Winning a ‘lost’ contest

SMU trio bags L’Oreal award despite almost losing presentation material in taxi, reports BRYNA SIM

A DIFFERENT taxi, a different ride, and these three young women might not be smiling out of the photo at you. The three almost ruined their chances of winning the L’Oreal Brandstorm 2006 marketing competition when they left their presentation slides and brochures in a taxi.

But the kind taxi driver drove all the way back from Bukit Panjang to Four Seasons Hotel where the final presentations were taking place. The team managed to set up their materials, with just 15 minutes to spare.

If they were unversed by the experience, they did not let it show, and their team, “La Difference”, was declared winner of the eight finalist teams to develop a new line of products and an appropriate communications strategy for Lancome Body Care.

The winning team is made up of three undergraduates from the Singapore Management University. They are Lavinia Tan, 24, Rebecca Wong, 23 and Kuik Xiao Shi, 23.

Their product, Lancome Crysalis, comes in a range comprising the Crysalis Appret Cristal, Cryslis Serum Intensif and Crysalis Peaux Absolument Parfurl.

Different working styles

Intrigued by the products? Sorry, but the girls are adamant in declining to reveal more. And understandably so because the team will be flying to Paris next month to represent Singapore at the competition’s International Finals.

“Other teams might read about our products,” explained Rebecca apologetically.

On the other hand, the girls are more than happy to share their experience of working with each other. The comradeship between the three is apparent, as they stress repeatedly on the positive team dynamics and synergy. “After ironing out our individual working styles during the initial stages, we focused on each other’s strengths and capitalised on them,” said Lavinia.

They agree on each other’s unspoken roles. Lavinia is the idea-generator, who also keeps the group’s spirits up with her humour. Rebecca is strong in language, and helps to articulate the group’s ideas. She also keeps the group focused. Xiao Shi, as the “creative art director” of the team, helps to present the group’s ideas visually via glossy brochures and slick PowerPoint slides.

Although they each have different strengths and personalities, the differences never got in the way. Rebecca and Lavinia attribute this to their being friends prior to the competition. Still, according to them, more important than good teamwork are creativity, focus and understanding of the Lancome brand.

Creativity kicked in especially during the crucial periods. The night before the final presentation, Xiao Shi had a brainwave on what the team should wear during the presentation itself, so they went to print T-shirts with their team name on top for themselves. And during the presentation, the girls improvised a talk-show for the judges and audience.

“I think our team name, La Difference, says it all. We always sought to be different,” said Lavinia.

While attempting to stand out, the team also made sure that they remained focused. Based on their research studies, the team knew what their consumers wanted, so they sought to drive their message across. “We were passionate about our product because we believed it was what women wanted,” said Rebecca.

Based on their research studies, the team also wished to thank the doctors who endorsed their products, the taxi driver who drove back to deliver their presentation material, and especially their friend Jordi Ong, who helped them with the graphic designs.

To them, being able to compete in the International Finals is an opportunity to represent not only their university but also Singapore.