Alumni Interview

Maja Zupan



IMB

31th Generation

How would you briefly describe your career path and what you do today?
I have always been a very curious person, with a strong need to understand how things work. Because of that, I started working alongside my studies at a very early age. What I enjoyed most was realizing that some of the challenges I faced at work were the same ones we discussed in class. Those moments connected theory with practice and became the lessons I truly remembered.

During my studies, I gained experience across several different fields. I worked in a well-established marketing agency, in sales within a startup environment, and later in project-based roles where I organized events and, for the first time, led a team. Each step helped me better understand not only how organizations function, but also where my strengths lie. Even though I reached a point where I could have continued working full-time in a good company and just finished with my studies, I decided to take a final step and enroll in the IMB programme. Through my work experience, I realized how crucial a strong knowledge foundation is and how it differentiates even very good performers from those with the greatest long-term potential.
The combination of diverse work experiences and the academic depth gained through the IMB programme gave me two kinds of confidence: the courage to try, experiment, and fail when necessary, and the self-awareness to understand what I know well and where I still have room to grow.

After completing the IMB programme, I was unable to start working immediately due to a personal family situation. I used this time intentionally by enrolling in additional training and successfully obtaining the national professional qualification for a real estate agent. As soon as I was able to return to work, I decided to combine my skills, knowledge, and experience and take an entrepreneurial step by starting my career as an independent real estate agent. Working across different fields has proven to be a major advantage in this role. I manage the entire process myself—from acquiring business opportunities and building client relationships, to marketing, sales, administration, and after-sales activities. If I had to describe my job in one sentence, I would say it is a continuous effort to provide the highest possible level of service, while constantly learning, refining my approach, and strengthening self-discipline.

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What initially motivated you to choose IMB for your studies?
What initially attracted me to the IMB programme was how thoughtfully it is designed. The structure is logical, well-balanced, and sufficiently in-depth, and it is supported by excellent professors from around the world who bring diverse perspectives and real-world experience into the classroom. IMB offers a safe yet challenging environment that encourages you to step outside your comfort zone, absorb new knowledge, and continuously test yourself—whether through teamwork, leadership, public speaking, or interpersonal dynamics.

What I found especially valuable is that the programme closely reflects the reality of working in a high-performing organization. It prepares you not only academically, but also mentally and personally for the challenges, expectations, and pace of professional life in demanding environments. Another reason and for me, personally one of the most important ones, was the network. I truly believe that the people you surround yourself with shape the way you think, act, and grow. Being around individuals who challenge you, inspire you, and push you to aim higher makes an enormous difference. There is a well-known saying that you become similar to the five people you spend the most time with, and from my experience, I couldn't agree more. That is why choosing the right environment matters so much. At IMB, students are selected thoughtfully, which creates a community of ambitious, driven, and diverse individuals who constantly motivate each other to grow—both professionally and personally.

How did your studies at IMB contribute to your professional development (knowledge, skills, mindset)?
First and foremost, the IMB programme provided me with a strong and structured foundation in business and management, with valuable insights into entrepreneurship as well. I strongly believe that knowledge shapes not only what you do, but also how you think and communicate. When this foundation is solid, it becomes much easier to build sustainable, well-thought-out ideas and to navigate challenges that are inevitable in any professional path. In addition to knowledge, the programme significantly strengthens your practical skills—especially time management, self-organization, interpersonal skills, and public speaking. These skills are often underestimated, yet they are essential. You can have the best ideas, but without the ability to communicate them clearly, work with people, listen, and understand different perspectives, it is difficult to lead, collaborate, or create impact. IMB constantly challenged us to manage a demanding workload, set priorities, and organize ourselves efficiently—skills that are crucial regardless of the industry or role.

If I look at myself personally, the biggest shift IMB gave me was in my mindset. I am a perfectionist by nature and very self-critical, which in the past often made me doubt myself or hesitate—sometimes even to the point of not trying at all. The programme was intense enough that there was simply no space for overthinking. You either moved forward or you fell behind. At some point, you stop questioning yourself and just start doing. And then you realize that you are capable of much more than you thought. That experience builds a very real, healthy confidence and naturally puts you into an always-learning mindset, where challenges stop being something to fear and start becoming something you trust yourself to handle.

Which course, professor, or project at IMB had the greatest impact on you?
This is a difficult question to answer, as several courses and professors left a strong impression on me. However, being naturally people-oriented and creative, I have always been most drawn to topics related to human behavior, creativity, psychology, and the way ideas are formed and developed.

I am especially grateful to Professor Dr. Miha Škerlavaj, with whom I worked so well even later while writing my final thesis. His depth of knowledge, intelligence, and genuine gift to work with people—to guide, mentor, and challenge them, left a very strong impression on me. His approach to leadership and learning was both inspiring and formative, and I have great respect for him as a professional and a mentor.

In terms of courses, I would also highlight those led by Professor Pustovrh Aleš and Ada Guštin Habuš. Their courses offered valuable insights into entrepreneurship and they really encouraged us to think independently rather than follow predefined paths. They helped us activate our own perspectives, creativity, self-trust and problem-solving approaches, which is very precious especially for those of us, who became entreprenurs.

What key competencies gained during your studies do you use most in your current role?
In my current role, I use many of the competencies I developed at IMB every single day. Working independently means self-discipline and perseverance are essential, as there's no one else structuring my day or motivating me. Time management, self-organization, and strategic thinking help me stay focused and navigate multiple priorities. At the same time, the interpersonal skills like communicating clearly, understanding different perspectives, and building trust are what help me work effectively with my clients and build long-term relationships with them. And perhaps most importantly, the mindset of continuous learning that IMB instilled in me keeps me growing, experimenting, and tackling challenges with confidence.

What was the most challenging part of your transition from university to the labour market?
The most challenging part for me was the internal pressure and self-doubt. There's so much talk about how "your first job defines your career," and it's easy to get scared of failing or being judged. On top of that, figuring out which field to focus on—especially when you're still exploring your strengths and interests—can feel overwhelming. Balancing those fears, expectations, and uncertainty was definitely the toughest part of stepping into the labour market.
Internal fights because of the pressure that you feel because some people scare you, that the first job is the most important one, you are afraid of failing, of judgement, you are confused which field to choose, especially if you don't know it quite yet, etc.