

Margaret Finch Reflects on Being an Assistant Brand Manager for Novartis Consumer Health



MEMP Alumna

2011

By Shreevaishnavi Venugopalan



An undergraduate from Duke University, Margaret majored in biomedical engineering and English. Afterwards, Margaret felt the need to gain broad-based business skills and chose to pursue MEMP at Duke. She graduated in 2011 and joined GSK as an IT Development Program Associate. After working with GSK for a year and a half, she moved to Novartis Consumer Health as an Assistant Brand Manager. Her experience in data analytics and basic knowledge about marketing acquired from her coursework in MEMP helped her with this transition.

“Could you tell me about your day to day activities as an Assistant Brand Manager?” said Vaishnavi.

“I work on making the margin budgets for two cough/cold brands. I help manage the day-to-day operations of the brands. I manage budgets, forecast the brands’ monthly and annual sales and analyze marketplace sales data. It’s a collaborative role.”

“What in your opinion are the most valuable skills for high performance in your role?”

“The ability to derive meaning from data is a very important skill. You should be able to create a collaborative team setting. Also, creative thinking is a key skill that will help one perform well in this role.”

“What are the biggest challenges one can expect to face while working in this role?”

“As in any large company, it can be hard to get decisions made due to the bureaucracy of a large organization. Yet another challenge is being expected to forecast sales on day one of work. It can get a little overwhelming when you’re new to the role and organization.”

“What are some courses from MEMP that helped you in your role?”

“The marketing course particularly helped me in my role. It taught me marketing fundamentals that I use on a daily basis. I’m glad I took the Decision Models course, which helped me brush up on my analytics. The course in advanced finance was very valuable since I work very closely with finance.”

“What are some of the titles in the industry that involve similar work?”

The ability to derive meaning from data is a very important skill. You should be able to create a collaborative team setting. Also, creative thinking is a key skill that will help one perform well in this role.

The organization is big on collaboration, teamwork, and shared responsibilities. People are very supportive and helpful. The work hours are flexible and it is all about making sure the work gets done.

“Roles such as Marketing Analyst, Associate Brand Manager, Demand Planner, Forecasting Analyst, Marketing Associate and Pricing Manager involve very similar work. These are roles that students can look out for if they would like to work in this field.”

“Margaret, could you tell me more about the work culture at Novartis?”

“The organization is big on collaboration, teamwork, and shared responsibilities. People are very supportive and helpful. The work hours are flexible and the organization focuses on helping its employees realize their full potential. The organization is flat in terms of hierarchy and we get to interact with top management easily and frequently.”

“Can you share a valuable experience from Duke?”

“The team-based projects in MEMP such as the practicum and simulation assignments in marketing provided the platform to work with every personality type and people with varied work styles. These experiences focused on getting work done and on problem solving as a team.”

“Where do you see yourself professionally in the next five years?”

“I love what I’m doing. Marketing is a great experience. I’m looking to take the general management track in the future. I would like to move into a position wherein I will oversee different functions. I also believe experience with a technology-based startup would be a fun challenge, so I’m continuing to explore that option.”

“Thank you, Margaret. I think this interview will be very helpful for students, particularly those interested in finance.”

“No problem, Vaishnavi. I encourage the MEMers to enjoy being student and gain the most out of the MEM Program.” ■
