The Opportunities You Don’t Apply For

By Chelsea Catherine Liaw

I used to think opportunities came from having the perfect CV, the perfect experience, or saying the perfect thing in an interview.

Now, after completing the Marketing Careers Mentoring Programme organised by Royal Holloway University of London and the Worshipful Company of Marketors, and beginning my internship at Real View Marketing, I have realised something far more important:

People remember people before they remember applications.

One of the most valuable things I gained from the mentoring programme was a completely different perspective on how opportunities are created, especially in an industry like marketing where trust matters more than simply being seen.

Through the programme, I first took part in group mentoring sessions led by Jarmila Yu last year, which helped me build the foundations I previously lacked: improving my LinkedIn profile, developing my personal brand, and thinking more seriously about where I wanted my career to go.

At the time, I thought that was enough.

But as I started applying for opportunities, I quickly realised how competitive the job market really is. You can spend hours tailoring applications only for them to be screened in seconds. Like many students, I faced hundreds of rejections, and it became easy to feel as though you were simply another CV in a long queue.

This year, after applying again, I was fortunate to be selected for the more personalised one-to-one mentoring programme, where I was paired with Sarah Clay.

From our very first conversation, our personalities and energy matched so naturally that every discussion felt exciting. Sarah gave me something I had not fully understood before: the importance of building authentic relationships.

She taught me how to think outside the box when approaching opportunities. Rather than relying solely on online applications, she encouraged me to approach networking more intentionally: attending events with purpose, connecting with the right people on LinkedIn, sending thoughtful messages, and most importantly, building meaningful conversations before expecting anything in return.

As students, we can sometimes view professionals as intimidating or unreachable. Sarah reminded me that behind every company and every LinkedIn profile is simply a person. People respond to curiosity and sincerity far more than rehearsed perfection.



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That mindset completely changed the way I approached networking. I stopped seeing it as trying to impress people and started seeing it as building genuine conversations and learning from others. Ironically, that shift in perspective was also what eventually led me to my internship at Real View Marketing.

THE OPPORTUNITIES YOU DON'T APPLY FOR (CONT'D)

Around the same time my mentorship was coming to an end, Sarah introduced me to James Barnett, founder of Real View Marketing, who had shared an opportunity for a marketing intern within the Worshipful Company of Marketors network.

Looking back, it felt like a combination of preparation, consistency, and timing. But it also reinforced something I had slowly been learning: opportunities often come through the relationships you build over time.

Over the past three years at Royal Holloway, I made a conscious effort to attend workshops, mentoring schemes, networking events, and industry talks whenever I could. At times, it felt discouraging because relationship-building rarely creates immediate results. You do not instantly gain something from every conversation.

But over time, people begin to remember your energy, curiosity, and willingness to show up consistently. You never know who might later recommend your name in a room you are not even in.

And honestly, sometimes the worst thing that can happen is that you make a new friend along the way, and maybe get a free sandwich too!

My experience at Real View Marketing has only strengthened these lessons further. Working within an agency environment has allowed me to explore different sides of marketing in practice, from client research and website optimisation to scripting, storyboarding content, and joining client meetings across different industries.

What has fascinated me most is seeing how differently marketing works depending on the business, the audience, and the stage of growth. At university, we often learn theories in structured frameworks. But in practice, marketing is far more nuanced. The same strategy will not work for every company. Some companies need to build visibility from the ground up, while others need help turning existing expertise into messaging their audience can trust.

That is something James Barnett and the team at Real View Marketing understand deeply. Their work across consulting, AI, and advertising industries consistently reinforces the idea that marketing is not just about chasing virality or short-term attention. It is about building credibility and a presence people genuinely connect with over time.

In many ways, that philosophy mirrors the lessons I learned through mentorship too.

Whether it is applying for jobs or building a brand, people can tell when your actions are genuine. Relationships built with sincerity tend to last longer than those built purely around opportunity.

So, if I could give one piece of advice to students trying to break into the industry, it would simply be this: Put yourself out there!

Attend the event. Send the message. Ask the question. Start the conversation.

Not every opportunity will work out immediately, and not every interaction will lead somewhere. But the relationships you build quietly over time often become the opportunities you were searching for all along.

Because sometimes the opportunity that changes your career begins with a conversation you almost never had.



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“So much of life and business comes down to who you know and at times luck! That’s exactly what happened when I posted in the Worshipful Company of Marketors WhatsApp group and was connected with Chelsea. She’s taken everything in her stride and is really pushing on. From the start, we made a conscious decision to work in person as much as possible, and it’s made a real difference, not just in learning but in building confidence and understanding how people work. I believe most technical skills in marketing can be learned over time, but attitude is the starting point, and that’s why things have worked out.”

James Barnett
Founder, Real View Marketing