



The Shumaker Technology Group

I started interviewing for the Shumaker Technology Group in February 2012. During my first interview, I met with President Kyle Shumaker and the then Director of Marketing Stu Kendall in the Student Services building on MSU, and was asked mostly personality questions as well as some regarding my motivations and qualifications. I was brutally honest, admitting almost no knowledge of HTML aside from the fact that tags were involved, no knowledge of CSS, PHP, or any other relevant technologies. Despite these strikes against my chances, I was called in for a second interview, where I was asked if I could recognize any relevant web technologies, where I also fell utterly short. I was then asked when I wanted to start, not because I was the most skilled applicant, but because I was brutally honest about my abilities, expressed a burning desire to learn, and was very excited at the prospect of the job. I began at STG, as you likely will too, by doing an initial, low pressure series of training sessions, in which I would come in, be taught a couple of new techniques, then mostly be left to myself to try and apply what I had learned on a test server, or through simple website corrections for existing clients. After a few weeks of this, I was given an actual job, to produce a small single page web site for a dry cleaning business entirely independently. Though I now look back on it and can tell it was my first, I show anyone who is interested, <http://goldbondcleaners.com/>, and more often than not their reactions make me proud to have created something entirely on my own, only a few weeks after starting, from a base of knowing nothing at all about HTML.

After Gold Bond and a few other small sites, I began to work full time during the summer, when the person I was temporarily standing in for left for the remainder of the season. During this time I got to know Kyle much better, traveled around the state more than I ever had before, and learned more and more about website development. Around mid-summer, I was introduced to Content Central, the Document Management System that STG is the Michigan reseller for. Upon learning that we did more than just website development, my interest in Shumaker Group rose. I've always been told that it is good business strategy to seek multiple sources of income, and here was an organization that was doing just that, branching out from the bread and butter and looking for some extra sources of revenue. I began to do a little work here and there in installation setups and configurations, getting to be at least comfortable with the product by the end of the summer, though honestly at this time my interest in the product was fairly low, since I was explicitly here to learn how to create websites.

Throughout the season I was also introduced to the other workers at the time, Brock Carroll, Stuart Kendall, and Sean Moening. The three of them were very good friends and helped me feel very comfortable working at STG. An attitude and atmosphere I have tried to carefully continue with any new hires we encounter.

By the end of the summer, I had developed to the point where I was producing websites such as <http://mimovers.org/> and <http://grea.org/>, which made me very proud, combining all of the

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technologies I could use. By this point, I was very comfortable working with HTML, CSS, Javascript, PHP and MySQL. I had investigated HTML5 and CSS3, but at the time support for these features was low, so I more or less stuck with what I knew worked at the time. At the end of the summer, I was offered a continued position in the Shumaker Technology Group, and worked part time throughout my Junior year of college. During this time, I was invited to go on a trip with the company to Florida in order to receive advanced Content Central training from Ademero, the company who had developed it. This training enhanced my knowledge of Content Central and heightened my curiosity about what it was capable of, and has largely been responsible for my furthering self-education in Content Centrals abilities. While there I learned how to do a clean install, set up an installation, create document types to be captured, and how to file them within the system. I also learned that it was capable of integrating with databases and how to configure workflow within the system.

During my time in school, I had a bit more free time during the day, so whenever I had a moment, I did what I could to further my understanding of web technologies and learn new CSS tricks to try out on my websites. My web design abilities were culminated in a project at the time for MATS – The Michigan Association of Township Supervisors. Because of our developing relationship with them, I wanted their site to be significantly different than my previous works, and this resulted in <http://matsupervisors.com/>. My final design for this website actually inspired a rebranding of the Shumaker Technology Group where we recreated both our website and our media to better reflect our talents, which lead to <http://shumakergroup.com/>, the brainchild of everyone working for Shumaker Technology Group at the time, and spearheaded by Taylor Beggs, a newer hire at the time.

That school year contained some of my highest highs and lowest lows. I was producing the most visually appealing content I had thus far (which in this line of work is true every single day), focusing more on clean visuals, like those being promoted by large websites, and becoming more comfortable with jQuery, allowing more lively sites filled with motion and activity. I was eventually forced to face the fact that my initial lack of experience combined with a school atmosphere look at coding practices was not going to fly in a professional setting. Due my inexperience with databases and the “close enough” approach to programming that was instilled by academia, I wrote programs that only worked in the barest sense of the word, had very little error checking, and were prone to failure. This strategy, which can only be called a form of laziness, does not fly in a professional setting, and resulted in a number of failures that cost me a large amount of time and caused me a large amount of stress, as I waited every day to hear about the next issue I had to fix.

Being a fairly recent graduate from MSU, Kyle Shumaker (the owner and founder) was very patient and understanding with me during this time. He had experienced this atmosphere first hand, and while I did get a serious talking to in order to kick me back on track, he understood where that sort of mentality

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came from. Despite his relatively gentle handling of it, the projects themselves did their fair share of punishing me through constant reminders that what I had created was not good enough in the form of angry emails and problem reports. Those projects served as a huge motivator for me to write better, more maintainable code, and to stop trying to get away with the bare minimum. I learned that saving time now in sacrifice of time later is never an even trade.

During the second half of that school year, I did my best to up my game and create better, more maintainable websites. We picked up new clients that I worked with from the ground up to make new, more powerful websites than any I had personally done before, interacting with systems like Authorize.net and PayPal in order to process online payments and keep track of what members of an organization had to pay their dues. I also was becoming more familiar and comfortable with AJAX, allowing my sites to integrate with databases in a much more visual and interactive way.

By the time the next summer rolled around, we had a new batch of hires as the previous group left at the end of their Senior year of college. During this summer, we discovered that HTML5 and CSS3 had gained a lot of support and were becoming more popular with the major browsers, so I was able to begin developing using these new technologies, and to rework some older sites with new tricks that I wanted before but couldn't use quite yet.

We also began work on the product STG Easy Web, which is a Content Management System designed to help smaller organizations have very easily updated websites, keep in contact with their membership/clients, and easily track user information. We created a very powerful page creation tool that allows web pages to be intuitively build from the ground up. This project was the epitome of all I knew how to do at the time. We poured ever piece of knowledge the company had into the system to make it clean, easy, and dependable. This included Normalized Databases, clean commented code, a liberal use of AJAX, jQuery, CSS3 and HTML5, as well as integration with several Google APIs and products. We focused on creating a clean, intuitive mobile side, so that browsers on their phones could easily access relevant information.

This familiarity with databases led to me becoming comfortable with them, and resulted in my two biggest failures to date. I completely, and irreversibly destroyed one database of highly crucial information, and sent out multiple test emails to hundreds of people, both within the same month. Similar to how he reacted to the previous situation, Kyle responded with disappointment but understanding, as this kind of thing is inevitable with our kind of work, but he pressed me to use this as an example for future behavior. As a result of the horror I felt when I realized my mistake was irreversible; I now never make significant alterations to a database without first backing it up in two

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separate ways. I also am far more cautious about sending out emails, and triple check any code that sends emails to a database list, behavior I would encourage in you as well.

After we rolled out STG Easy Web, the school year was fast approaching, and after it started, I went back to working part time, but with all I had learned from STG Easy Web, I was much more knowledgeable of HTML5, CSS3, and AJAX.

One problem I repeatedly encountered was that the actual design phase is very time consuming, as you may come up with many mock ups before one is chosen by a client. Here at STG, we are encouraged to dedicate time to investigating new ways of doing business that can benefit the company in any way, so my most recent project has been learning how to use Bootstrap in order to make clean, simple, responsive sites that can be quickly produced and don't require us to re-invent the wheel every time we make a site.

And that pretty much brings you up to where I am today. The Shumaker Technology Group invested time and money in someone without any previous experience because I was more motivated to learn and more honest about my ability than any other applicant. They held my hand as I developed my abilities, and kicked my butt when I screwed up but shouldn't have. As with every company, there have been high points and low points, I have gotten in arguments with my co-workers, as well as my boss, and my mistakes have come back to hurt me, but I have learned a lot more than I could have possibly done on my own, have gained experiences I value, and even out of the negatives I have learned more about how business works than I may have liked to!

Hope to see you soon!

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Vice President

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