

Internship Report

Customer Service Assistant in the Events Department at MCI

Michalina Czapska

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University of Groningen, Campus Fryslân

BSc Global Responsibility & Leadership

Internal Supervisor: Josefine Geiger

External Supervisor: Eva Debinski

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Student: Michalina Czapska

S4819802

m.e.czapska@student.rug.nl

+48660411226

Gysbert Japicxstraat 37, 8933 BA, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands

Host company: MCI

Avenue des Arts 47, Brussels 1000, Belgium

Company mentor: Eva Debinski

eva.debinski@wearemci.com

University mentor: Dr. Josefine L. Geiger

j.l.geiger@rug.nl

Preface

For my minor of my Bachelor studies at University of Groningen, Global Responsibility and Leadership (GRL), I decided to do an internship at an international conference management agency in Brussels, Belgium. I was a Customer Care Assistant in the Events Department at MCI from August 2023 until February 2024. I assisted my team under the supervision of my mentor, Eva Debinski, in organizing conferences and high-level congresses around the world. My main tasks included handling registration of participants, processing payments, managing sponsor and exhibitor services, and membership support online as well as onsite.

I had decided to pursue this internship, as I wanted to use the minor time to improve the skills I already had from previous experiences in practice and in professional settings. In the past, I was involved in many projects and initiatives that involved organizing events, and therefore I wanted to broaden my knowledge in the path of my interest. I was eager to gain practical experience in a field that was different from the one I study, and learn about things that I could not learn at my faculty. Nevertheless, during my internship, I have found a fundamental connection between my studies and my work at MCI. While working on different events, I found out that there are aspects of the industry that could be developed to be more sustainable, which initiated my motivation to write my bachelor thesis on this topic.

Being motivated to gain as much knowledge and experience as possible in those 6 months, and thanks to my supervisor, Eva Debinski, who provided me with many opportunities to learn and explore the industry, my time at MCI has been incredibly enriching. This internship experience has given me great insight into the process of organizing professional conferences. The below report discusses the order of events of my internship, a description of the organization and my tasks. Also, I critically evaluate my development throughout the internship, and reflect the relation of my work to my university programme.

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Introduction

In the beginning of my second year of university, in November 2022, when the Board of Examiners provided my class with more information about doing a minor abroad in our third year, I immediately knew I wanted to pursue an internship. After two years of studying and learning theory, I was eager to gain more practical experience in the job environment. I searched for traineeships through various websites and online job search engines, and after looking at many positions I got specifically interested in the position at MCI. After sending my motivational letter and CV, I got interviewed via Teams on the 20th of June, 2023, and at the end of the call with the Recruiting Director, I was offered the position.

On Monday, August 7th 2023, I began my internship as the Customer Service Assistant at the Customer Service Unit (CSU) in the Events Department. I worked from Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, until February 2nd 2024. The total count of hours that I worked was above 1100h, which is double of the required amount of working at least 560 hours to receive the 20ECTs from the university. For a better record of my tasks and work, I kept a logbook with different milestones and moments during my internship that I updated every couple of days (Appendix 1). During the 6 month period, I had the opportunity to work on 5 different conferences, which were equally spread throughout the months of my internship.

The internship has given me the opportunity to work on high-level international conferences with people from different backgrounds and on different topics. I learned various aspects of project management and conference organization, including registration, sponsor and exhibitor management, and membership services. What is more, I improved my communication and interpersonal skills in a professional setting. Overall, the internship experience during my minor was a greatly rewarding job opportunity which sparked my interest in sustainable development of conferences.

In the following report, I will describe the host company, my tasks and responsibilities, and the progress in steps of my internship. I will conclude with a critical evaluation of my learning outcomes, and a connection of my internship to my university studies.

The Internship Organization

MCI Group's office in Brussels is an organization which consists of 4 different branches; MCI, Logos, Ovation and Business Bridge Europe (BBE). All of those companies specialize in different sectors, yet they all have a common ground in the events, travel and leisure industry. I worked at MCI, which is the branch that operates as a professional conference organizer internationally. MCI handles major associations (AMC), like WLPGA, Hydrogen Europe, or ILCA, as well as non-profit organizations, like SCDM, or Globalaw. MCI also helps in organizing conferences for the Belgian presidency council of the European Union, like the European Space Conference in cooperation with Logos and BBE. Logos focuses on public affairs and communication, and together with the BBE consultancy firm, they specialize in the sectors of mobility, defense, space, and aviation. Ovation is a branch company of Logos, which helps companies find travel destinations and organize the logistical matters of corporate trips.

MCI Group has 60 offices in 31 countries around the world, with the Brussels' office being one of the three major ones in terms of size, tasks, and clients (MCI, n.d.). The agency was founded by Roger Tondeur in Geneva, Switzerland in 1987, which is now led by his son, Sébastien Tondeur, being the CEO of the agency. With over 30 years of experience in the industry, MCI is known to be one of the biggest international agencies in organizing conferences. The biggest clients of MCI are usually pharmaceutical organizations, as this industry has the fastest growing developments, innovations and demand. Another big part of the conferences are focused around topics on energy, transport and artificial intelligence, which represent the main industries in today's world.

The company has 4 core values which they implement in everyday work: thriving through diversity, inspiring breakthrough moments, living by growth, and promoting innovation & entrepreneurship (Appendix 2). Thanks to MCI's strong focus on diversity and inclusivity, taking care of each other in a holistic way is a common value among all employees. The Brussels' office consists of a big part of international staff from Italy, Spain, Portugal, UK and other countries, with English as the main language of communication. Moreover, having won the EMAS certification, MCI strives to make a more eco-friendly future in daily work as well as in conferences.

The Internship

My work at MCI was filled with many different responsibilities and tasks, as I worked as an Assistant to the Customer Service Unit of the Events Department. The team I worked in handles registration, speaker, abstract and membership management. This set of responsibilities is a big portion of the process of conference organization, however the team only consists of 5 people. Every person in the team has their own clients and projects assigned to them, sometimes working on the project in two or more people. I would help every person with some of their tasks throughout the whole of the internship, however with time I began working individually on some projects. In the below section, I describe in detail the order of my tasks with time and the progress of my role at MCI.

Initially, the biggest part of my tasks was assisting with the registration process of participants for conferences. The registration process begins with setting up the registration site, answering attendee's questions on creating their profiles, updating registration reports, processing payments, and ends with sending certificates of attendance to participants. In the first month of my traineeship, I learned about all the different platforms and the procedures of registration. However, I only really experienced and understood the work when attending my first conference. The 43rd Dioxin Symposium in Maastricht, the Netherlands, from 10th to 14th of September, was the first conference I attended and helped with the registration process of participants onsite and on evening social events (Appendix 3). Having an in-person interaction with the delegates and participants, who I earlier helped to register online, who gathered from all around the world, showed me the consequences of all the administrative work that we did at the office. Seeing the results of our work in practice was very rewarding and eye-opening. After this conference, I also became more comfortable with registration management and more knowledgeable on this aspect of conference organization.

In the following months of my internship, I continued to work on registration for more conferences. During the LPG Week, 13-17th November in Rome, Italy, I also helped in the registration of participants. In addition, my role also focused on sending VISA Letters to participants from outside of Europe to be able to attend the conference in Rome. The process of sending VISA Letters consisted of the following steps: our office issued a formal VISA Invitation Letter in accordance

with the Italian immigration office, then I would fill those Letters with the participants' details and send them back to the participant or their country's embassy. The LPG Week gave me another perspective in working with a big client that the World Liquid Gas Association (WLPGA) is. Issuing the Italian VISA Letters also gave me insight into the administrative and bureaucratic system that is in place in Italy and the difficulties that some foreign attendees experienced with registering for the conference. Apart from that, my role was to update Excel trackers of participants who have or have not paid, or sent us their documents for approval. Those included for instance Student ID's if the attendee registered in the "Student" category, and so I had to verify their details to confirm they are able to attend the conference.

Moreover, I helped in registration of attendees at the European Hydrogen Week, which took place from 20th to 25th November in Brussels, Belgium. This congress had a division of participant categories, either being a normal attendee, or attending the high-level policy conference upon approval. This was an interesting procedure of registration, as it created a division of audience, and limited the diversity of the conference sessions by putting the attendees into separate groups. The approval came from the organizers of the conference; the European Commission, Hydrogen Europe and Clean Hydrogen Partnership. This was an interesting learning experience, as I realized that I could already identify the effectiveness of this registration process, after working on other conference registrations. This division not only made the registration process more difficult, but then also seemed ineffective as the groups mixed and attended all sessions. What is more, I assisted in registration at the 16th European Space Conference in Brussels, Belgium, 23-24 January, 2024. The conference was organized by the two branch companies of MCI Group, Business Bridge Europe and Logos, yet MCI helped in the registration process. This was my last conference I attended, and I could see the big progress I made in fulfilling my tasks, especially with registration. With every next conference throughout my internship I felt more confident and comfortable in my job, as I understood better the series of steps and the plan of action that would be in place.

Furthermore, one of my other major responsibilities was handling sponsorship and exhibition services for one of the biggest clients in our department; SCDM, Society for Clinical Data Management. Working on this client was a decision our team had to take fast, as this was not supposed to be one of my main tasks as an intern due to the importance and size of this responsibility. However, due to

the fact that in late September, a colleague who worked on the sponsorship and exhibition services of SCDM had left the company, my supervisor proposed to me to step in. I found this as a great opportunity to learn more about yet another aspect of conference organization. Within nearly 4 weeks I learned about sponsor and exhibitor management and prepared to be a support for them onsite in San Diego, USA. The 2023 SCDM Annual Conference took place from 8th to 11th October, and counted around 2000 participants and nearly 40 sponsors and exhibitors. I took care of the logistical aspects of managing the exhibition and sponsorship by managing the companies' profiles on our registration platform, processing payments, managing sponsorship packages, collecting deliverable content, and reserving their booths, while being in contact with the freight company. Also, I assisted our Corporate Relations Manager, Rik Bollaert, in sales of the next Annual Conference booths and sponsorship packages. This was a big step forward in terms of my work at MCI, as I suddenly took care of a different aspect of the conference that I did not know before. This experience was a pivotal moment in my journey at the company, marking a positive point in my interest in organizing congresses.

Moreover, with time I started to have more responsibilities as I had a wider knowledge of the job and different aspects of event coordination. Due to the small capacity of staff members in our department, I helped others with their tasks. In December I helped in managing memberships and the education platform of SCDM with webinars. I assisted in administrative work like changing the details of the webinars, prices and types of memberships on the associations' platforms. In January, I focused on sending invoices, contracts and collecting sponsor deliverables for the 2024 SCDM Annual Conference and EMEA Conference (Appendix 4, 5). Upon leaving the company, I had onboarding sessions for our new colleague, who took over my tasks, introducing her to the SCDM Sponsorship and Exhibition Services.

Evaluation

My minor not only taught me many different skills, but also provided me with valuable knowledge and practical experience that will be useful in both academic and professional context. Below is an analysis of the learning outcomes I have achieved and skills I developed. Also, I discuss what I would like to improve in the future with implications for MCI.

Skill 1: Event Organization Knowledge

During my internship, I learned that organizing a conference requires a lot of online preparations beforehand, which is mostly administrative work on the computer. Therefore, I realized that my job was based on daily work with many online softwares and platforms like Microsoft and Excel, Word, registration platforms, payment sites and bank reconciliation documents. Thanks to this, I have greatly improved my technical proficiency and computer skills. The other part of the conference organization however, requires a lot of logistical and analytical thinking. Organizing a conference takes a lot of planning ahead, cooperating with many parties, working with deadlines and a clear agenda of your schedule. Thanks to being a Customer Service Assistant and helping in exhibitions and sponsorships, I have learned the different steps and things that need to be done when, and how.

Skill 2: Professional Communication Skills

Another major aspect of the conference organization is professional communication. During my time at MCI, I have greatly developed my skills in business language and etiquette. Having to work with high-profile individuals and companies in professional settings, I considerably improved my communication skills in both writing and speaking. As I had daily e-mail contact with participants, sponsors and exhibitors, but also in-person onsite of the conferences, I became much more confident and fluent in speech and oral communication. Those skills helped me a lot in resolving problems, misunderstandings and stressful situations when working as a Customer Service Assistant. Being the first welcoming point of international professionals at registration desks at conferences, I practiced my cultural sensitivity and courteous speaking in professional environments.

Skill 3: Adaptability and Decision-Making Skills

Furthermore, organizing a conference well, sometimes may require a lot of last-minute changes and unpredictable situations. Dealing with such scenarios and adjustments has greatly improved my adaptability and fast decision-making skills. At the SCDM Annual Conference in San Diego for instance, during the meetings with prospective exhibitors I realized that the booth dimensions and prices were incorrect in the sponsorship brochure. Such a situation is of big importance, as the agreements were in progress with prospective clients, and so we had to resolve this misunderstanding on the spot. I changed the registration site then to prevent further issues, and kept calm and professionalism during the meetings with the sponsors. This experience taught me that there might be details that one overlooks onsite of the conferences, and with the skill of adaptiveness and quick decision-making, I was able to fulfill my work well. Even though at most conferences I did registration, every project and client is different, creating new challenges and opportunities to practice problem-solving. This provides a lot of possibilities to learn how to work with people flexibly.

My Contribution to MCI

The internship has given me a lot of valuable experiences, however I believe to have been a valuable intern at MCI too. I think I have contributed to the team and helped in the daily tasks and activities. Even though the company has interns every couple of months, I think I gave the team a different perspective on the work by being a young student and being new in the conference organization industry. I believe that having a specific background in governance from my Bachelors, coming from Poland, and being new to Brussels, gives me a certain positionality that has a different perspective. In a more tangible sense, by being an intern, I have helped in projects my teammates were working on, like helping with programme and abstract management of ILCA or SCDM, and membership and education services for SCDM. Also, I was a backup support for my teammates tasks in December, when I got the chance to help in registrations of conferences I did not work on before, like the Space Conference. To further contribute my work to MCI, I would like to share my Bachelor Thesis with the company to offer the academic product of my knowledge on making conferences more sustainable.

Connection with Studies

The Global Responsibility and Leadership programme has taught me to think critically and find ways to create more sustainable solutions. During my internship I found crucial connections between my Bachelor studies and my work at MCI in several ways. I believe that coming from a sustainability and governance-oriented academic background, let me notice many things that we discuss on a daily basis at Campus Fryslan, but that are not so known outside the university.

Firstly, I see many situations and aspects of working in the conference-organization industry that have implications to sustainability. I had the opportunity to see what it takes to be a sustainable and diversity-oriented company. MCI is known to have a big focus on sustainability, and received the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) certification. This is of great importance as MCI is transparent in their decisions and active in searching for better alternatives to make the company more eco-friendly, as they share their sustainability report on their website (MCI, 2022). Nevertheless, organizing events in a sustainable manner is a very complex undertaking, as it comes with working with many different parties at the same time, cooperating with the venue, the construction company, the hotel, the participants, and the client themselves. Sometimes the parties have different objectives, budgets, and perspectives, that is why maintaining the organizing agency, like MCI, strives to be sustainable is crucial in this process. During one of the conferences, the European Hydrogen Week 2023 in November, there were numerous protests organized by young activists who stood for clean energy and sustainable development. This was an interesting experience for me, as I come from a university which also focuses on transitions to sustainable energy and innovation. Nevertheless, during that time, I was part of the organizing team of the conference, and I had conflicting emotions. This experience let me see the strikes and protesters from the organizer point of view, which was a very insightful experience, making my interest in making conferences more sustainable even stronger.

Secondly, I noticed a strong relationship between being a Customer Service Assistant with the leadership skills I learned at GRL. The interconnectedness between those two is very intriguing from the insider perspective, as it teaches me to be very professional but also caring and helpful towards the client. I got to learn how to flexibly be a leader, and show boundaries to participants as an

organizer, but also be at their service and help as a part of the Customer Service Unit. I think this skill is a very important one when it comes to growing to become a future leader. The opportunity to be in the events industry for six months and work with professionals gave me great insight into the actual practices in place. Taking examples from people from my team and implementing them into my behaviors helped me in becoming a more professional leader on the conferences.

This internship let me use the skills I learned at GRL in practice in a professional setting. Noticing similarities between my studies and my work was a very eye-opening experience, as it helped me appreciate the knowledge and expertise I gained from my programme. Working at MCI equipped me with other skills that I did not learn at Campus Fryslân, like conference organization skills, adaptability, and being a professional rather than a student. I am eager to continue working in the events industry at MCI and learn more about conference organization. I would like to become more knowledgeable on sustainable entrepreneurship and making the industry even more eco-friendly.

References

MCI (2022). *Sustainability Report*.

<https://mcigroupsustainabilityreport.com/>

MCI (n.d.). *About us*.

<https://www.wearenci.com/en/about-us>

Appendices

Appendix 1

Logbook of my internship which I updated weekly.

Date	Description
7-11 August	Onboarding tutorials, setting my accounts on all platforms, having introductory meetings, had a first preview of a Registration Report, helped to manage speaker and member profiles for SCDM
14-18 August	Attempted to do a Registration Report, meeting about Dioxin, starting my work on VISA Letters for LPG
21-25 August	Designed attendee badges for ILCA, daily check of trackers and VISA Letters for LPG, had my official onboarding meeting with the HR team, helping with SCDM speaker profiles
28-01 September	Daily check of trackers and VISA Letters for LPG, found out that I will take over Sponsorship and Exhibition management of SCDM, preparing for Dioxin
04-08 September	Helping participants in registration for Dioxin, check of trackers and VISA Letters for LPG
11-15 September	Dioxin conference onsite
18-22 September	Continuing to check trackers and VISA Letters for LPG, but also answering to emails and calls from attendees with questions on registration, answering questions of sponsors and exhibitors for SCDM
25-29 September	More intense preparations for LPG, checking trackers and VISA Letters for LPG, following up with people who have not paid yet, answering more calls from attendees with questions on registration, working on the sponsorship and exhibitor deliverables for the SCDM Annual Conference, creating a registration platform for 2024 SCDM EMEA Conference
2-6 October	Intense preparations for SCDM and finalizing sponsor

	and exhibitor information about their booths, shipments, and deliverables, helping with a mobile application that will be used onsite of the conference
9-13 October	SCDM Annual Conference onsite
16-20 October	Concluding reservations of booths and registration profiles of sponsors and exhibitors for SCDM 2024 Annual Conference, updating the sponsorship brochure
23-27 October	updating the registration platform for 2024 SCDM EMEA Conference
30-3 November	Made a registration report for European Hydrogen Week, approved/declined attendees, following up with SCDM sponsors on their registrations
6-10 November	Intense preparations for LPG, finalising attendee questions and VISA Letter requests, practicing processing payments
13-17 November	LPG Week onsite
20-24 November	European Hydrogen Week onsite
27-1 December	Following up with outstanding attendee payments for LPG Week, updating registration profiles of 2024 SCDM sponsors and exhibitors
4-7 December	Helping with administrative and manual work on SCDM membership and education platforms
11-15 December	Working on my internship assignment of creating a manual for a mobile app, helping with SCDM membership and education platforms
18-22 December	Working on projects as back-up for colleagues who are on holidays, assisting in SCDM membership services and the education platform, finalizing contracts for 2024 SCDM sponsorship and exhibition, correcting the registration platform for the upcoming Space Conference
2-5 January	Working on payments for 2024 SCDM sponsorship

	and exhibition, working on the exhibitor manual for 2024 SCDM exhibitors, updating the registration site for the Space Conference
8-12 January	Updating the manual for a mobile app, updating the exhibitor manual, tracker and following-up about payments for 2024 SCDM exhibitors and sponsors
15-19 January	Preparing for the Space Conference, updating trackers for 2024 SCDM EMEA Conference
22-26 January	Space Conference onsite, Onboarding new colleague on SCDM sponsorship and exhibition, finalizing and correcting the manual for a mobile app
29-2 February	Onboarding new colleague on SCDM sponsorship and exhibition

Appendix 2

MCI's Core values.

Retrieved from:

MCI Group (n.d.).

<https://www.mci-group.com/>

Our Core Values

Thriving through diversity



What it means

We actively promote diversity within the mci group, and believe it is an essential source of richness and innovation.

How we achieve it

We nurture our people, supporting one another with care, respect and warmth.

Key behaviours

Open-mindedness | Respect | Nurture

RESULT:

Strong and shared relations that are profoundly human, and link and engage our global community.

Living by growth



What it means

We believe an mci group story should always end with a transformation, with a new way to see the world moving forward.

How we achieve it

We strive to stay ahead of the curve, embracing trends and championing evolution in order to create lasting change.

Key behaviours

Courage | Creativity | Leadership

RESULT:

Ambition as a force that allows us to accomplish our clients' dreams, and our own.

Inspiring breakthrough moments



What it means

As a connector, we believe that when people come together, magic happens.

How we achieve it

We're proud to act as a bridge between our talent, customers and partners. Together, we create the space for strong relations and shared breakthrough moments.

Key behaviours

Accountability | Discipline | Perfectionism

RESULT:

Trust, confidence and enthusiasm amongst our talents and clients.

Promoting innovation & entrepreneurship



What it means

Encouraging and enabling entrepreneurs, innovators and thinkers to thrive.

How we achieve it

We actively share the insight, knowledge and practical experience we've acquired over the last 30 years.

Key behaviours

Positivity | Humour | Collaboration

RESULT:

A joyful energy and intensity that radiates out to our clients, and to the world.

mci
group

Shape the future. Share the future.

Appendix 3

Photography documentation of me registering participants published on the official website of the Dioxin 2023 conference.

Google Photos (2023).

https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipMgg3YBdBuGzZDQdSOOrRJQFodNy3cknpM8aLWoS6yuU148G3AkCCYnIBHnH2c_N1Q?key=WG5yR3UyeTJCNVRNMGNGUINBZ0xJbE56RnFyRk5B

Retrieved from:

Dioxin 2023 (n.d.). *43rd International Symposium Halogenated Persistent Organic Pollutants.*

<https://dioxin2023.org/>



Appendix 4

Screenshot from the SCDMLive official website of EMEA Conference 2024 sponsor and exhibitor deliverables I collected; logos, descriptions, links.

Retrieved from:

SCDMLiVE. (n.d.). *EMEA24 Sponsorship*.

<https://scdmlive.org/emea24-sponsorship/>

The screenshot displays the SCDMLive website interface for the EMEA Conference 2024. The page features a navigation bar with the SCDMLive logo and a dropdown menu for "EMEA Conference 2024", with "Annual Conference 2024" also visible. The main content is organized into three sections: Gold Sponsors, Silver Sponsors, and Bronze Sponsors. Each section is separated by a horizontal green line. The Gold Sponsors section includes logos for MEDIDATA, PINNACLE²¹ BY CERTARA, and revvity signals. The Silver Sponsors section includes logos for BioForum (THE DATA MASTERS), Clinical (Powered by illuminate), and clincase. The Bronze Sponsors section is currently empty, showing only the placeholder boxes.

Gold Sponsors

- MEDIDATA
- PINNACLE²¹ BY CERTARA
- revvity signals

Silver Sponsors

- BioForum THE DATA MASTERS
- Clinical Powered by illuminate
- clincase

Bronze Sponsors

Appendix 5

Screenshot of one page from the published sponsorship brochure of the EMEA Conference 2024 that I helped to create.

Retrieved from:

SCDMLiVE. (n.d.). *EMEA24 Sponsorship*.

<https://scdmlive.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SCDM-2024-EMEA-Sponex-Brochure.pdf>

