Experiential Work Report

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2008/08/01
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1 Introduction

This report provides an overview of my Japan internship experience as a Canada-Japan Co-op Program student. This includes an overview of my employing company, Sony Digital Network Applications (SDNA), as well as a description of the products and services that the company develops. Furthermore, a discussion of my roles and assigned responsibilities at SDNA shall be provided, including the knowledge and skills that I have acquired. Finally, my cultural experiences in Japan shall be discussed, which includes my living arrangements, my adventures throughout my entire stay in Japan, my recommendation to prospective Canada-Japan Co-op Japan students and my overall Japan experience.
2 Company Overview

Sony Digital Network Applications (SDNA) is a 100% subsidiary of Sony Corporation that specializes in the development of software applications for the digital electronic products produced by Sony’s consumer products groups. This includes, but is not limited to the following consumer products:

- VAIO PCs
- Walkman portable media players
- Bravia televisions
- Ericsson mobile communication devices
- Cybershot digital cameras
- Handicam camcorders
- PlayStation 3

SDNA was established in 2000 as a separate entity, with its aim to be the backbone for the Sony consumer groups, using software as the medium. SDNA does not sell software applications to the end customer per se, but the applications are integrated into the products listed above. For example, software applications developed by SDNA can be found in the VAIO laptop PCs. Essentially, SDNA can be considered as Sony’s private software contracting company accepting software development work requests from the Sony consumer groups, with the added benefit of being closely integrated with Sony’s expertise and technology.
3 Roles/Responsibilities in SDNA

From the beginning of January until the middle of August of 2008, I held a software development position in SDNA. The organization in SDNA is based on assigning software developers to teams with similar expertise or specialization. From this pool of similar technical expertise/skills, management assigns the developers to active projects that require their particular expertise. After the project is complete, the developer is returned back to the pool, where they will be immediately assigned to a new project.

The first project I was assigned to was an interim project for me that served to be training ground for my next project. This project was scheduled to complete at the end of February, and by that time, I would be transferred to my main project for the internship. The assignments I was given by the project leader were to prepare me for my work in my next project, which was to develop applications for the Cell microprocessor, an architecture that was jointly developed by Sony Computer Entertainment, Toshiba and IBM. The Cell processor is more commonly found as the core of the PlayStation 3 gaming console.

Software development on the cell processor differs quite significantly from software development on a normal general purpose microprocessor. This is due to the enormous 8+1 core computing capacity of the Cell processor. 8 of the microprocessor cores implement the Single Instruction Multiple Data (SIMD) instruction set, where multiple sets of data can be processed at once, as opposed to only one set. Therefore, becoming familiar with programming on the Cell processor requires some learning and practice.

The purpose of the next project was to perform software development contract work for a department of Sony responsible for developing applications for the Cell processor. In particular, MPEG-2/MPEG-4 related applications were requested. My assignment was to develop MPEG-2/MPEG-4 demuxing/muxing applications for the PlayStation 3 platform. This work involved expertise in the following technical domain:

- MPEG-2 systems
- MPEG-4 systems
- Cell processor programming (in particular, vector programming)
- Cell processor micro-architecture
- AVC video compression standard
- AAC audio compression standard
In general, my relationships with my co-workers and supervisors in SDNA were similar to the
relationships I had in my previous co-op experiences in Canada. The exception is that
there is a language barrier between myself and several of my co-workers. As with the
previous companies, whenever I require explanations, guidance, or any sort of aid, I can
freely and openly ask any of my co-workers, which they kindly accept and assist as best as
they can. During work hours, I mainly communicate in English to co-workers who can
speak and understand English, and simple, broken Japanese to co-workers who can only
speak Japanese. During non-work hours, I attempt to speak in Japanese with my
co-workers in order to improve my Japanese language skills.

3.1. Effects on Career/Academic Goals

One of the main reasons why I chose to participate in the Canada-Japan Co-op Program
was to benefit career-wise from working in a Japanese software development company.
My 7-month work experience with SDNA definitely had a significant impact on my career
goals.

The opportunity to work for any software development company, let alone a Japanese
company, provides an opportunity to expand your technical knowledge domain and also
explore different areas of software development that may be of interest to you. The fact
that I had the opportunity to work for an established Japanese software development
company significantly enhances this experience. Japan, as commonly known, has a
reputation for being one of the more technology advanced countries in the world. For this
reason, I was exposed to technology not available to the rest of the world throughout my
work term. I believe this exposure definitely enhances my marketability when searching for
a job after graduation. Furthermore, working in a Japanese environment provided me with
not only familiarity with the Japanese work culture, but also demonstrates my ability to adapt
to foreign environments, an experience that would be invaluable for future positions that
require travelling overseas, especially in Japan. This Japan work experience has
confirmed my interest in pursuing a career that may involve travelling to offices around the
world. An example position may be a software engineer in a technical support role who
may be dispatched to branch offices or customer sites overseas.
4 Living in Japan

4.1. Living Arrangements

My accommodations for my 7 month stay in Japan were generously provided by SDNA, which was an apartment-hotel called Tokyu Stay in Gotanda, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo. I was assigned a fairly small western-style room, but included all the amenities that I needed like: television, microwave, safety deposit box, washing machine/dryer, air-conditioner, internet access, and kitchen. Pictures of my hotel room are as follows:

Mini Kitchen
Breakfast is provided every morning to hotel guests by a nearby restaurant called Jonathan’s. The hotel is about 10 minutes away by walking to the building I work in.
Gotanda, though not one of the downtown districts of Tokyo, is a fairly busy neighbourhood. Everything you need, including supermarkets, convenience stores, pharmacies, restaurants/izakayas, fast-food restaurants are within walking distances away. The neighbourhood is centered around the JR Gotanda station, which is one of the stations on the well-known, busy Yamanote line (Tokyo's loop line).

The two main downtown districts of Tokyo, Shibuya and Shinjuku, are within 15 minutes away by train.

4.2. Cultural Experiences

4.2.1 First Taste of Downtown Tokyo

The first district in Tokyo that I was visited was Shibuya, which is a busy shopping, entertainment and business district famous for its five-way pedestrian crossing. Having lived in Vancouver my entire life, I was overwhelmed by everything surrounding me: the bright, neon lights, the crowd of people, tall buildings, large television screens, huge intersections.
It was definitely new and exciting for me at the time, and found myself just walking up and down street after street, not having a particular destination in mind, just following the neon lights and crowds of people. This feeling of overwhelmingness and excitement, and memories of neon lights surrounding every square meter of the area will be one that I will remember most of my time in Japan.

4.2.2 First Taste of Traditional Japan

The first time I visited the more traditional areas of Japan in the Kansai region, I immediately noticed the huge contrast with the lively atmosphere of downtown metropolitan Tokyo. Despite my awareness of the existence of cities that exemplify urban Japan and traditional Japan, it still amazed me how the two contrasting atmospheres co-exist in the same country, in the same era. I was also amazed at how well the old temples, shrines and castles are preserved despite being founded more than 1000 years ago.
Todaiji Temple in Nara

Yasaka Shrine in Kyoto
4.2.3 Hanami

Being a Vancouver resident most of my life, I am no stranger to the blooming of cherry trees, and thus, parks overflowing with cherry blossoms in Japan, although beautiful were not unfamiliar to me. However, what was a big surprise for me during cherry blossom season are the crowds of people who sit under the cherry trees with a huge group of friends (as many as 30 people!) drinking alcohol and having fun. I remember enjoying the unique atmosphere during night time at Ueno kouen of groups of friends having fun, and the illuminated cherry blossom trees making this time of the year in Japan a truly must-experience for locals and foreigners alike.
4.2.4 Sanja Matsuri

One of the most amazing things about Japan is the countless number of festivals that occur all year round. I decided to attend one of the biggest festivals in Tokyo called Sanja Matsuri, which occurs every year in the Asakusa district of Tokyo. Many of the festivals in Japan are very elaborate, as dance performances, colourful costumes, open-stall food vendors, and huge crowds of people are typical sights. My experience at one of biggest of these festivals in the largest city in Japan is a memorable one.
4.2.5 University of Tokyo’s Go-gatsu Sai Festival

Go-gatsu Sai is an annual festival organized by the students in the prestigious University of Tokyo. I was made aware of this festival by a co-worker, and the fact that it was a student-organized festival, made it much more unique from the other festivals in Japan. One of the reasons I wanted to attend Go-gatsu Sai was to meet some of the students in order to understand the similarities and differences between one of the most prestigious schools in Japan and my home university, University of British Columbia.
A band performs on a stage in front of Yasuda Auditorium

University of Tokyo Software Engineering Students

4.2.6 Climbing Mount Fuji

Climbing Mount Fuji is a popular tourist activity during the summer months so it is almost expected that conquering the highest mountain in Japan is one of the items on a Canada Japan Co-op Student's to-do list. Most climbers embark on their hike starting on the fifth
station at night time in order to catch the sunrise on the peak in the next morning.

A typical sight near Mount Fuji’s eighth station

Watching the sunrise at the peak of Mount Fuji
4.2.7 Okinawa

Okinawa is the southernmost prefecture of Japan found between mainland Japan and Taiwan, and is a popular resort for Japanese and foreign tourists alike. Okinawa is famous for its beautiful beaches and coral reefs, so naturally, scuba diving and snorkeling are popular tourist activities.
Zamami Island

Observation Area on Zamami Island
4.2.8 Hanabi

The end date of my 7-month internship in Japan was in August, which is hanabi (fireworks) season in Japan. Typically, in Vancouver, there are a few fireworks events that occur every year, which are usually on holidays (such as New Years, Canada Day, BC Day). In comparison, in Japan around August and September, fireworks occur fast and furious, typically one per week in urban areas such as Tokyo. What better way to celebrate my enjoyable, once-in-a-lifetime experience in Japan by attending several Hanabi events around Tokyo.
Viewing spots are reserved hours before the start of the fireworks
Sumidagawa Fireworks Festival
5 Recommendation to Prospective Students

One of the main reasons why I (and other students) chose to participate in the Canada-Japan Co-op Program was not only to learn about and experience the Japanese culture, but to be able to live, adapt and face challenges in adjusting to the new environment. In facing adversity such as language barrier, solitary, and/or a lack of a comfort zone, and being able to figure out how to overcome these difficulties is an experience, be it good or bad, will result in personal growth, or at least allow one to understand more about him or herself. As for me, my experiences in Japan resulted in both personal growth and further understanding of myself, something that made me a different person from when I first came to Japan. Prospective students should view this program as an opportunity to understand and improve one’s ability to adapt to a new, unfamiliar environment. This is a unique life-lesson learning opportunity that does not too often present itself in your lifetime.

Another possible concern of prospective students is the anxiety that may result from entering a new culture. In particular about Japanese culture, it is common for many foreigners to Japan to experience varying degrees of culture shock when first entering Japan. I myself experienced a moderate amount of culture shock due mostly to the language barrier, but also unfamiliar customs, behaviours and habits. It was definitely a challenge being comfortable in a new environment in the beginning months of my internship. After living 7 months in Japan, I don’t feel at all unfamiliar with the Japanese culture, and have managed to find a comfort zone in Japan. From my experience, being able to find a comfort zone is key to a successful experience in Japan. The time it takes varies from person-to-person, environment-to-environment. It is normal for frustration to set in when facing these challenges. My recommendation is to not focus too much on adjusting to the new culture, but to relax, be yourself and enjoy all experiences that Japan has to offer. You will see that finding a comfort zone will occur naturally.
6 Overall Impression of Living in Japan

Now as I look back at my 7-month internship in Japan, I can proudly to say that Tokyo is my second home. The word “home” carries a connotation of comfort and safety, and is often thought of as a place or time where one grew up. For me, Tokyo covers all these aspects and will no doubt be a place I will return to in the future.

The most enjoyable and rewarding part of my internship in Japan is the whole journey of establishing a life for myself in a new culture. From initially being overwhelmed by the unfamiliar environment, to establishing new friendships and learning the different aspects of the culture, it was truly an unforgettable experience for me. At the end, it gave me confidence that when placed in a new, unfamiliar culture, I would have no problems overcoming the challenges that face me and establishing a comfort zone for myself.

Specifically, I loved the dynamic, lively atmosphere of downtown Tokyo. The bright neon lights, huge crowds of people, restaurants and shops galore, and street band performances contribute to an atmosphere that radiates enjoyment, excitement and exhilaration. Though the metropolitan city life is not for everyone, I have no problems living there for an extended period of time.

I would like to end this by thanking the Canada-Japan Co-op Program for providing this unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me. To say that being able to live and work in Japan for a significant period of time is an amazing opportunity for me is an understatement. I would ask that the Canada-Japan Co-op Program continue the exceptional work that they do, as I would proudly recommend this program to my peers.