

Making the jump from Science to cosmetics

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INVALUABLE EXPERIENCE: Tan Ee Von, a Bachelor of Food Science and Technology (Hons) graduate, may not seem a typical candidate for employment at a cosmetic company.

But entering L'Oreal's Brandstorm — a creative interactive marketing game for undergraduates — changed that.

The 23-year-old, who participated in the contest twice, is now a management trainee at the multinational attached to the Consumer Products division where she handles three of the company's brands.

"I first heard about the competition as a freshman in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in 2009, the year that a team from my university won the national title.

"Hearing of the team members' experience throughout the event as well as of their time in Paris, where they represented Malaysia at the International Finals, motivated me to give it a go in the 2011 edition," says Tan, who added she had only made it to the national semi-finals.

She had better luck when she joined a second time with new teammates in the 2012 cycle earlier this year — the group made it to the

national finals.

Coming from a Science background, Tan found she had to quickly learn marketing concepts from scratch as the contest called for contenders to create and market a new iconic product for the featured brand.

"We had to learn the basics, check out items that were already on the market and understand why some products are successful while others are not.

"We did tonnes of research to produce something that is not only feasible but also brand-aligned and innovative," says Tan.

While challenging, she values the experience and the skills she picked up.

One of her team members, Teh Eve Lynn, who also graduated from the same course, is now a management trainee in the cosmetic company's Luxury Products division.

"I was inspired to join by my seniors who represented Malaysia in the 2009 cycle; they were a great source of support and mentorship during my sophomore year when I was in a leadership role in AIESEC (a global youth organisation)," says the 22-year-old, adding that she was also thrilled to be able to enter the contest with two of her closest friends.

Teh was no stranger to marketing



Team Tutus from the 2012 cycle comprised (from left) Teh Eve Lynn, Tan Ee Von and Amy Wang Lin Ying

concepts as she took up modules in the subject as her minor and was happy to see what she learned put to practice.

"I learned a lot from the contest — from launching a new product line of an existing brand to developing an international marketing campaign — and it was great having the chance to collaborate with an advertising giant on the visual representation of our vision.

"After the contest finale, I walked out equipped with such priceless experience and skills that I could not have acquired elsewhere," she says.

Dr Serene Ng Siew Imm, a senior lecturer at the Department of Management and Marketing at UPM, sees the benefits students gain in competing.

The university was first invited to participate in 2008; Ng is among a group of lecturers who acted as ad-

visers to teams in the latest cycle.

While Tan and Teh had already demonstrated leadership, creativity and resourcefulness during their AIESEC activities, the contest made them more confident, outspoken and knowledgeable in marketing concepts.

Some other teams showed greater differences after competing, such as improved English proficiency, presentation skills and innovativeness.

Aside from being able to showcase their ideas and assess their capabilities against other teams in Malaysia and meet counterparts from other institutions, participants are also more visible to the multinational company's human resource department — which opens up job opportunities for them.

The chance to win a trip to Paris to represent Malaysia at the international stage is another incentive.

The contest — which has been running since 1993 — has a new twist for the 2013 cycle.

For the first time, the game is open to teams from non-partner universities under the Wild Card category.

The best international Wild Card team will join the country representatives at the International Finals in Paris in June 2013.

For details, visit www.brandstorm.loreal.com