

Why Do Romanian Creatives go to the Berlin School of Creative Leadership for an EMBA?

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A total of 11 Romanian managers have graduated from the MBA program offered by the Berlin School of Creative Leadership, an institute of the Steinbeis University in Germany, a special program created for professionals who are working in creative industries.

The main reason why managers from the advertising industry choose to attend the 1 ½ year EMBA program in Berlin is that this MBA does not exist in the local educational market.

The program, which began in 2006, was created for creative managers that work in advertising or public relations agencies, but also those working in fields such as journalism, design or marketing.

"Romanian managers seem to be very interested in the added value that an EMBA brings. The program teaches the companies leaders to have a creative style of management and includes accounting, finance, strategy, human resources courses, adapted to the creative industries", said Clark Parsons, managing director of the Berlin School of Creative Leadership.

The program is created to reflect the business experience of some leaders in the fields of advertising, journalism, PR, entertainment or new media, in different markets and cultures.

"I chose this program to meet and learn from people who write the history of creativity in the world, along with colleagues who want to develop first themselves as leaders and to transform the industries from which they come", said Simona Dan, senior partner at Rogalski Grigoriu Public Relations. She started this program last year in November and she will graduate in April 2010.

"We all have signed up for the program with the desire to transform ourselves from very good professionals in perfect leaders. One of the first lessons received at this school was that leadership is not a trait with which you are born, but a science that is learned", says Dan.

Ema Prisca, creative director of Graffiti BBDO, will complete the program she began in November last year in 2010 too, when she will present her masters thesis.

"It is the only EMBA program that addresses exclusively the creative industries. I think that the failure of company financiers and lawyers leaders most clearly reflected in the current economic crisis makes Mr. Conrad intention an extremely relevant one," says Prisca.

In Dimitris Tranakas opinion, partner in the group of agencies Frank, one of the most important advantages of the program is that it offers the opportunity to work with some of the best people in advertising and marketing in the world. The classes are held in centers of advertising and media: Berlin, New York, London and Tokyo.

"I would say that it is a new model of MBA that has evolved together with the industry, that closely follows the latest trends, also seeking to inspire and create networks of collaboration between industry leaders worldwide," explains Tranakas. Frank Group offers consulting services in areas such as strategy, branding, advertising, online BTL and public relations. Tranakas has led the agency since 2008 and has over 15 years experience in advertising.

Adrian Botan, creative partner of the communication group McCann Erickson, thinks that the program offered by the Berlin School is different than a classic MBA program. "The difference is major, because in an advertising agency, for example, the software, the culture and the motivation part are very important. Maybe that's why many financiers fail to lead creative companies", says Botan.

Currently, the program offered by the Berlin School has registered 36 students, half of whom will graduate in April 2010, and the rest have chosen a more flexible program and will graduate in 2010 or 2011.

"Most of the participants are international. The Americans, Romanians, Brazilians are more willing to invest large amounts in education if this will help their career development. MBA market in Germany is rather small, because there is no tradition of obtaining an MBA or to pay for such a program", Parsons says. From 2006 until now there were two series of graduates, the total number reaching 35. "Currently, five Romanian managers are enrolled in the program," Parsons adds.

The average age of students is about 38 years, and the fee for the program, 48,500 euros, doesn't cover transport and accommodation costs.

"Half of the graduates pay the program by themselves, and for the rest the program is paid by the companies they work for. For those who pay the fee by themselves, we offer the possibility of payment in one or two years," Parsons says.

The program has approximately 12 teachers who teach regularly, but most of those who teach classes in the MBA program work also for other institutions such as Harvard, Stern School of Business, New York University, INSEAD from France or Swiss business school IMD.

"There are a large number of creative industry professionals who come as speakers to share their views with participants", said Parsons.

One of the most famous teachers of the creative business school is Doug Guthrie, academic director, who is also the professor of management and member of the faculty of Stern Business School at New York University. The subjects of the courses are structured to develop skills and create competent leadership.

"I felt richer after the lectures of some very special people, like Keith Reinhard, Michael Conrad or John Hegarty. I learn a lot from my colleagues during sessions of "learn & do" that take place on the first day of each module and where we debate our professional experiences gained from the last meeting", Simona Dan says. Michael Conrad, founder of the school, left the industry in 2003, after 34 years of experience in advertising.

Under his management, 27 agencies from Leo Burnett were awarded with "Agency of the Year", and some of them have achieved this award several times. Born in Germany, Conrad lives today in Switzerland.

Courses supported by teachers such as Doug Guthrie, Heike Bruch from the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland, Robert Weisz from the University of Aix in France, Paul Olivier Verdin from Belgium or Olivier Tabatoni from IAE Aix-en-Provence School of Management are those where students applauded at the end.

"The ability to multiply the value, the ability to create an organization in which you have to develop talents and the power to insufflate a vision, all together represent the essence of leadership. This is for me the most valuable lesson learned in Berlin", Rogalski Grigoriu's senior partner adds.

Classic MBA programs usually mean a promotion after graduation, and an up to 50% salary increase, but after this program that is not necessarily the goal.

Most of the participants already have management jobs or are on the boards of major advertising and media networks or own their companies.

"The program does not necessarily want to create opportunities for professional promotion, but rather to help us find new models of leadership for the industry, so that we can build in the agencies that we manage healthier systems than the ones that already exist, based on "open source" cooperation, creativity or focus on people. It's about "brain food", being an asset in any professional's career in this industry," said Tranakas.

He says that one of the biggest opportunities offered by the program was to interact with some of the most important people in the industry, from creators of some real world advertising empires (McCann) or owners of some boutique creative firms (Droga5, Naked) to the digital sphere professionals (those who created the online campaign of Obama) or people who are dedicated to identify new business models in the industry of creativity.

Ema Pisca from Graffiti BBDO has the same opinion. She considers that the infusion of information brought to the company as a result of the knowledge achieved during the program is beyond any promotion. "Even if on short-term we won't all become CEOs, we will certainly be more balanced regarding the information and knowledge than many current decision makers need. All my colleagues, 20 in number, are professionals with a long experience in advertising, television, architecture, on-line, communication. And just like me, they want to see how things look on the other side of the barricade: from the area of business strategy, finances, management of the organization", Prisca explains.