of the inexpensive transportation and visited several other countries on the weekends. Although it was my first time in Europe, I

was able to visit some of the less popular places that I never would have anticipated going to before like Sweden, Slovenia, and Slovakia. In fact, I was even more surprised to find out that Slovenia and Slovakia were different countries. These trips proved to be more enjoyable than some of the more popular places I visited because the authentic culture was preserved better than a lot of the tourist traps I found myself in in other countries. One weekend, two other brothers of Chi Psi living in other European countries for the summer were able to visit me in Budapest, and we all met up in Amsterdam several weeks later. Learning about the rich history, enjoying traditional cuisine, and visiting attractions that made each country unique made these quick weekend trips incredibly informative and exciting, and were a great supplemental learning opportunity outside of my internship.

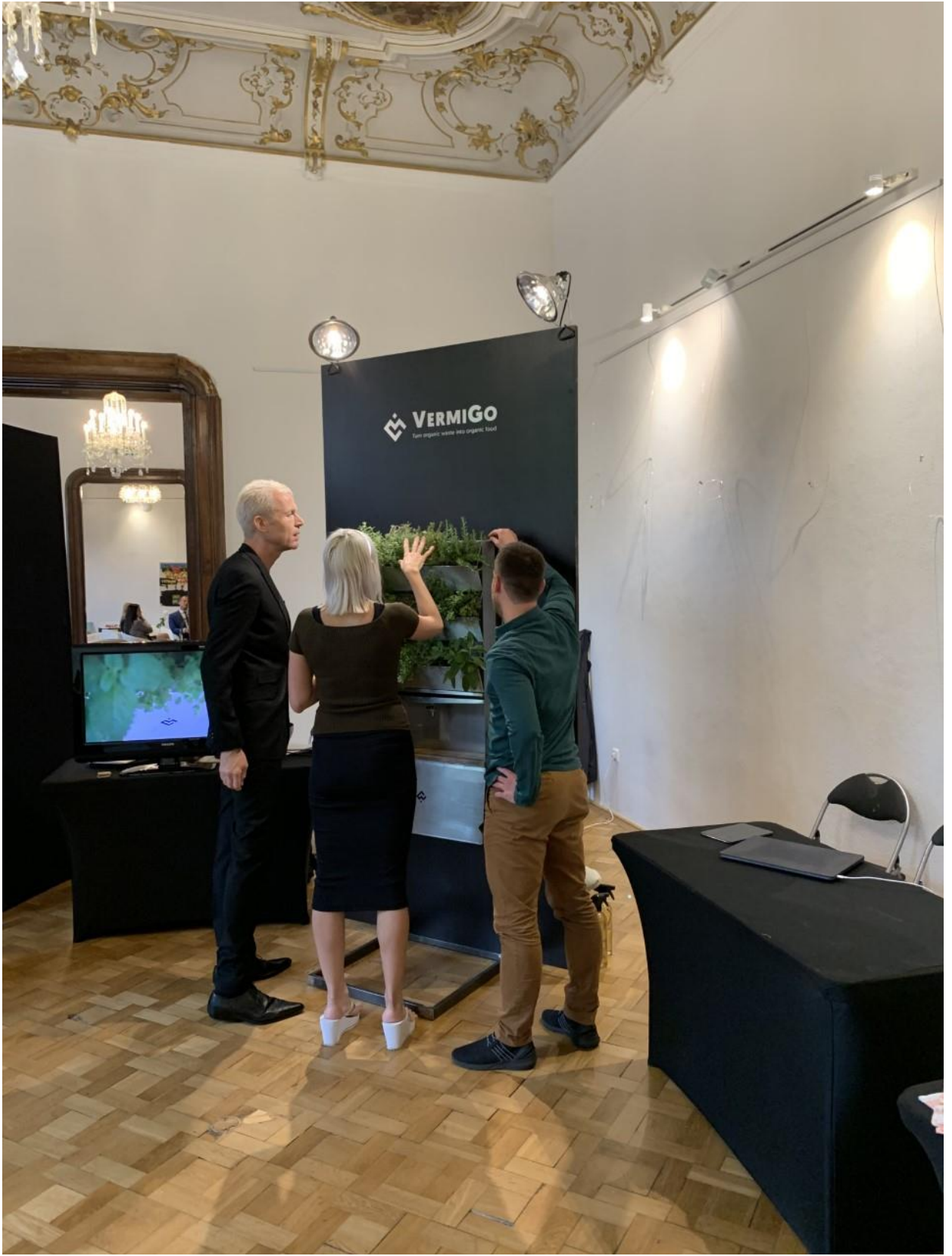
Living by myself for nine weeks taught me to be more self-reliant. I couldn't count on someone else to take charge of a situation and had to do it myself or else I wouldn't accomplish what I set out to. This was a valuable lesson for me, and a crucial one to learn before I take on the responsibilities of adult life. I learned the amount of value you get out of something is always correlated to the amount of effort you put in. This is a lesson I've heard hundreds of times, but seeing it in practice every day made me appreciate it's simple but powerful lesson all over again.

This summer was everything I hoped it to be and more. I learned new skills that will help me in my career, was exposed to new parts of the world I had never seen before, and discovered new ideas that shifted my worldview. Most importantly, I think I grew up a lot this summer. As I start my junior year and start to take on more responsibility and prepare myself for the future, I am glad I had this experience to kick off that process. I'd like to again thank the Alpha Sigma Foundation for making this summer possible and turning something I only daydreamed about into one of the most educational experiences I have ever undergone.

Pictures:



An early prototype of VermiGo, now hanging on the office balcony



My coworker showing Danish zero-waste activist, Selina Juul, how the product works

12:51



VermiGo - Your Urban Oasis

August 5 at 3:40 PM · 🌐



Klímainnovációs Közösség

August 1 · 🌐

Have you heard of Vermigo? The startup produces valuable nutrients for plants from accumulated organic kitchen waste via vermicomposting. The founders combined composting with a vertical herb garden, making the prototype to be a useful and aesthetic element of any kitchen. The startup got closer to make its dream come true with the EIT Climate-KIC Accelerator powered by KPMG Program, with a total of € 8,000 non-refundable grant so far. Do you want to develop your **#greentech** idea? Apply to our incubation program by 10th September, for more information check out our website: <https://klimainnovacio.hu/en/programme/accelerator-program-for-startups-powered-by-kpmg>



KLIMAINNOVACIO.HU

A Vermigo vertikális kertje egyedi megoldást nyújt a városi komposztálásra



Write a comment...



A Facebook post about a 5,000 Euro grant Vermigo won at an Accelerator pitch competition



Fellow Lodgers Will Batchelder and Christian Gillespy paying me a visit



View over the Danube River and the two sides of the city, Buda and Pest