

Sunk in Sacramento*

You are a 2001 graduate of BTU (Beaver Technical University), the top engineering school in the country, with a degree in marketing from the Loans School of Management. In the summer between your junior and senior year, you interned with Course Management International (CMI). CMI, a five-year-old German company, developed and now sells educational software that helps faculty manage many of the administrative tasks associated with teaching a course. For example, CMI software can store a photo of every student in a course, and when the instructor clicks on a particular photo, it can provide him/her with demographic information on that student, a list of all his/her grades, and a sample of his/her assignments.

As the marketing intern, you worked directly for Mark Compton, the Director of North American Marketing. Compton is 35 years old, married, and has an MBA from Loans. You did fairly routine tasks in the office, but your communication skills, analytical abilities, and earnestness caught Compton's eye. He told you to keep in touch during the school year, and you did. In March, he invited you to apply for the position of Marketing Coordinator. You were hired in April and began work right after graduation. You and Mark continued your good relationship, and your responsibilities increased accordingly.

In October, four months after you arrived at CMI, Mark announced he was resigning. His wife, a zoologist, had received a fantastic job offer to breed rare pygmy kangaroos at the New South Wales Zoo, and they were moving to Australia in four weeks. However, Compton negotiated an arrangement with CMI to remain as a marketing consultant. When he left he said to you, "Let me know how you are doing, and if I can ever be of help, get in touch."

To replace Compton, CMI promoted Berndt Hausman, Associate Marketing Director in CMI's headquarters in Breslau. You soon discover that Hausman is a much different kind of supervisor than Mark was. For example, he is much more formal with you, asking you to address him as "Mr. Hausman." He is also a stickler for detail and wants everything to be done according to his precise directions.

A month after Hausman arrives, there is a regional trade show for educational software in Sacramento, California. You have already been to two of these kinds of shows with Mark, and you tell Hausman this. He is happy to hear it because he would like you to go to this one alone since he is still trying to get the office "in order." You are pleased to accept this responsibility because it will give you an opportunity to prove yourself to him. You get everything ready for the show and leave for Sacramento.

Upon arriving, you check your e-mail. There is a message from Hausman with the subject line, "Important. Read Immediately!" You open the e-mail to read a very curtly

*Based upon a true incident. Names and places have been changed. © 2002 Lori Breslow, Sloan Communication Program.

worded message that states you have not “outfitted” yourself sufficiently for the trade show—specifically, you have not brought enough promotional packages, demo CDs, or laptops. The e-mail says Hausman is sending more of each to you via overnight mail.

You are confused, if not stunned. You know you are well supplied because you brought exactly the same amount of material that you and Mark had used at other shows. You don’t see any reason to send anything more, and you compose a quick e-mail back to Hausman telling you this. You receive the following e-mail in reply:

Obviously, you and Mr. Compton had not been reaching enough potential customers at these trade shows, which is why you had sufficient materials. As per my earlier e-mail, I am sending—via overnight mail—an additional number of our promotional packages, demo CDs, and laptops. This expenditure, I’m sure you realize, will cost the company hundreds of dollars, and I expect all of the promotional material to be distributed.

You notice Hausman has copied the Director of the North American office on this e-mail. What do you do now?

Your Task

Create a communication strategy to deal with this situation. Decide:

- With whom will you communicate?
- When?
- For what purpose?
- What medium should you use?
- What should be the content of your message(s)?

Be sure to factor in credibility and context.