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Spring 2025, First Co-op at Possip

13 Jan' 25 – 1 May' 25

From Classroom Theories to Real-World Impact: My First Co-op Voyage

"The only source of knowledge is experience." - Albert Einstein

As I transitioned from the familiar structure of academic semesters to my first co-op at Possip, I felt a mix of excitement and nervousness. This was my chance to apply the theoretical frameworks to real-world problems and see the impact firsthand. I was drawn to Possip's mission of empowering schools and organizations by amplifying the voices of their communities, and I was eager to contribute my skills to a platform that was making a difference.

During my time at Possip, I took on a range of responsibilities that challenged me to grow both technically and professionally. One of my main projects was leading the redesign of their Import Platform, which required me to develop a deep understanding of the company's data infrastructure and workflows, as well as their technical systems, including ETL processes and HubSpot CRM software. I also had the opportunity to collaborate with the product team to evolve Possip's language and messaging for broader industry appeal. Additionally, I was responsible for maintaining and analyzing the company's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) dashboard, which gave me a bird's-eye view of our progress and areas for improvement.

Architecting Solutions: Weaving Innovation into Possip's Fabric

My time at Possip was a deep dive into practical software engineering, where each project offered unique challenges and learning opportunities.

Forging a Seamless Gateway: Revolutionizing the Import Platform

My primary undertaking was the ambitious redesign of Possip's Import Platform. Built with Python Flask, the existing system needed an overhaul to become truly customer-facing and more automated. Drawing inspiration from the intuitive interfaces of sophisticated CRM software like HubSpot, the goal was to craft a seamless, three-step import process. This new design would allow a user to upload their file, select the import type, and then rely on the platform to intelligently detect and automatically map column fields to standard Possip fields. Crucially, it also empowered users with the flexibility to manually override these mappings if specific needs arose. The platform was engineered to enforce rigorous data verifications, provide actionable suggestions, and facilitate real-time data transformations, thereby preventing errors proactively. To further enhance user experience, we designed a tutorial mapping feature to guide new users. Beyond the immediate import functionality, I also began conceptualizing a more robust, automated, and optimized post-import verification system. Complementing this core development, I took responsibility for ensuring data integrity within HubSpot, meticulously managing imports, filtering data, and creating targeted marketing lists.

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Amplifying Possip's Voice: Sculpting an Industry-Agnostic Narrative

Another significant endeavor was to update the language across the Possip platform, which operates on Ruby on Rails. The strategic objective here was to make Possip's terminology more industry-agnostic, allowing it to resonate beyond its strong K-12 education roots and attract a wider array of sectors. This initiative was a profound exploration into an existing, extensive codebase. It sharpened my proficiency with my IDE (Cursor IDE) and honed the nuanced skill of navigating a large platform's architecture to precisely locate and modify code. The scale of this update was substantial, involving approximately 240 file changes and 72 commits, including the meticulous writing and updating of corresponding specs. This marked my first significant interaction with specs on GitHub, providing invaluable experience with Git workflows. My toolkit for this task included Code Rabbit and Copilot for PR reviews, and Roo for maintaining code standards. While web development is not my foremost passion, this project was an exceptional real-world lesson in contributing to established projects rather than always starting from scratch. The ability to understand, navigate, and meaningfully enhance pre-existing code felt like a considerable achievement. By the time you read this, these transformative changes should be live, reflecting Possip's expanded vision on their website and platform.

Illuminating the Path Forward: Data-Driven Insights via the KPI Dashboard

I also shouldered the responsibility of maintaining and updating Possip's KPI dashboard on Looker Studio, Google's powerful dashboarding tool, comparable to Tableau or PowerBI. This role involved regular interaction with Excel, writing VBA scripts, and employing various functions to distill actionable insights from raw data and present them visually. My primary function was to report any numbers the team deemed critical, interpret these figures to provide context, and meticulously ensure the accuracy of all displayed data. This necessitated writing SQL queries to extract data from our database, transforming it for effective use in Excel, and ultimately reflecting these insights on Looker Studio. This weekly update cycle became a familiar and vital part of my contribution, ensuring the team had timely information for strategic decisions.

The Possip Pulse: Reflections on Culture, Growth, and a New Rhythm

Beyond the technical tasks, my co-op at Possip was an immersion into a unique and nurturing work culture that significantly shaped my professional outlook.

A North Star for Impact: The CEO's Weekly Beacon

Shani, the CEO of Possip, had a practice of sending out emails every Monday morning. These communications served as more than just updates; they were reminders of our collective goals, celebrations of milestones achieved, and clear outlines of the path ahead. This transparency was incredibly valuable, allowing me to see precisely where my work was having a direct and meaningful impact on the company's broader objectives.

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Navigating New Waters: Mentorship, Autonomy, and the Power of 'Why'

Initially, I reported directly to Adam, the VP of Tech. This co-op marked his first experience mentoring an intern. Recognizing the considerable demands on his time, I consciously focused on utilizing all available resources, striving for self-sufficiency, and proactively taking on as much work as I could independently. Adam, and indeed everyone at Possip, afforded me immense flexibility and the crucial time needed to truly understand the company's logistics, its business model, and its underlying needs. I made it a personal principle to deeply understand the 'why' behind existing systems before attempting to disrupt or modify established solutions.

Beyond the Clock: A Culture of Trust and Passionate Collaboration

Possip fostered an environment that felt like a tight-knit family, where every team member was approachable and supportive. Despite it being a remote position, the emphasis was never on the hours I clocked but on the quality of my work and the successful delivery of projects. There were days I might work a focused five hours, and others where I would be up all night, driven by a desire to refine a solution or explore a new idea. I have always felt that rigid time-keeping can stifle creativity and lead to monotonous work; Possip's environment was the perfect antidote, a place where I could genuinely grow and thrive. It introduced me to a professional work culture that felt less like a job and more like a team of individuals passionately collaborating on shared projects. There were refreshingly few limitations; I could use my personal laptop and any resources I found helpful. While I recognize this might not be standard industry practice everywhere, it proved remarkably effective when the priority was getting impactful work done.

The Juggler's Life: Weaving Co-op with Campus Commitments

Throughout this immersive co-op experience, I continued my roles as a Resident Advisor at CRC Hall and a Peer Career Coach at the Bearcat Promise Career Studio. Possip's understanding and flexibility meant I could maintain this multifaceted life, simply integrating a new layer of professional structure and responsibility.

I have often heard the sentiment that co-ops are inherently easier than academic semesters. In some respects, a co-op does instill a unique discipline that can sometimes be elusive in academic pursuits, and the financial compensation is undeniably a significant perk – oh, it is a lot! However, my personal hot take remains: academic semesters could be far more manageable, perhaps even more rewarding, if approached with the same focused passion and dedication one typically brings to a co-op. Imagine dedicating eight intensive hours a day to studies, including classes. It is an intriguing thought, though I confess I do not see myself adopting that intense academic schedule any time soon.

Advice to Past-Self for Present and Future Success

- **Embrace the 'Why' Before the 'How':** Your instinct to thoroughly understand the business logic and existing solutions before diving into development was invaluable. Continue to cultivate this habit. A deep understanding of context not only prevents

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redundant work but also leads to far more impactful and sustainable solutions, especially when working within established codebases.

- **Document Your Discoveries Rigorously:** While you learned a great deal about navigating existing code and utilizing new tools, ensure you are systematically documenting new commands, intricate processes, and crucial architectural insights. This evolving personal knowledge base will be an immense asset for future projects and for accelerating your onboarding process in any new environment.

Reflecting back

My first co-op at Possip was a period of profound professional and personal development. It was a journey from the abstract world of classroom theories to the concrete realities of contributing to a mission-driven company. The experience solidified my technical skills, provided a rich understanding of a collaborative and flexible work culture, and taught me invaluable lessons about project management, communication, and the sheer satisfaction of seeing one's work make a tangible difference. More than just applying knowledge, this semester was about integrating it, adapting it, and ultimately, using it to build, refine, and report in ways that truly mattered. It was not just a co-op; it was a catalyst for growth.