Careers in the Digital Economy

What have Data Centres Ever Done for Me?
Case study:
Hayley Godlieb, Project Manager, BA (Hons)
Turner and Townsend

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1. What do you do?
I am a London-based Project Manager in Turner & Townsend’s Real Estate Team and part of the dedicated High Tech and Manufacturing team. My specific expertise is on Data Centre programmes and technical projects. I work with a team of project and commercial managers who have vast experience within this sector, advising on a range of enterprise, cloud and co-location Data Centre projects within the UK, Europe and globally.

2. A bit about what your organisation does.
Turner & Townsend is a global, independent professional services company specialising in programme management, project management, cost management and advisory across the property, infrastructure and natural resources sectors.

In Data Centres we’re at the forefront of the development of tier II, III and IV technology centres across the globe for many of the major players in the industry.

On both technology and manufacturing projects we manage and coordinate the team of contractors, sub-contractors and specialist consultants, and enable their effective interface with our client’s engineering department, specialist suppliers, designers and contractors. We also provide procurement strategies for specialist technology and Data Centre clients.

3. Your story – where you started from and how you got to where you are.
I have always been interested in architecture and design, and whilst at secondary school I knew I wanted to go into construction as a career, but I wasn’t sure on what options were out there.

I did a lot of research for university courses and I went on to study Design Management at Bournemouth University, which I thought would be very suitable for me. However, in the ‘Management and Innovation’ units I found my peers would write about design innovation, and I was writing about how companies manage innovation using Big Data to get an analytical competitive edge. I think at this point I realised I didn’t quite have the design flair my peers had, but instead was excelling in design strategies and technology.

During my placement year I worked for a project management company specialising in mission critical projects. I remember visiting my first data centre and finding it fascinating that this
facility was powering millions of people’s digital activity. It seemed obvious that this industry was driving the future.

As I continued to become more passionate about data centres and technology, I focused on developing my skills and learning how to manage construction projects. Being naturally organised and efficient in my work, I found it easy to manage and organise others. While I don’t have an engineering background, I am lucky to be surrounded by technical experts who are always more than happy to teach me about new technologies so I can apply this knowledge to my work.

Working on mechanical and engineering projects is like the open heart surgery of the construction industry. We have to work in live environments, and this makes these projects exciting to me – it’s the reason I’ve stayed in this sector and not moved to fit-out or another aspect of project management. Technology is moving on so rapidly, and I enjoy being at the forefront of it.

4. **What have you gained personally and professionally from working within the sector?**
   Large data centre developments can present significant challenges and risks. In most cases they are complex, long term investments with many stakeholders and participants involved. I have gained great experience in managing projects of this nature, and managing people to deliver these projects successfully. I like working with a team and try to bring the best out of people to achieve the end goal. Personally, I have grown more confident and I am proud to be breaking the mould in this sector.

5. **Why you chose to work in this sector (if you did!)**
   It’s not always what you know, it’s who you know, and for me this has very much been true. My step-mum has a mechanical engineering background and introduced me to a contact of hers in the industry, who helped me find my university placement. I was lucky to also be interested in data centres, and work on projects that were exciting enough to keep me hooked.

6. **Any learning points you would like to pass on to aspiring technical staff or, even better, why you would recommend a career in the sector to young people who think data centres are as dull as mince with no onions.**
   I think the saying “you can’t be what you can’t see” is very apt. Some young people think ‘the cloud’ is actually a cloud in the sky where their photos and documents go to be saved. When you explain to these people that everything they do online, Facebook, Twitter, Google etc. is stored on a server in a data centre miles away they looked bewildered. I think young people should be able to visit data centres, to understand what they are, and what they do. I think the exciting environment would draw a lot more people’s interest in a career working there.

   Additionally, young women shouldn’t be apprehensive about going into construction, engineering or technology. It’s a very challenging, but rewarding, career and female role models need to promote these opportunities. The data centre industry is wide ranging and can take you around the world. It can give many career options and should not be overlooked.