

Remember our panda friend? The one who once lived a perfectly content life watching hockey, drinking Slurpees, and hanging out in the tops of the bamboo forests? Well, turns out the world's economic climate changed dramatically and a job was needed to maintain his lifestyle. To research this phenomenon, he decided to do some research in China's Shenzhen and see what these crazy little things called businesses were all about.



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For Tuesday, the 27th of October, about two dozen of us foreign students boarded a bus to visit Ryder Enterprises and the world famous IBM Corporation in Shenzhen to see a couple of businesses in action. All of us from the CIMBA program attended as well as several of our European classmates from Italy, France, and Germany. This was a great opportunity to see the culture of a Chinese corporate environment and at the end of the day, I felt as though I had learned many things and am more prepared for my internship and maybe even a job in China... you never know!

Our tour left from the north gate at 8 am, which made most of us happy because the majority of us live near the north gate but our trips often leave from the south gate, a 20-25 minute walk away. The bus trip provided an opportunity to see some of the rural areas of Guangdong. Living in Guangzhou would never hint to this, but the Canton province is actually very green! Just before arriving in Shenzhen, we traveled over a bridge that is one of the greatest engineering feats I have seen. It was a suspension bridge, entirely at an incline, that spanned at least 2 kilometers. By the time we reached the top of the bridge, our elevation had changed a few hundred feet.

Our first stop was at Ryder Enterprises, China's second largest electronic manufacturing services company. They build small private label electronics for some of the biggest brands in the world. Some products are components that the brand is sourcing for a larger item, and other products are built ready to sell. The day we visited, many of the work lines were focused on building heart monitors for babies.

Entering the company's compound, we were lead to a conference room where we were met by the general manager who introduced the company to us with some business data and models they follow. We were then divided into smaller groups and given a tour of the factory. This is a photo of my group and the girls who gave the tour. I think they may have been having more fun than we did!



The first level of the factory held the plastic injection machinery. Here, the bodies of the heart monitors were being produced. Going to the next floor, we needed to put booties over our shoes to keep dirt out. On this floor, the computer chips were manufactured and installed, and the devices were tested and boxed according to the buyer's specifications.



Watching the workers was very interesting. The employees sat at very long workstations and each had a very small task. They only do that one small step, and had it on to the next person. For instance, a person will only attach a certain chip, only place certain screws, or only test a certain aspect of the device. The prolonged concentration on what would quickly become a very mundane task would be very difficult for me. Also, the administrative employees work a "western" 8 to 5 schedule, while most of the factory employees work 10-12 hours 6 days a week, but could work more according to the needs of a contract. We felt the working conditions in terms of cleanliness and general safety were quite good, and met international standards, something critical for a company building for some top-line international brands. These are some more pictures of the factory in action.



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The third floor is where the high-tech manufacturing took place. Using clean-rooms, with employees behind glass windows and dressed head to toe in clean suits, they worked on electronics with Siemens machinery. We arrived only a couple of minutes before lunch began, so we had little time to see these lines in action. Their efficiency in clearing out for lunch was quite impressive.

Overall, we were quite impressed with the standards of the factory. We wished that some of the work hour requirements on some of the factory workers could be improved, but we also understand the market factors that result in these conditions, so Ryder cannot be entirely to blame. The buyers looking to meet their customer's needs share some of this responsibility.

After a 10-course lunch at a local restaurant with the management team that showed us their business, we made a short trip to IBM's offices. IBM was unable to provide us with a tour of their offices beyond a quick spin through an area of cubicles, but they did have three employees ready with talks about the company. One of them is an expat from Canada who moved to Shenzhen only about a year ago. He is also one of the very few blacks that are in China outside the trade industry. He commented that he has some interesting experiences because for many Chinese people, he is the first black person they have ever met. IBM talked a lot about their strategy to move away from hardware manufacturing and become a true service providing company providing fully integrated technological solutions for their clients, from sourcing through testing and implementation. This is a great case study in corporate evolution and maintaining market leadership. Although IBM might not be a leader

in consumer laptop computers, they are certainly a leader in technology solutions and implementation. They have taken a big step forward into service providing, and their computer prowess is now just a competency, but not the entire company.

