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Amelia Island, Amelia Island

| **How did you start your career?** | Prior to my time at USI, I began my career in advertising, starting in San Francisco’s tech industry in 2001. I built my leadership and digital marketing skills in California, then forged my international career, starting in Canada. After almost a decade, I felt a strong desire to “recalibrate” myself. Doing something meaningful and fulfilling was very important to me and would require a total reset. I enrolled at USI to challenge my mind, shift my focus, and be in a completely new place -- this was my tabula rasa. I was one of the older students in my class at USI, so I went in with a broad perspective and appreciation for the opportunity to learn. After graduating, the big pivot was taking my newly-acquired tourism economics and communication skills, then combining those with my digital marketing experience. This eventually led me to the Amelia Island Convention & Visitors Bureau, where I apply my education directly on a daily basis. |
| **Why did you choose a career at Amelia Island?** | The opportunity to work at an award-winning DMO in a location with a great quality of life was a professional and personal win-win. Marketing Amelia Island means promoting a very unique tourism destination, with both natural and cultural assets. The challenge is committing to quality over quantity while building the foundation for sustainability. This challenge perfectly aligned with my Master’s thesis research in partnership with the United Nations World Tourism Organization. In fact, I provided my manager a copy of my Master’s thesis and was hired the following week. |
| **What is your current role/duties?** | As Director of Digital Strategy, I use online channels to “speak to the right person, at the right time, with the right message”. My responsibilities include managing www.AmeliaIsland.com, from content creation to programming; placing our paid digital media; and authoring of our content strategy on owned channels, including email and social media. Since we have a very small team, I oversee our creative and digital ad agencies’ work, as well. |
In your opinion, what are the qualities necessary for a successful career at Amelia Island?

To take the organization to the next level, team members need an entrepreneurial spirit, a creative fire, the ability to tell the destination’s story, and a strong orientation to data-driven decision making. Public speaking and presentation skills are also critical, as we are regularly reporting to our board of directors. However, the overriding job requirement is, “Do what it takes”.

What are USI’s positive features and qualities?

USI, for me, offered unlimited potential. The university laid the groundwork -- I learned to navigate the system, form the relationships, and utilize the resources. For example, I was able to participate in internships, work at USI News, and lead a team of volunteers for an international conference. I loved being deeply involved in the university, observing how the institution worked and helping it to grow. USI’s small class sizes allow you to get to know your professors. You can learn about their research and career paths and benefit from their becoming mentors to you. Also, I am a firm believer that one’s surroundings influence one’s state of mind. To study surrounded by pristine mountains along Lago di Lugano -- all in the heart of Europe-- leads to a deep state of focus enhanced by nature.

What competences and/or skills acquired in your USI Study Program have been useful/are useful to your professional career?

USI takes a multidisciplinary approach to tourism with two departments -- Economics and Communication -- explaining this complex phenomenon. This makes for a well-rounded student, able to shift between micro- and macro-economic perspectives and from interpersonal to international communications fluidly. For example, the macro-economics of tourism as an export, and how deeply tourism is entrenched in the economic health of communities and countries, is used daily in my DMO work as we advocate for support at local and national levels. In particular, the study of sustainability through economic, ecological and socio-cultural lenses has been absolutely critical to my success at the organization. In fact, we won a Platinum Adrian Award sponsored by National Geographic for our work with sea turtles and clean beaches.

What is your advice to USI students entering the job market?

Accept a healthy amount of failure. Take risks, be vocal, and be accountable. You can learn and grow professionally only by taking those leaps. The ability to say, “This didn’t work, this is why, and here is how we can improve” takes courage. Recognize that career fulfillment can take years. There is some sacrifice or trade-off, typically. Often, there may be an inverse relationship between remuneration and fulfillment. Finally, be humble. Allow your work to help build your reputation, and always give credit to the people who support you. Humility makes managers more comfortable in giving you new opportunities. Take nothing for granted -- each opportunity is a gift.

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