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APPLES Reflection Essay
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My experience with our APPLES client, Keep Durham Beautiful, was a rollercoaster. When I was first assigned to this client, I was a bit disappointed because this was the organization that I was least interested in. Little did I know that this challenge would allow me to grow much more because I would need to sell a mission that I did not know or care about. As someone interested in working for an agency in the future, I need to be able to frame many different types of products to be desirable for various specific target audiences.

Our first meeting with the point of contact was both overwhelming and reassuring, as we learned that they had worked with other APPLES classes before. They had a good idea of our goals for the project, and they gave us lots of suggestions of ways they thought we could help. We left that meeting with many ideas and created a shareable document to delegate our work.

I specifically focused on their Big Sweep event, creating media kit items for a social marketing campaign. I was also able to interview one of KDB's partners in the Durham Public Works department as a representative of KDB for a profile about her experience serving in the Durham community and working on the event. She expressed that she was impressed with the questions and research I had conducted to make the interview run smoothly.

I knew that this work would help me sharpen skills that I could take into a postgraduate position, but most of the time, I was unsure if KDB appreciated and wanted to implement our work. We were unaware that KDB decided to hire an external marketing consulting agency called Method Savvy to outsource a lot of changes that they wanted to make, including a complete rebranding. This rebrand made it difficult for us to format our materials as there was no consistent style they were using for their pages. KDB also used Hootsuite as an external platform to manage their social media posts, which meant that we needed passwords to access our posts and publish our work.

The campaign that I focused on was later in the semester and included work writing about the Big Sweep campaign's success after KDB compiled the results. I was waiting on our point of contact to get me this information to finish up the pieces she asked for, but she never got back to me. I sent multiple follow-ups and asked my group partners if they were experiencing a similar lack of responsiveness, and they all agreed that she had not responded to any of us in weeks. We were unsure of how to move forward and felt like our efforts were meaningless at this point. One of the largest benefits of working with a client is seeing the work you would do in class applied in a real-life scenario, and I feel like this got lost when the communication became one-way. This work lost its collaborative benefits very quickly, and I started to feel like I was sending my hard work into an abyss. I decided to focus on the kit pieces needed for class for the remainder of the project and sent the contact my templates to fill in if KDB decided to use them.

Despite the frustration of being blocked out by professionals, it was interesting to see the pitch deck and materials that Method Savvy brought to KDB. I noticed that many of the suggestions I mentioned in my communication audit were reiterated in the agency's pitch. These similar recommendations made me confident in my abilities moving into the working world. I realize that I have gained the skills and expertise to give professional suggestions to a client. It has also been beneficial to see how agencies frame these recommendations or pitch their ideas to their clients to show that they are the most qualified to be implementing changes.

In regards to my suggestions, I was in charge of the recommendations section of the communication audit. I suggested that KDB improve their digital communication by making the website easier to navigate and having more consistent interactions on their social media pages. These are both ways to increase the interactions and build relationships with their publics. The organization's success largely depends on donations and volunteers, so it is extremely important to make sure the resources are as apparent as possible. The agency they hired seems to have these goals in mind, and I believe that many of these changes will be implemented soon.

I would not recommend KDB as a client for APPLES classes moving forward. Since KDB is a small organization with many moving parts coordinated by very few people, I do not think they have the time to help teach a different group each semester about the programs they want help with. I think they are a great organization to get involved with from a volunteering standpoint, but the agency they hired is doing many things that we would be helping them with, therefore eliminating our purpose of partnering. I do not think they have enough work or need for student volunteers moving forward, so it would be best for the partnership to be restricted to volunteering in the future.