SMU team bound for Paris

KELVIN SAM talks to the winners of the S’pore leg of the Trust-Danone business competition about their winning strategy, business case competitions and studying in French cafes.

They spoke with polished ease, their slides shot with professionalism and their business strategy seemed flawless. They were not professional consultants but to the untrained eye, each of them looked every inch the confident authority on business strategy.

Jeremy Tay, David Naidu, Zhang Kai Xiang, Joel Yong and Yock Siang are the new winners of the Trust-Danone competition. Also known as Team Zeith, the five Singapore Management University students will be flying to Paris in a few weeks to represent Singapore in the international phase of the competition. In the span of 24 hours, they made tough executive decisions in a simulated business environment, analysed a business case study and presented a strategic solution for the business.

The various teams were assessed on their ability to respond to the changing business environment, their business strategy and their presentation skills. When questioned about their winning strategy, the team humbly admitted that the competition was stiff and credited their victory in the experience of handling business cases before and the complementary nature of their abilities.

“The five of us are friends so working together was enjoyable,” said Kai Xiang. “We have always respected each other’s talents and this competition represented a perfect chance for all of us to come together.”

“Presenting a solution to a business case helps to synthesise everything a business student has learned. There is always an aspect of accounting, marketing and finance involved in a business case.”

— Jeremy Tay

“Most of us were involved in business case competitions before. I guess that helped,” added Jeremy.

According to the winning team, the main differences between their presentation and the other presentations was their professional styles and the practicality of their solution. “We suggested diversifying one business segment in order to raise cash for our strategic solution,” said Joel. “That helped in justifying the strength of our ideas.”

Apart from taking part in this competition, four out of the five team members are currently organising a similar business case competition. As a whole, the team felt that such competitions were becoming increasingly popular among business students.

“In the past, there used to be this notion that case competitions were very elitist and are restricted to only the cream de la cream. Three days, most students are interested in such competitions because they want to experience applying business concepts to realistic scenarios,” explained Jeremy.

Applying knowledge

“Presenting a solution to a business case helps to synthesise everything a business student has learned. There is always an aspect of accounting, marketing and finance involved in a business case,” said Yock Siang. “Every student can learn something new from a case competition.”

David agreed. “Taking part in such competitions allows us to apply what we have learnt in school. Sometimes the simplest answer can be the best answer to a company’s problems.”

With their sponsored trip to Paris coming up soon, all five of them were excited about the idea of visiting the beautiful French capital. They will be leaving for Paris in the week before their final exams.

“Being in Paris will be a nice break before the exams,” said Kai Xiang. “It might be a refreshing change to try studying in a French café!”

David summed up the group’s sentiments regarding Paris enthusiastically: “I always wanted to see Paris’s charming people,” said David. “This trip will be a dream becoming true for me.”

 Tight team: The friendship between the five SMU students. (Left to right) Kai Xiang, Jeremy, Yock Siang, Joel and David, was an advantage.