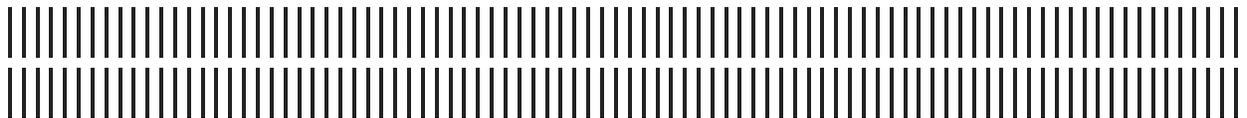


# SHANGHAI CAREER CASE STUDY: How Brandon found a Shanghai job in 3 months



By Brandon King and Michael Olson



## Why I Wrote This Guide



Thank you for downloading our case study on finding a job in Shanghai in 90 days or less.

My name is Brandon, and I have been in the exact same position you probably are in now: In China (or wanting to be), but unsure of how to find a job that aligns with your target career path.

It can be challenging, but you wouldn't be in China if you didn't like a good challenge, now would you?

In this case study I'm going to break down the steps I took to land a great job (in management no less) within 3 months of arriving in Shanghai.

My hope is that you finish this story feeling inspired and ready to pursue your dream job in Shanghai.

It probably won't be easy, but if I can do it, so can you!

By the end of this guide, my hope is that you have a better understanding of how to approach getting a job in China, and that you are able to do so in 90 days or less.

Jiayou!

From Shanghai,  
Brandon

## The Backstory



*Photo: Brandon in Guilin, China just before moving to Shanghai in 2012.*

I first moved to China in late 2008, after graduating university, when I moved to a city in the south named Shenzhen.

Shenzhen is located just to the north of Hong Kong and has a booming manufacturing center. It seemed as good a place as any in China to begin.

Opportunity does abound in Shenzhen, but I wanted to work in marketing, and Shanghai held more promise.

So after a few years and a few jobs in Shenzhen, I packed up and moved to Shanghai.

I had a few connections there but not many, a little bit of money saved, and knew I needed to land a job sooner rather than later or I'd be headed home to California.

**It was Shanghai or bust.**

## Month One (January): Building a Network

When I arrived in Shanghai in January 2012 I immediately fell in love with it.

The gingerbread houses of the French Concession, the narrow Shikumen alleyways, the billowing skyscrapers- Shanghai's historical scope and scale made my stomach jump into my throat. Sometimes it still does.

My first steps after arriving in Shanghai weren't related to finding a job so much as they were to getting situated. I had to:

- Find a room. I used SmartShanghai with [these filters](#).
- Learn my way around the city
- Prep for possible interviews in Chinese
- Made a list of companies and people I would like to connect with
- Network, network, network

### ***Networking:***

My first step was to compile a list of networking events in Shanghai. This turned out to be such a useful activity that I still do it to this day.

If you want to see the template I use to organize events, along with some events (some of which have passed already, some of which are ongoing in Shanghai) just visit the spreadsheet here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YOUEMw7hUtxPzLtnX1YX42ASJC\\_krbVMKNHLk6rJ42c/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YOUEMw7hUtxPzLtnX1YX42ASJC_krbVMKNHLk6rJ42c/edit?usp=sharing)

My first month in Shanghai was full of constant networking.

If you tend to be results-oriented, networking events can sometimes feel like a waste of time. I know I felt this way, and sometimes asked myself, "Am I not just wasting my time (and money) by eating and drinking at these events? What will I get out of this?"

The key is to trust that all the socializing will pay off in ways that are impossible to predict. It really will.

**Pro-tip:** No matter whether you are employed, unemployed, self-employed, whatever- you need to get a set of **good** business cards made. I use [this company](#) for mine.

I kept networking through January until Chinese New Year arrived. During the New Year, all of China gets really quiet, so there wasn't much I could do outside of strategizing until people came back to work in early February.

By the end of month one, I had a group of friends, most of whom were new to Shanghai as well, and was attending 2-3 networking events a week + a weekly brunch.



## ***Branding Yourself:***

I also used the quiet of the new year to get to work building a digital resume that I could send to potential employers in addition to my resume.

This was especially important in my case, as I was looking to work as a digital marketer.

If an aspiring digital marketer sends you their resume in a Word Doc, would you want to interview them? Probably not.

I build a portfolio website using WordPress. It wasn't sophisticated but it established me as being somewhat digitally savvy.

**Pro-tip:** It's absolutely essential that you use a gmail.com address or, even better, a [yourname@mydomain.com](mailto:yourname@mydomain.com) email address. Nobody is going to take a resume sent from [coolchick2949@aol.com](mailto:coolchick2949@aol.com) seriously.

### ***To create a website, you'll need:***

A domain name: For example, [www.smartinternchina.com](http://www.smartinternchina.com)

A hosting plan: I recommend [Dreamhost](https://www.dreamhost.com/), this is what we use for SmartIntern. Input the coupon code "smartintern" with no quotation marks during checkout for a \$40 discount on your first year of hosting.

A website: I recommend using WordPress.

## February (Month Two): Mindset and Interviews

By February, I had some interviews set up, but they were mostly for internship positions.

They were interviews with some really cool companies, but at 25 I felt like I was “too old” for an internship. Isn’t that what I had spent my college summers doing? Didn’t I deserve something better?

Then came *the email that changed it all*. To this day, it stands as some of the most succinct and realistic advice I have ever received on working in China.

I have printed it exactly on I received it on the next page.

## ***The Email:***

I am reprinting the email I received in February 2012 below. I have blurred out only a few lines to respect the privacy of the person who wrote it to me.

This was the single most valuable piece of advice I could have received at the time. Pure, blunt honesty from somebody who had been exactly where I was at the time.

Hi Brandon...excuse the bluntness, but I'm gonna ask a VERY direct question.

How hungry are you to succeed in China?

You're concerns are very legit, and I understand that internships don't necessarily mean a long term position. Your chances of interviewing for a full time position and *hopefully* landing a job is definitely more secure, in comparison.

However, I'm not sure how active you've been interviewing at, or how much replies you have been receiving at the moment. [REDACTED] becoming more and more aware that you **want** and **need** to get **somewhere** with your career...so what are you willing to do to get there?

Personally, my suggestion is this: IF you don't need to "bring home the bacon" (i.e. have financial responsibilities for family, beside yourself, or no school loans/bad debt/crazy gold diggin girlfriend), then i'd suggest DO AN INTERNSHIP, no doubt hands down. Realistically, if you do want to play it safe and find the right company/role/boss, then that will also take some time to mature. [REDACTED] what and how can you put on it to better "sell and market" yourself?

China's not such an easy "career" market to tap into, it took me 7-8 years to get to where I'm at (without any family connections or financial support), and I've had a lot of painful yet experience-full detours/U-turns. So don't fret...if you have the right attitude, willing to learn (and fail), passionate to put out 110%, and can mix and understand the locals well enough...the opportunities will keep on coming once you've made the first step =)

(at least that's what I keep telling myself when its a rainy day...)

[REDACTED]

## ***Shattering my Mindset:***

That email led to a massive shift in my mindset.

It revealed to me the challenge of what I was trying to do. I wasn't just trying to find a "job". Any foreigner in China could do that by teaching English or taking one of the many dead-end jobs on offer.

The real challenge would be finding a job in a company that I could grow with, and that would allow me to develop a skillset that I could take with me when I returned home.

I needed to be prepared to sacrifice my ego and my salary in the short-term if it meant that I would set myself up for a position of long-term growth.

I was starting to see the somewhat gritty reality of getting a good job in China. My previous, self-entitled mindset was starting to crumble like the buildings below...



## ***The Interviews:***

Early February had been slow, but by the middle of a month I had a iron in the fire, so to speak.

In typical China fashion, the offers were all over the place. One day I'd be interviewing for an internship or entry-level position, the next for a management position. It was confusing.

Looking back, I can see clearly why this was. Positions for mid-career foreigners in China are not nearly as abundant as internships and entry level jobs or, on the upper end of the spectrum, positions in senior management.

The fact that most companies didn't quite know where to fit me and my 3-4 years of work experience was reflected in the offers I was getting: one offer would be for an unpaid internship, the next for a position in management in SME.

Ah China – never ceases to confuse.

Here were some of the opportunities I had started to line up. As you can see, they were all over the place.

**-Got my resume into a recruiter for Nike** through a personal connection. I had worked as an intern at their world headquarters in Portland in 2007 and had aspirations to work for them again. I realize now that they were looking for more of a "local hire" than I was. They needed somebody who could create marketing material in Chinese. I couldn't then and I still can't.

**-An interview with quiksilver**, also through a personal connection. As was the case with Nike, they were looking to hire a local.

-I was **exchanging emails** with an interested company in performance marketing. I told them my salary expectation of 20,000 Yuan a month and their HR person promptly stopped emailing me ☺

**-Became one of two finalists with a media company** looking to revamp their online presence. They needed a digital project manager. Ultimately they decided to hire a more experienced person, which was probably the right decision for them.

**-Secured an interview and eventually an offer with a marketing agency servicing a luxury car brand.**

I declined their offer for two reasons. One, by the time I receive the offer, I had already secured a full-time job.

However, I wouldn't have accepted the positions anyway. This is because, during my interview, they had showed me where their office "bed" was (in a broom closet) so that you could sleep there if working late.

This wasn't a Google nap-pod- it was a bed in a broom closet that told me way more about the working culture at this company than anything HR did.

**-Secured an interview with the web marketing agency that eventually hired me**



These opportunities came from a combination of networking and sending out emails in response to classified ads. When sending emails, you can adapt this [B2B cold email template](#) to your specific situation. It's a sales template for cold emails, but remember this: when you are pitching yourself to a company, you are a sales person. You are just selling yourself, not a product or service.

## Month Three (March) The Offer

By March I was working as a marketing manager with a web design firm and receiving a healthy salary for doing so.

I was managing a team of 5 at the age of 25. It was an invaluable learning experience.

It wasn't a perfect job, but it allowed me to build a valuable skillset in online marketing. It was that same skillset I later took with me to land a job at a startup in California that had recently closed a \$20 million round of funding.

### ***The Takeways:***

Be confident when interviewing, but don't oversell yourself. In all likelihood, you are in your early to mid 20s and still have a lot to learn.

The good news is that, at that point in your career, companies are hiring more on personality and interpersonal skills than they are skillset.

You'll have to take risks: If I hadn't been willing to take the risk of moving to Shanghai with very few connections there, I never would have been able to build a life there.

When it comes to landing a job in China, you have three options:

-Go to China on whatever kind of visa you can get and look for a job once there.

-Go to China on an internship, work hard and network aggressively, and at the end of 3 or 6 months there is a good chance you'll have a full-time job offer somewhere

-Try to get a job back home that will send you to China. This approach has a high possible upside in that you will earn a solid western wage while working in China, but it's also the most risky of the three options, as jobs like this aren't exactly abundant for entry-level hires.



## How I Can Help You?

After spending nearly five years based in China, and seeing my peers go through many of the same struggles that I did, I co-founded SmartIntern with my partner Michael Olson.

We now help ambitious university students and recent graduates begin their careers in China through our internship placement agency.

Visit our [Supported Shanghai](#) page to learn how we can help you get a head start in China without the hoops, headaches, and hassles.

And feel free to email me at my personal email address, [brandon@smartinternchina.com](mailto:brandon@smartinternchina.com), anytime.

From Shanghai,

Brandon