

Another feather in SMU students' cap

Four of its undergrads emerge champions at a top business case contest in New Zealand, writes **JAYME TAN**

WHEN three of my fellow university students and I heard that we have been selected to represent our institution at a prestigious competition in New Zealand – we had to come up with business solutions for local companies there – it struck us collectively that we know very little about the country.

Asked to name five New Zealand companies, and we struggled to do so. But after poring through gigabytes of information online in frantic preparation for our trip, we were confident that we could put up a good showing at the Champions Trophy Case Competition held on the campus of the University of Auckland.

Held annually, this year's competition from Jan 25-31 was a magnet for business case heavyweights from universities all over the world to gather and compete to propose sound business solutions that New Zealand companies could implement.

It might surprise some to learn that New Zealand, despite being tucked away in one of the furthest ends of the world, is actually quite similar to Singapore. Both, for instance, have a population of about four million and are heavily reliant on immigrants and value-added industries to gain prominence in the world economy.

On the eve of our flight, we could rattle statistics off the tops of our heads, such as how many plates of fish and chips an average male New Zealander eats a year, the average amount spent on household bleach or books read by the average 63.4-year-old half-Maori, half-Pacific Islander female. And who knew that New Zealanders are second only to the Japanese for working the longest hours within the developed world?

When the competition began, we were ready. My team members – social science and economics double degree student Alvin Amadeo Witrto, business management student Benjamin Koh Jer-Min and accountancy and business management double degree student Inna Chandika – tackled a variety of challenges.

We were able to address issues such as the need to attract local talent in the face of increasing migration, and the need for companies to move towards a more design-oriented approach rather than a manufacturing approach – just some of the many elements we tried to address in our solutions for the companies. The judges commended our solutions for being comprehensive and feasible. It was encouraging for us as we had only five hours



Big win: From left, Benjamin Koh, Jayme Tan, Inna Chandika and Alvin Amadeo after winning the Champions Trophy Case Competition on the campus of the University of Auckland last month

to work on each case to produce a deck of slides, financial spreadsheets and a presentation.

At the end of the competition, we did enough to score a convincing victory, sweeping both the Judges' Choice and the People's Choice awards. The latter is decided by participants and advisers who are not in the Final Round, giving them an opportunity to vote for the team that they felt gave the best presentation.

In the final round, we managed to defeat teams from the University of Washington, the University of California at Berkeley and the National University of Singapore.

What's more, our victory comes hot on the heels of another major victory by an SMU team. Last October, a group of students from the Lee Kong Chian School of Business emerged champions at the CIBER Case Challenge organised by the Ohio State University. SMU had won the same challenge back in 2005.

Looking back at the achievement in New Zealand, I found it satisfying to work with such a talented team of people, and to be recognised by judges from the business community as well as our peers. A random member of the audience even wrote in to our school after watching our presentation in the finals saying – "I have to say the quality of the

SMU's presentation was excellent, in terms of content, presentation and thinking outside the box."

As a graduating student, I have been very fortunate to have been able to not only represent my university, but also to have this experience as a capstone to my tertiary education. Business case training has been an excellent avenue for adapting my years of academic education into a real world business context and this success has given me the confidence to believe that my years in school have been well spent.

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