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

Case study:
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Where did I start?
I left school at the age of sixteen with a small number of qualifications but was lucky enough to attend a number of interviews arranged through the local Careers Office. At the time I had absolutely no idea what job path I should take or what would be open to me. One of the interviews attended was with a George Thurley an internal recruitment officer for British Telecom International (BTI). George was recruiting for Telecom Engineers. The first twenty minutes was a disaster, all questions referenced back to the telco side of the business. George, clearly losing patience said “well Gary we’ve been sat here for twenty minutes and you’re only answer is “I don’t know”. So what do you know?” This allowed me to talk about my passion at the time, motorbikes. We had another twenty minute conversation on the workings of bikes, cars etc. which lead on to George saying “I have the right job for you, how would you like to join our power engineering team?” I accepted there and then.

Learning the ropes at BT
The position was a three year apprenticeship and titled Trainee Technician Apprentice (Building Services). The BTI training was second to none and covered all critical, essential and non-essential building infrastructure supporting the core communications business. I gained ONC & HNC in Electrical & Electronic Engineering which taught the fundamentals and helped to strengthen my industry knowledge. As a result of my willingness to learn I was offered the opportunity to lead a challenging project of migrating communications services from an ageing central power plant to smaller dedicated systems. The outcome was successful and I was rewarded with a formal commendation. I had nine good years with BTI, worked with some fantastic people and gained a strong working knowledge of the communications industry.

Flying over to Mercury for the next steps
In the late eighties Mercury Communications Ltd (MCL), a competitor to BT was evolving and I was offered the position of Power Engineer covering critical services for their London based operations. This also included the satellite base station located in the Docklands. The position offered a hike in salary, a number of other financial benefits whilst focusing on the operational effectiveness of critical Mechanical & Electrical (M&E) services. Promoted to Senior Power Engineer some three years later I was enjoying the learning experience. After eight years of operational duties with MCL I was felt a change was needed.

Challenges and rewards at AT&T
At this time AT&T were planning their UK network and I was offered the position of Power Engineer covering critical services for their London based operations. This also based around critical services but this time in the design and implementation of infrastructure and not operational based. Promoted to the position of Senior Building Services Engineer within eighteen months of joining. The AT&T role involved UK travel another pleasant change. After eight months I, along with a
number of other employees, was awarded the AT&T UK President’s Award for Excellence for going above and beyond.

**Power Engineering and Promotion at Colt**

After two and a bit years with AT&T I was approached by COLT Telecom to join their International team in the capacity of Power Engineer. A small team made up of all internal employees other than me and tasked with the rollout of eighteen data centres across a number of European countries. This was the late nineties when cash was readily available to build data centre assets. A design manual was compiled, this representing the design & build template for all European builds across countries such as Germany, France, Spain, Ireland and a number of others. A modular approach was taken which restricted spend in an untested market, however the uptake of space was surprisingly rapid and in certain countries a phase two programme was immediately launched. Promoted to the position of Project/Programme Manager within eighteen months of joining. I had eight enjoyable years with COLT strengthening my knowledge & understanding of the role of critical M&E infrastructure in the Data Centre world but also acquiring new skills such as people management (in particular hard-nosed consultants), coaching new staff speaking limited English and working with varying regulations across the different European countries.

**To Infinity and Beyond..**

Learning new skills and holding the level of experience gained over numerous build programmes it was time to look for a new challenge, my thoughts were a start-up company or consulting. Then came along my present company, Infinity SDC Ltd, a new start-up specialising in the design, implementation and In-life of bespoke Data Centre builds. Now this was a challenge. A team of four, with mountains of individual successes but with no collective results and very little money in the bank presented a number of difficult challenges. We set off raising cash which appeared fairly easy to do however the caveat placed on the founding members was half salary until measureable success was demonstrated, a period that lasted some 2-3 years.

We took office space in the old Barclays building in Lombard Street and invited potential clients to lunches, evening drinks whilst demonstrating our capabilities. Unfortunately, this was a tough sell based on a due diligence library (how to build a Data Centre) and the architectural models demonstrating what an Infinity Data Centre would look like. During this period I had drafted the majority of the DD suite and expanded my knowledge in the world of commercials and general marketing and sales activities. A customer was finally signed which changed the business dramatically.

**Engineering Design Authority, and Professional Registration**

The Infinity business was a fast growing organisation which at its peak held six very large data centre build projects. I have worn many hats through the journey of the organisation, titles have included Engineer through to Customer Engineering Director with my present title being Engineering Design Authority. Along the line I have achieved Chartered Engineer status and I am a Fellow member of the IET. The CEng achievement being based on experience and industry knowledge.

Present role includes work activities such as Authorising Engineer, technical sales/bid support from conception through to handover, customer project support from first client presentation through to customer go-live date, project delivery responsibility (from concept through to handover), delivery of utility high voltage power supplies (100+MW delivered to date) and environmental compliance (first colocation data centre to achieve EPR licence).
All in all I have found my working career very satisfying and would recommend the data centre industry, whether it be on the IT or services side, to those considering a career change or are about to embark on their first work experience.