Careers in the Digital Economy
What have Data Centres Ever Done for Me?

Case study:
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October 2018

What do you do?
As the Solutions Director for VIRTUS my responsibilities include pre-sales consultancy with sales team, design and implementation works with the operational team and post sales client management for Enterprise customers.

What does your organisation do?
We are the fastest growing Data Centre company in the UK. VIRTUS design, build and operate the best Data Centres in the world so our customers don’t have to.

Where did you start and how did you get to where you are? Did you choose to work in the sector and if not how did you end up here?
It’s 1983, and Financial Services is where it’s at. I’m all ready to go back to 6th form and learn amongst other things ‘Computer Studies’. I think it was called that as it was pre-PC so most computers were things that you could only view from afar (more on that later). An opportunity arose at a life insurance company so I decided to take the plunge and join the world of work, which in those days was like going training with an American Football team (you couldn’t move for shoulder pads). The company had an IT division, and within six months I got a job within it in ‘Data Control’. This involved building work schedules for overnight batch runs, that were executed on a computer 4 metres long! Everything was big, (especially the hair – even mine). The storage units were like a top loading washing machine, with a platter of disks delivering 100mb of storage weighing 10 kilos and needed to be screwed in with different platters for different data. That’s less data then the SIM card holds in your mobile phone. Over a couple of years I held various positions in Operations, then was ‘outsourced’ to an IT services company as part of a managed services contract. The company I joined had a large data centre, which was built to 400w/m² which at the time was considered powerful. From there I worked across a range of contracts, eventually becoming Head of Data Centres for the UK and Europe. My final role with my former company was to build the business case then execute the delivery of a new primary data centre for UK operations, which was my first experience of the build and delivery of a bespoke data centre.

What have you gained personally and professionally from working within the sector?
Once in the world of outsourcing, this gave me the opportunity to work and gain experience across a range of different industry verticals. I’ve worked with finance organisations, food manufacturers, coffee companies, logistics companies, diamond importers, PC manufacturers, pharmaceuticals, local and national government and even the police - responsibility takes on a whole new meaning.
when you are running a system that handles all of the 999 calls in London. Whilst the end services and products of these organisations differ hugely, they all had one thing in common – the need for a robust and well run data centre to support them.

Working in the data centre world has enabled me to work and travel around the globe, learn about the requirements of different industries and experience how each one deals with very different challenges. This environment has given me the opportunity to study in France at a renowned business school, greatly enhance my own knowledge and to build a network of business contacts that has provided opportunities for myself and our business. I also have a career that now extends to 35 years but still consistently provides new challenges and experiences.

Any learning points you would like to pass on 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?

The main take away I would offer is don’t fear change – embrace it. Take the opportunity to be in at the start and help shape how we live and work in the future. Whatever you think about data centres, and most of them do look fairly non-descript from the outside, they are not going away anytime soon, and the world we live in is totally dependent on them. From the moment you get up in the morning and turn on the radio, or the TV, or check your email, or swipe your Oyster card on the way to work, or use your Sat-Nav, pay for a coffee then make your first phone call of the day you will be having multiple touch points somewhere with a data centre. The industry needs bright new people to make them even better, and being a ‘geek’ is not mandatory – far from it. These facilities need designing, building, marketing, selling and operating. So if you are an architect, engineer, consultant, builder, marketeer, salesman, coder, financier, security specialist, or cleaner to name just a few this industry needs you. Come and join us, there is plenty of opportunity.

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