St John's Innovation Centre Tenant Spotlight: 10 minutes with… David McLeary from Cambridge Software Ltd

Join us for 10 minutes with SJIC tenant David McLeary, Operations Director at Cambridge Software Ltd, on why he is both a fan and a participant of crowd funding, the importance of mentoring and how to maintain a work/life balance in the IT sector.

What drew you to the sector you currently work in?

I've always loved computers in general and specifically communication and information so what started as a hobby for me in 1990 turned into a successful career, helped by the web becoming part of everyday life, through the emerging of social media and the exciting world of cloud technology and software as a service. I'm particularly interested in what all of these progressive technologies do for business and how it can improve productivity rather than for their own sake.

How has your life experience contributed to where you are today?

Because computing was my hobby, my field of study had been the world of business administration. I think that having that background of understanding helps us to liaise with clients and for us to be pro-active with our own products and services to pre-empt business needs. For me, it remains about the solution and benefit rather than the jargon and technology itself.

How do you distinguish yourself from your competitors?

We're really pleased to have good, long-term relationships with the clients that we serve, so we like to think we're doing something right. In addition to our focus on technology for business solutions rather than for its own sake our clients often point out how we are different from many other IT suppliers they have worked with in the past because of the way we engage with them. I think social media forms part of that picture as for many it's about the people within the business and having individuals within it that you get to know and trust over time.

How do you see your industry developing in the next 5 years?

I think that there is still massive potential for businesses to improve by using productivity tools that are out there already. The amount of time lost by rekeying information instead of adopting good data management practices and utilizing appropriate CRM systems really drives me crazy. Beyond that, however, I'd like to see much closer business integration including shared data such as stock level between supply chain companies, better trend analysis to allow companies to pre-empt and adapt to consumer behaviour and with the emergence of the Internet of Things there is a wealth of opportunity for businesses to become much closely aligned to the specific needs of the way their clients work rather than a simple buy and forget mentality.

What are your thoughts on crowd funding?

I'm both a fan and a participant. It's people that have the ideas and often these people simply don't have the capital to progress the idea even to a prototype or proof of concept phase. Crowd funding allows them to do that and with enough involvement the boundaries of how we work and live can really be challenged.

How much importance do you place on mentoring?

I'm sure it's similar in other industries but with IT particularly it's very easy to see yourself as closed off from other people, particularly when tactical or strategic problems hit you. Having regular mentoring sessions or having access to a mentor within the business is a superb "reality check" on how you are dealing with any issue.

How do you maintain a work/life balance?

With IT this is a particularly relevant question! With permanent connectivity to emails and with server management 24/7 it can easily mean that there is no life at all within the industry. For me, it's about managing expectations, building good relationships with the people that you supply services to and ensuring you have the necessary fallback procedures and a great support team in the event of something happening.

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