



3 USB students conquer mighty USA

After six years of taking part in the National Black MBA Association's Case Competition in the USA, USB brings the honours home. AMANDA MATTHEE and CLAYTON SWART tell the story.



Victors Pambili Booi, Kagisho Mahura and Fortune Ngwenya with their DaimlerChrysler trophy.

was sponsored by DaimlerChrysler in South Africa.

The competition forms part of the NMBBAA convention, one of the largest and most influential events on the USA business calendar, where some 20 000 people meet annually. The convention is the largest career fair in the USA where companies from across the globe recruit talent. The CEO and president of the NMBBAA, Barbara Thomas, is rated as one of the 100 most influential people in the USA.

As part of the case study, Booi, Mahura and Ngwenya had to find solutions for what DaimlerChrysler called a minority supplier which had become uncompetitive and found itself in financial distress owing to, among others, competition from low-cost Chinese suppliers.

All the teams had to tackle the same problem and present their findings to a panel of judges in two elimination rounds. Six schools made it to the final round. The panel included the vice-presidents of DaimlerChrysler in the USA and in Germany, and the vice-president of IBM. The DaimlerChrysler case competition is an integral part of the organisation's objective to expose talented minorities to business leaders across the world.

"We had to come up with a procurement strategy for this minority supplier and help them to help themselves. All three of us in the USB team are very argumentative and we pushed each other very hard – always focusing on the work at hand," says Mahura. All three members of the USB team are modular MBA students working in the financial services industry in three different provinces.

Said Ngwenya, who works for Absa Private Bank in Johannesburg, "Our victory shows that we can apply our MBA skills in any industry – also in the motor industry. The same business principles apply everywhere. You need strategy, you need analytical skills, and you need logical and lateral thinking to come up with solutions."

"At the awards ceremony, they first announced the team that came third. I then thought, okay, we did not make it and started to relax. But when they announced

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A TEAM OF THREE black final-year MBA students of the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) – Pambili Booi, Kagisho Mahura and Fortune Ngwenya – came first in the National Black MBA Association (NMBBAA) Case Competition in the USA in September.

A total of 29 leading business schools participated in the competition that was held in Atlanta, Georgia. The USB is the only business school outside the USA which is invited to take part in this annual competition.

The competition is sponsored by the DaimlerChrysler Corporation to find the best solution for a real business problem within DaimlerChrysler. The South African team

that we were the winning team, it took a few seconds for us to realise what was going on. I'm very proud of the USB. Clearly, they are teaching us relevant information. And people like Prof Eon Smit, Prof Wim Gevers and Dr Babita Mathur-Helm really supported us," said Fortune.

"We learn such a lot at the business school and as a team we decided to combine this knowledge with our experience. The presentations were formal, with very practical business problems that had to be addressed. We were grilled for 10 minutes by these big thinkers. In the final round we had to present in front of a live audience who included recruitment specialists from a >



The winning MBA trio from the USB (from left), Pambili Booi, Fortune Ngwenya and (far right) Kagisho Mahura knocked out 28 MBA teams in the USA. Here they receive prizes from (second from right) Frank Fountain, vice-president of DaimlerChrysler.

host of global companies,” says Booi, operations manager for Capitec Bank in the Eastern Cape.

“We were wary of the American teams because we heard they have world-renowned business consultants and professionals who help them polish their presentations. The more we rehearsed, the longer our presentation became! However, I believe we won on content because our solution was practical and it could be implemented. It was well thought through and we were silently determined to give it our best,” said Mahura.

“We often undermine ourselves and think we cannot compete against first-world countries. The fact that we won shows that the competencies we have acquired at the USB can be applied to any business problem anywhere in the world,” said Mahura.

“I was very impressed by the USA. Everything is big – their cars, their meals, everything. Everything is clean and they have a highly efficient transport system. But we, as South Africans, have world-class skills,” said Mahura.

As winners of the competition, each member of the USB team received a prize of \$5 000 (about R38 600) and a trophy. They were also invited to the DaimlerChrysler head office in Detroit to meet its top management. The DaimlerChrysler Group said it would be implementing some of the solutions suggested by the USB team.

Dr Johan Smith, a senior lecturer from the USB who accompanied the team, provided them with mentorship during this time. “The winners of the case competition were front page news in the USA. Our team was inundated with interviews by the media and, more importantly,

“ ... the USB team had a distinct advantage as they had a focused approach to integrating business objectives with social responsibility.”

head hunters. Frank Fountain, vice-president and most senior African American in the DaimlerChrysler organisation, was so impressed with the USB team’s realistic business approach and suggested solutions that he has invited the team to meet with the full DaimlerChrysler board.

“In my opinion the USB team had a distinct advantage as they had a

focused approach to integrating business objectives with social responsibility.”

“The fact that some other teams used world renowned business consultants to arrive at their suggested solutions further highlights our team’s achievement,” says Smith.

Commenting on the victory, Prof Eon Smit, director of the USB, said: “The outcome of the competition once more confirms that the USB’s policy of internationalisation is bearing fruit and that USB students now can compete with the very best in the world.” □



USB winners address DaimlerChrysler executives

The USB’s three MBA students Pambili Booi, Kagisho Mahura and Fortune Ngwenya were invited to attend the full executive meeting of DaimlerChrysler South Africa to present their case study on solutions for a minority supplier of this corporation which had become uncompetitive.

A 20-minute slot was reserved for Booi, Mahura and Ngwenya to share the presentation which secured them the first place in the NBMBAA Case Competition held in the USA.

The trio were invited to share their insights at the end of last year at the last meeting of the year for the executive committee of DaimlerChrysler South Africa.