



ESPA

The Next Generation
of International Talent

Protein Works is a fast-growing online business supplying protein shakes, snacks and sports nutrition products to a growing international audience.



protein works™



**Protein Works
strengthens
international
expansion with time-
and cost-efficient
European intern
recruitment**

A deciding factor was that ESPA could reliably source student interns of the right calibre and capability.



Protein Works have been welcoming European interns from ESPA for more than five years. During that time, more than 30 students have worked with the company on 6-month internships, complementing its full-time team of more than 100 staff.

Ollie Chissell, the company's Global Head of Trading and Merchandising, explained how this approach to staffing came about and how it is continuing to help the company grow.

Identifying an internship strategy

The company turned to ESPA after a referral by one of ESPA's own students.

A deciding factor was that ESPA could reliably source student interns of the right calibre and capability. He continued *"We realised straight away that the quality of students from ESPA was higher than we could achieve alone. We just had to say: this is the calibre we are after. Their students are intelligent, usually very hard working and eager to impress, which is often hard to find."*

Maintaining momentum, mitigating uncertainty

Recruiting interns of different nationalities helped Protein Works expand in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and The Netherlands. It created internships in marketing and customer experience across these markets.

Recruiting in this way limited the cost and risk of investing in international staff when the brand was not only establishing itself in new geographies but doing so in challenging times. In the run-up to Brexit, Protein Works was necessarily cautious – but wanted to maintain growth momentum.

“Taking on interns allowed us to grow our European market in times of uncertainty. We couldn’t commit long term to any European project before Brexit – but intern placements helped us to keep the wheels turning and push into those markets until we were in a comfortable position to build” recalled Ollie.

Bringing in a range of European language speakers to the team was also helpful. Ollie went on *“ESPA interns have high quality language scores in English, as well as their native language – it is really important for us that they can communicate effectively, not just help us translate marketing copy.”*

Interns in customer experience and service roles, communicate effortlessly with local customers in their own language, adding to the company’s local audience knowledge.

Confidence and communication through COVID

Like other businesses, Protein Works had to adapt fast to the pressures of the pandemic. An intern had been due to start his placement in the UK but instead had to work remotely for three months before being able to travel. This didn’t stop him becoming a strong contributor, and he was subsequently hired permanently.

Ollie recalled several benefits of having interns onboard at such a time. *“Having interns working with us during COVID gave us agility. We could move quickly even in rapidly changing situations. Countries were shutting borders, and our interns could quickly find out whether we could get parcels through to customers or not by placing test orders.”*

“They also helped us understand the nuances of what was going on in different countries. We had daily updates coming through, and eyes and ears to help us keep pace with whether gyms were closed in Italy or whether shops were open in Spain. That knowledge helped us forecast and predict trends in sales. It saved a lot of time having people feeding us what was happening on the ground around Europe.”

Time and cost-efficient recruitment

The cost-efficiency of internship recruitment helped Protein Works maintain its progress without full hires. Ollie stated that *“As a team it allowed us to keep a good level of expertise in the team, and balance off the cost efficiency with the resource investment these students thrive off. It’s a win, win situation.”* Through its 30+ placements to date, ESPA has learned much about what Protein Works needs in its interns, as Ollie described: *“Over the years we have been able to really refine what a good intern candidate for Protein Works looks like. They need a certain skill level, particular interest, and be the right kind of person – we’re quite tight on our culture. ESPA is really good at understanding those needs.”*

Protein Works has not only made internships a part of its workforce growth strategy, because it helps them identify useful candidates, it also appreciates the business efficiency of this model versus traditional recruitment. ESPA plays a key role in enabling that efficiency to pre-monetise roles.

Ollie told us: *“With ESPA you already save time on talking to candidates that aren’t right – in this initial step ESPA are probably saving us 8- 10 hours of wasted time finding one intern. It frees you up for tasks you should be doing, instead of recruitment”* said Ollie.

He is very happy with the speed and efficiency of the ESPA process, saying *“After a quick 30-minute call about what we’re after, ESPA will bring in just a few high-quality candidates. It’s a huge time saver over doing this in house. After we’ve interviewed and chosen someone, they handle everything else.”*

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Strong intern support minimises issues

While interns are in their placements, Protein Works can rely on ESPA for ongoing support. “ESPA deals with any issues that ever arise, and that gives you a higher level of confidence,” Ollie told us. He cited an example: “In one case there was a landlord issue and the student had to move to new accommodation, but ESPA took care of it all – it was fantastic.”

Léa Muller who originally joined Protein Works as an ESPA marketing intern, agrees. She said: “ESPA was always reaching out with information about the process – they helped me with my accommodation and called constantly at the beginning. Throughout the internship they always took care of how I was feeling, asked whether I was happy, and if I was fitting OK with my flatmate.” She joined the company after finishing her Master’s degree.

Protein Works has hired several former interns on a full-time basis. When asked about this, Ollie said: “Out of 30 we’ve employed four of these students after their internships have finished. It’s almost a 6-month interview and a good way to understand if they can be of value to the business.”

“Those we have employed display Protein Works DNA – they don’t have huge egos, they work hard, are naturally collaborative, and bring the right work ethic as well as quality of work. It was usually a no-brainer, because as interns the value they already added to the business meant they’d won the confidence of the team that they could continue to deliver.”

“ESPA knows what we are looking for, and it works. They have knowledge of the students, and understand who is genuinely looking for opportunity, not just applying because they need 6 months’ work experience.”

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LÉA MULLER – MARKETING EXECUTIVE,
PROTEIN WORKS

Léa Muller was a French intern placed by ESPA to help Protein Works with its social marketing. She shared her experience:

“Interns bring knowledge to companies. Everything is fresh in our minds, we are used to working in a strict academic way, and we want to prove things. It is our first job, and we put in a lot of effort to be part of the company.”

“I had no expectations of being hired in the first five months – but at the end my expectations went higher. I was doing more, proving more, and trying to show a lot of value as I really wanted to be hired. When the result came, I was really happy. I had no hesitation – I was keen to stay”

“If you want to get a really great opportunity abroad, ESPA is the place to go. It is the best opportunity you can have. Even if we are not paid for the internship, everything else is paid for and we have a grant to support us too. It gives us great experience, a first step to the job market – and makes a difference on the resumé!”

Looking towards the future

Ollie believes an internship strategy is a strong approach for any company on a growth curve in the region: “If you are growing into Europe it is a no brainer to bring in intern resources. ESPA makes it easy for you by making it easy to recruit and manage them – it has been nothing short of a breeze for us. We have just one point of contact and they handle everything.”



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