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Within its pages you will find reviews of each of the local technology based community groups’ events and details of their upcoming events. You will find news about local tech companies and how they are working together with each other and the local community groups. You can read about the people who make up the technology community in Norfolk in the Meet the Community column. You will also find technical and business based articles and other related news from around the county. And you will find the latest tech jobs from specially selected recruitment agents.

Locally it has been well known for over a year now that Norfolk is teeming with technology companies and has a thriving tech community. It has everything from startups to SMEs and even a few large firms. Groups like Hot Source and SyncNorwich have helped promote technology in Norfolk and have done an astoundingly good job of forming the tech community and bringing it together with the business community. Now it’s time to tell the world about technology in Norfolk and the fabulous companies and community groups that the county boasts.

How can you help?

We need to expand our team of reviewers who regularly attend one or more of the local community groups (Hot Source, SyncNorwich, Norfolk Developers, Norfolk Indie Game Developers, Norwich Ruby Users Group, SyncDevelopHer, The Norfolk Network, etc). We need people to engage with local businesses and gather news and stories from them. We need people to write technical articles. Can you lend us just a few hours a month to help put Norfolk on the map as a tech centre? If so, or if you would like to find out more or help in other ways, please drop an email to paul@nakedelement.co.uk.
The Editor

// PAUL GRENYER

I’ve been speaking to a lot of local tech business owners about various things recently and something that is on most of their minds is recruitment. There just aren’t enough developers to go around. People often come to me to help them fill roles. And while I know a lot of people through Norfolk Developers and the other groups I’m involved with, most people locally, in my experience, are gainfully employed and keen to progress where they are.

This leaves us with two options. To bring experienced people into the county or to train graduates and other enthusiastic people up.

So what do we need to do to bring experienced people into the county? I believe the stumbling blocks are that Norfolk is still not perceived as a tech hub and the salaries on offer here. We’re doing everything we can to change how people perceive Norfolk. Cracking the salary problem is more difficult and the reason is that most of the companies in Norfolk are SMEs (Small to Medium sized Enterprises). We need bigger businesses to come here and fill the gap between the large number of SMEs and the single large tech company in Norfolk.

Training people up is also a problem for SMEs as they generally need experienced developers who can hit the ground running. There isn’t the perceived time or budget in a lot of cases to teach developers. I think this perception needs to change. At the moment a lot of local companies have open vacancies and have had them for months. Is this costing them money? Of course it is. If they took on a school leaver, a graduate or someone unemployed with the right attitude would it cost them money? Probably, but in the long run, with the right person, it would pay dividends.

The one skill that seems to be most sought after at the moment is .Net web development using C#. There are a number of companies locally looking for this particular skill. It would make sense for those companies to group together and sponsor people through training with a view to taking them on at the end. This would be a starting point to bridge the skills shortage in Norfolk.

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Liftshare.com founder Ali Clabburn and his Head of IT Tim Stephenson talk to Beccy Johnston about leading the charge in the “sharing economy,” the connectivity challenges of doing business in Norfolk and why they installed a giant slide to create some of the county’s funkiest office space.
It started life in an Attleborough turkey shed in 1998 (two weeks before Larry Page and Sergey Brin founded Google) and went on to become the world’s most successful “Sharing Economy” website. Today, Liftshare has more than 600,000 members and is responsible for people sharing around 100,000 car journeys every day. Founder Ali Clabburn now employs a team of 30 from an office in Norwich’s Duke St that features hanging-basket chairs and a one-storey high slide.

Tell me about the genesis of Liftshare.com?

Ali: I was a student in Bristol, trying to get home to Norfolk. I couldn’t afford the train so I put a notice up in the student’s union asking if anyone was driving back this way and I had three people offer me a lift. That’s when the idea was born. The noticeboard became quite popular and at the same time the internet was arriving at university so I persuaded a friend to build me a very early website that would match people that were going from A to B. Now it works anywhere in the world in about five different languages, but we’re 95% in the UK where there’s an 80% chance of finding a match and the average journey has about 30 matches.

How rapidly did it take off?

Ali: Slowly! We went round fresher’s fairs where I planned to have 10,000 people pay £10 each to raise £100,000 to build the website properly. By lunchtime on day one we’d made about £10 so we made it £5, then we made it free and had lots of people join! For three years I worked in the Virgin post room in Norwich and did pub jobs to make money to get the website developed, and then we found a way to make some money by selling branded versions of the site to companies and councils.

And this came about partly because of Glastonbury?

Ali: In our second year, someone from Glastonbury phoned up saying “The council says we’ve got too much traffic coming, would car sharing be possible to get to Glastonbury?” So we branded Liftshare for them and it was very popular and we realised that if people have something in common they are much more likely to want to share. So we broke down the national site into communities, things like a business, an area, a hobby group, people going to the same sports event. For groups and festivals we provide the service free because it promotes us to lots of people, whereas companies pay us to help their staff share cars to work and councils pay us to help reduce traffic in their areas.

And it’s in the matching process that the clever technology comes in?

Tim: The idea started as a load of post-it notes on a whiteboard, with people looking for someone heading in the same direction. Today, geospatial data processing, mapping & route-corridor matching has replaced the whiteboard and post-it notes. Once you enter your journey, we compare it to others in the system looking for potential matches who are going in the same direction along the same or a similar route.

What’s the technology stack?

Tim: It’s currently very Microsoft-heavy. The website front-end uses lots of Classic ASP although we’re in the process of trying to do something about that with a major migration to ASP.NET & C#. The back-end is a SQL Server 2012 database making use of the latest geo-spatial extensions. We rely on a number of Amazon EC2 web services for message queuing and email, and are starting to look at how we can take advantage of more of the amazing open-source projects that are taking the world by storm.

What’s the breakdown of your workforce between tech and non-tech people?

Ali: Roughly a quarter of the team are technical, developing new features and looking after current clients. Another quarter work on helping our clients to change the behaviour of their staff, another quarter do business development and the rest are in administration. Technology is critical but being in touch with your customers is even more important because if you try to sell this just technically you won’t do it, you need the behavioural change as well.

Why is Liftshare in Norwich?

Ali: The only no-go area in our strategic planning is that we’re not moving out of Norfolk. I’m from Attleborough but Norwich is an amazing place to be. The sorts of people that are here are lifestyle people rather than money people and if you can find a way to do something rewarding, challenging and exciting here then why would you want to be anywhere else?
Are there downsides to being in Norfolk?

Ali: It was slightly frustrating that when we moved from Attleborough to Norwich we got worse Internet access even though we are about 50 yards from a BT exchange. We are apparently too close to have it, so we’ve had to put in our own leased line to overcome that.

Tim: Our phone lines are the wrong type of copper, apparently! Although we commissioned our own fibre, we don’t host any of our services from here, instead using a data centre in Manchester. Fast and properly redundant connectivity is just too pricey for a business of our size in Norwich at the moment.

Ali: It’s also frustrating there isn’t more IT training locally. It was a real surprise to move to Norwich and actually find it harder to recruit people than it was in Attleborough. Everyone else here is from Norfolk but in terms of IT we’ve got people from all over the country. We feel there’s a massive demand for more tech skills. We’ve got a fantastic university and a fantastic college on our doorstep and they just don’t seem to be churning out nearly enough well-skilled IT developers. I have no idea why the arts school isn’t doing a lot more in design tech.

Tim: In many cases they also seem to teach the wrong kind of technology – for a business which doesn’t rely on Java at any rate. We have graduates from other universities, Lincoln for example, who can hit the ground running with great commercially usable skills. In too many other cases, graduates often have to set aside much of what they’ve just learnt and retrain.

You’ve won lots of awards and are recognised as one of the innovators in what’s now called the “Sharing Economy”. Have you been surprised how the sector has developed?

Ali: I’ve been surprised at how slowly it happened, even in the car sharing sector. I always thought someone else would come along and do it bigger and better with more money but it’s only really now you’re starting to see some interesting competition. It’s great to see companies are now successfully sharing all sorts of things, but whether those models will work financially….it’s a lot harder than people imagine.

Liftshare began two weeks before Google. Do you ever think you could have been as rich as Larry and Sergey if you hadn’t put the “eco” before the “commerce”?

Ali: Many well-known social entrepreneurs become social entrepreneurs having made a fortune first. We’ve maybe been slower to progress than we could have been if we’d focussed on ways to make lots of money, but when I look at what we’ve achieved with the small team and the resources that we’ve got, it’s amazing. My trouble is that I fell in love with Liftshare and the social benefits of what we were up to - and I really couldn’t do anything else. Making huge profits was never the point of liftshare but clearly we have needed to be profitable to grow.

What’s next for Liftshare?

Ali: Right now we are doing really interesting stuff with integrating all forms of transport, so we’ve created a product called myPTP which lets a company upload their staff’s postcodes and we’ll email everyone showing them the best ways they could travel to work by integrating walking, cycling, car sharing, bus or train. We built that for one partner and have rolled it out to 90. It could overtake Liftshare in terms of revenue-generation next year. Google are doing amazing things with mapping and journey planning, but they don’t have car share data and this does lots of things they don’t do, so it’s quite exciting. And we’re doing a lot on redesigning Liftshare.com to be more engaging and have more of a community feel.

So how much of your focus is on R&D?

Tim: The pace of change is phenomenal and it often seems that regardless of how much time we spend looking at new stuff there’s always something else that we should be taking advantage of. We could probably spend all day, every day doing nothing but R&D and still struggle to keep up. Overall we probably put around 20% of our effort into keeping client sites up to date and the rest is on developing new stuff.
What’s next for the sharing economy in general?

Ali: There are quite a few businesses pushing the legal limits to the point of being illegal, particularly in the States. There are lots of taxi apps that are claiming not to be taxi companies because they’re done through an app rather than through a phone system and are flouting the rules. The genuine taxi companies are pretty upset with them – in France they’re basically smashing up cars because they’re so annoyed. With hotels and Airbnb, there are lots of challenges about their business model and whether it’s legal or not, whether people are sub-letting houses that they shouldn’t be. So it’s getting a lot of attention. I’m hoping that it’ll be good attention rather than damaging the sector. But if they get it right the potential for the sector is massive. Partly because we’ve got no choice, we can’t just keep consuming. If you take transport; if everyone shared a car we’d have no congestion.

I have to ask about the offices. We’re sitting in a log cabin meeting room and looking at a slide, what made you go for the funky offices?

Ali: We’ve gone from a turkey shed to a job centre to this. What’s next, a space ship? Through work we see some amazing companies and with the amount of time we spend in an office it just seemed crazy that we don’t pay more attention to the environment we’re in. Every time you walk in here you feel lucky to be here so it’s absolutely worth it. The slide was one extravagant bit of craziness, but the amount of PR we got from it on the day we opened, it paid for itself! The fact that I use it every single day and my kids come to see me in the office far more than they would otherwise is a bonus.

“We are always looking for new and more efficient ways of doing things, because that’s part of a good business sense.”
Meet the Community

Ali Clabburn

Name: Ali Clabburn
Who do you work for?
Liftshare.com
What do you do there?
MD, Founder and possibilist
What experience, qualifications etc were important in getting the job?
I wasn’t very good at exams. I did four years of trying to do Mechanical Engineering. I did eventually get a 2.2 but I failed my first three years and spent each summer retaking them all... The best thing I did was fall asleep in a very dull lecture at 9am on a Monday morning. I woke up 2 hours later with dribble on my notes in the middle of a psychology lecture. It was fascinating and for the rest of the year I went along which I think has been quite handy for Liftshare. Far more useful than the Mechanical Engineering!
What do you like most about the job?
I think I have the best job in the world. We spend our days helping people to access opportunity and have people writing in and saying thank you every day. I can’t imagine anything better.
What’s the most challenging thing you’ve had to do?
Finding the right people and keeping them happy and finding the right inspiration to learn from. Some wise person once told me that you’re more likely to go bust when you’re growing fast than when you’re shrinking so we’ve had to have a clear strategy and be quite careful during our growth. And the hardest thing is being a social enterprise – focussing on achieving our social mission of ensuring that everyone has someone to share a car with whilst competing with those who just cherry-pick profitable bits of the sector. If we were just in it for the money we wouldn’t do it how we do it, but our mission is to help everyone not just a select few. It makes it harder but much more fulfilling!
How do you keep up to date with what’s new?
It’s funny when I think back to when we were operating out of a turkey shed in Attleborough and running the most successful sharing economy website in the world and thinking “how on earth are we doing this?”. I think it comes down to being very, very clear about what we’re doing and then looking around us across the vertical horizon to see what’s going on that could help us get there quicker. So we basically did online mapping before Google, we did software as a service before it hit Silicon Valley; we did social networking before Facebook. We built a social network thing on Liftshare to help people match up to each other without realising how cool it was. And we did that because we were trying to solve a very specific problem. The challenge now is that there’s so much going on out there, you look out on the horizon and you don’t know which way to look or what is going to be the next big thing so it gets harder.
If you could go back and do it again, would you still chose the same career path?
Yeah. I’m not sure if I would do engineering, but if I hadn’t flunked my A-levels, I might not have been in Bristol and had the idea...getting things wrong along the way has been a definite positive.
What is your platform of choice?
My answer would be my zebra-skin platforms – a great help when you’re 5ft tall and trying to see over the crowds at Glastonbury!
Cat or dog?
Dog.
What gives you a nerdgasm?
Just the Internet – it’s amazing. I was a complete technophobe until the Internet came along. Aged 21 I basically jumped from hating computers to getting really excited by the potential of this new thing called the Internet. I thought it was amazing. And it is still amazing how it brings people and information together.
What do your family think of what you do?
They get it, but it took a while! It was quite weird being based in my Dad’s old farm office surrounded by all his old Norfolk farming things and running a tech company. He hates computers but he loves what we do. My kids really get it. They like drawing posters about people sharing cars and how it helps save the world!
What is the most surprising thing about you?
The thing that normally surprises people is that I’ve been doing this for 16 years and apparently I still look about 12.
PS/Xbox/PC/other?
I’m a non-gamer, I think the last game I had was Donkey Kong!
Meet the Community

Tim Stephenson

Name: Tim Stephenson

Who do you work for?
Liftshare.com

What do you do there?
My title is Head of IT, but basically I'm responsible for most electrical things within the office through to software development and our network/server infrastructure. IT tends to be a bit of a broad remit in a company our size because we're quite a small team - with a typical day potentially including anything from helping someone out with Word to experimenting with NodeJS & Handlebars templates for large-scale email campaigns.

What experience, qualifications etc were important in getting the job?
I have a degree in Computer Systems Engineering from UEA, but for this job it was also about being in the right place at the right time as our founder, Ali, came across me via connections on LinkedIn. Along with running a technology blog, refurbishing a house and having around 12 years of technology and management experience at Archant, my core technical skillset was important as was being able to look at IT strategically and manage a team.

How do you keep up to date with what's new?
It's a constant battle. Our team are really passionate about technology so they're always keeping an eye on blogs, the Internet and twitter plus Norfolk Developers and the local tech scene. There's an amazing tech community in Norfolk, which I don't think I'd really grasped in previous roles. Coming to Liftshare and moving back to the centre of Norwich, it's like "Wow!" There's all these amazing other local organizations doing incredible things. FX Home for example with their video editing & photographic tools.

If you could go back and do it again, would you still chose the same career path?
Mostly, but I'd probably skip doing a year of Chemistry and Physics at University. It seemed a good idea at the time but after a year of degree level chemistry and maths I think I realised that it perhaps wasn’t the best way forwards and switched to computing.

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What is your platform of choice?
Mac & OSX. Working in technology, I’ve reached a point where I just want something to work when I need it to. You just open a Macbook and it’s ready to go with great performance and long battery life.

What is the best ever platform?
I have no idea. There’s too many out there to choose from, but I probably wouldn’t pick Windows! Any server OS that decides that rebooting in the middle of the day for updates is a good thing to do without giving admins the ability to override doesn’t really get my vote.

When you’re fixing a production problem, who goes on your iPod?
Whatever comes up first! My iPod has a bit of an eclectic mixture ranging from classical music through to house and dance/trance along with a healthy helping of Brit alternative and rock.

Cat or dog?
Cat. I haven’t got time to walk a dog twice a day.

What gives you a nerdgasm?
All the new stuff that’s out there – seeing new platforms and new technologies coming out every month. Major new platforms like NodeJS have effectively come out of nowhere and all of a sudden you’ve got incredible things you can do with a product you’d probably never heard of.
What do your family think of what you do?
I think they like it. My mum and wife run a business that's all about helping people so there are a raft of synergies there. When people ask me what I do, I don't say that I work in IT; I say that I work for Liftshare. It's worthwhile, we make a difference for thousands of people every day and it's one of the main reasons I moved to this job.

How long have you been in technology?
About 15 years overall.

How did you get into technology?
It probably started because my mum was one of the first computer programmers in the UK, racing around the country programming payroll systems in the 1970's on a mainframe with 4k of RAM. In terms of a home computer, we got a ZX Spectrum and it went from there! I started getting involved in the “online” world when a 33Kbs modem and dial-up bulletin board systems were all the rage, running a tiny BBS from home on a 486 PC. Fortunately the world’s moved on somewhat from there!

Do you have any personal pet projects you’d like to tell us about?
I’m working on getting something up and running using Ghost & NodeJS at the moment, along with trying to find time to update my blog more frequently than once every two years. I’m also working on creating a professional photographic business, specialising in shooting weddings, commercial and lifestyle.

What is the most surprising thing about you?
Probably that I’m a classically trained musician and that I’ve spent a lot of time playing the Norwich Cathedral organ. You have to get over the fact that there’s no way to practice on that quietly! On the rare occasions I have time with two kids and a busy day job, I tend to play piano instead now.

What do you see technology changing in the sharing economy in the next 5 or 10 years?
Within the sharing economy there’s lots of energy going into trying to smooth the transition from the online world to the offline world, because in many areas it’s very disjointed. For example, you can easily search for and book services online or via a mobile but when it comes to delivering those services, the interaction falls back to what can be a manual or tedious process. Technology is becoming more and more vital as a key enabler – with mobiles rapidly becoming the primary tool consumers are using to access services; something that’s only going to increase as time goes on.

How is the most surprising thing about you?
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PS/Xbox/PC/other?
If it’s ever actually switched on, Xbox. Other than that, probably my phone or iPad.

Favourite computer game?
Probably Angry Birds or whatever my 3 year old is currently playing – so something bright and colourful!

Are you in Norfolk by accident or design?
I grew up here and went to UEA. I had the opportunity to leave and I didn’t really want to. Norwich has everything you need and I’ve yet to find somewhere I’d rather be based. I think it’s a great place to raise a family, and we have no intention of moving!

What’s good about operating in Norfolk?
It brings with it a whole raft of challenges in terms of technology. You can’t rely on having access to reliable mobile data and despite how close we are to the exchange, it’s still disappointing that city centre businesses are not really being considered in fibre broadband rollout plans. The irony is that many small villages will soon be overtaking the city centre as FTTC deployments start coming on stream during 2014.

Other than that, Norfolk is an amazing county with some brilliant local businesses spearheading initiatives worldwide. It’s great to be based in Norwich with such a vibrant local tech community around us yet with stunning rural areas and the coast on our doorstep.

...Norwich has everything you need and I’ve yet to find somewhere I’d rather be based...
6 Cash flow tips for freelancers

Getting paid as a freelancer can often turn into an ordeal, but there are several ways you can make it easier for yourself. Here are some tips to ensure a steady flow of cash into your freelancing business.

1. Invoice Promptly
The later you send an invoice, the later you are going to get paid. So make sure that you get your invoices out in a timely fashion. If producing invoices is a hassle, then get yourself some invoicing software that makes it easy. I personally recommend FreeAgent.

2. Ask for money up front
Ask for a deposit before you start work. This can be anything from 20% up to the full amount. Don’t think the client will give you anything up front? There’s no harm asking. I insist on a project deposit from clients that I haven’t worked with before to minimise my risk.

3. Use payment milestones
If you are working on a project that’s going to run for at least a few weeks, then consider having intermittent payment milestones. Schedule an invoice every week, or every fortnight.

4. Shorten your payment terms
30 days is an awful long time to wait to be paid if you have previously spent weeks, or even months, on a project. Shorten your payment terms to 14 days, or less.

5. Automatically follow up
If an invoice has passed its due date, then follow up with a friendly reminder e-mail. Most invoicing software will have this feature in built saving you the time of following up yourself. Be friendly, but persistent.

6. Charge late payers
At least in the UK, you are legally entitled to charge interest and an optional fee for late payments. Add a note to all of your invoices to say that you have the right to charge for late payments. Send a new invoice with your late payment charge after a defined period – say, 14 days after the due date.

With all of the tips, it makes sense to get invoicing terms defined in your client contract before you start working. This will protect you legally from any payment problems.
Then & Now: Women in I.T.

We know women have traditionally been under-represented in IT. While we’re waiting for that to change, we hear from Dev Debah who’s been working in IT since the 1990s. Here, she tells it like it was – and how it is now.

I am a woman who works in IT. Here’s the good news: it hasn’t been a struggle. I haven’t felt marginalised or excluded by my almost exclusively male colleagues. But it pains me to say that I’ve had to contend with some strangely conflicted consumers of IT services, who seem to lack the faith.

Of my 18 years in IT, I spent 13 years out in the field, installing and maintaining hardware and software. I can replace a hard drive, install an operating system, and troubleshoot a software glitch as expertly as the next IT engineer.

But a surprisingly large number of people, on learning that a woman had arrived to deal with a technical calamity, would greet me instead with, at best, a look of unbridled astonishment. At worst, they’d exclaim, “Oh! We were expecting a man”.

The hard-pressed school secretary who hadn’t been able to print for two hours, or the exasperated housing officer who couldn’t log in to the domain, could normally be relied on to head off for an unlooked for, and very welcome, coffee break while the nice guy from IT fixed the problem. Not so when that IT miracle worker is a woman.

Instead, she (unhappily, it’s often a she) would suddenly develop an anxiety disorder, standing sentry-like at my shoulder, scrutinising my every move, and enquiring from time to time whether I knew “exactly” what I was doing. In the early days, I’d pledge, in an apologetic tenor, to do my very best to fix the problem as competently as any of my colleagues would if they hadn’t unfortunately been assigned elsewhere that day.

That didn’t sit very well with me, so I abandoned that approach post haste. I contemplated adopting the laconic, super-cool countenance of the IT support nerd. Of course, this won’t cut the mustard if you’re a female – they’ll complain you’re moody, and blame your hormones. Instead, I’d send my more anxious customers off on diversionary activities. I’d ask them to make haste to the reprographics office and switch the multi-function printer off and on again, or ask them to locate the post-it note on which they had written (backwards) their last-known password. Once I’d successfully resolved the problem, a smidgen of faint praise would come my way: “You’re so clever”. For a woman, was the unspoken addendum.

I’m sure it wasn’t ill-intentioned. However, it seems to me that, despite the embedding of tech into our everyday lives and our homes, stereotypical attitudes persist, not least that women are technologically illiterate and don’t know their iPhone from their funny bone, or don’t know “how to work it”.

And therein lies the rub: some of the biggest and best-known tech companies are led by women, and many tech startups are founded by women, yet fewer than one in five IT professionals is female. In schools in the UK, girls out-perform boys in IT-related subjects, but few choose to study computer science at higher/further education level. The IT industry needs to shed its geeky image if it’s to attract more women to the workforce; but there needs to be a shift in societal attitudes too.

I no longer work at the coalface, and am now a server analyst in a medium-sized datacentre where I deal only with fellow techies, and where I’m accepted as an IT professional of equal merit. It is a male-dominated team, where the language is unfettered and no topic is off-limits. I enter merrily into the spirit of community and play at being “one of the boys”, and the guys, in return, treat me with respect and conviviality.

Before entering the world of IT, I worked in the City of London for 15 years which, post-Big Bang, was the most testosterone-fuelled working environment imaginable. I have a vivid memory of a conversation I had with a very successful, high-powered female member of the IT team at a blue-chip investment bank. I told her I wanted to change career direction and break into IT. She solemnly proffered this piece of advice: do as I have done. Cut your hair short and wear glasses.

It worked for her – the glass ceiling opened and she ascended into the boardroom.
I.T. Support at Onebyte

This is my first time submitting an article to NTJ and I am attempting to bring the heady world of IT Support to life. It’s part of what Onebyte do and to us it’s about good customer service, a sunny disposition and an efficient manner. There’s no excuse for bad customer service – don’t get me started!

A large DIY warehouse, full of DIY stuff for the layman and no-one there to help us utilise it. I have spent an entire hour of my life waiting for a small piece of timber to be cut so I can fit it in my car, not because I can’t saw, but because the timber cutting guy was on his lunch! Couldn’t this huge corporate beast have someone else able to slice a bit of 2 x 2? Computer says, ‘no’. I have spent an infeasible amount of time taking DIY stuff back, because it wasn’t the right stuff, so where was the expert to help me when I went to buy it?

And as for the corner DIY shop that kept me transfixed for an hour examining the pros and cons of toilet cleaners, it defies belief!

Regardless of the size of your business, you must take into account the subject. It’s all about gauging your audience and the situation. I sound difficult to please. I’m not really. I just expect the right level of service to fit the job. Whereas I’m happy to talk about my new boots or a forthcoming album in a small boutique shop, DIY and toilet cleaner just aren’t top of my list. Just give me an authoritative recommendation, get it done and be on your way.

Waiting for your computer issues to be resolved can be a bit like that. So here I find my business sitting amongst the toilet cleaner and DIY frustrations as a potential irritant.

So what’s good customer service with regard to IT? To us it’s not just about how easy it is to call us if there is a problem. First of all, it’s minimizing any problems in the first place, then it’s explaining and training so you have answers to any questions you have along the way, then there is the more obvious service of resolving issues in a timely manner, anything from a client query to a business critical issue.

You know that feeling when you or your team get on to your laptop/PC/tablet/mobile and your screen surges into life, from wherever you are and from any device, your files are at your fingertips, your calendar is happily managing your time and your email system is clean & secure, all your data is securely backed up, of and if there is a problem, then there is that really efficient person you can call. Well I’m glad if that’s the case, because that’s how it should be!

We do lots in the background, the bits you don’t want to hear about, the bits we do whilst you are cracking on with your day. Not waiting around, waiting for us. We are pro-actively on the case. We always review how we are doing. Our latest customer survey shows 91% of our customers are really happy with our customer service. We shall continue to get on with our job, and I’m off to find ways of pleasing the 9% that need us to work harder.

“...With us you get exceptional depth of product knowledge and a personal service but we do understand you have work to get on with
Innovation grants and free business advice.

We can help you grow successfully.

For over 30 years NWES, the country’s leading enterprise agency, has been specialising in helping businesses to start-up and grow.

We’ll provide help to suit you including:
- Writing a good business plan
- Accessing bank finance
- Alternative finance schemes
- Intellectual property guidance
- Environmental planning - reducing carbon emissions and increasing profit
- Networking opportunities
- Managing cash flow
- Meeting your legal obligations
- Taxation and VAT
- Marketing and sales

And what’s more, once you have received some support from us you may be eligible for a grant of up to £25,000. Terms and conditions apply.

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If you’re a developer there’s a good chance that you use some open source software (OSS). If you’re typical of the developers I advise on OSS, you’re likely to be aware that there are risks (as well as huge benefits) with OSS licences, but you don’t know how to separate what’s important from the hype, myths and misunderstanding.

I’ll use some of my articles in the NTJ to give you some tips. What do you really need to know, and how do you put sensible processes in place? This is a huge topic, and it’s hard to know where to start. So I’ll start with the basics.

Open Source Software comes with conditions

I recently advised a software supplier business on its open source compliance. I asked for a list of all the OSS that the IT management knew was included in their code base. They sent me a table that did not use the term “open source” - it referred to it as “freeware”.

The term “freeware” has no clear definition, but people often (incorrectly) mean that it is freely supplied, without cost and without legal restrictions. Open source software is often also confused with shareware.

Many developers don’t fully appreciate that whenever OSS is used in their code there are legal requirements and consequences. Some are aware that there are requirements, but assume that if they don’t follow them nobody will ever find out or take enforcement action.

In fact, a lot of software suppliers have OSS code in their code base without even being aware that it’s there, but that’s another topic.

A true story

I’ll look at some of the licensing and commercial implications for OSS in future articles, but I’m going to start with a true story. It concerns a series of US lawsuits known as the BusyBox cases.

BusyBox (www.BusyBox.net) is a set of Unix utilities which was developed for use with embedded operating systems with small resources. It’s typically embedded in hardware products, such as set-top boxes. The BusyBox code is licensed under version 2 of the GNU General Public License (GPL2).

In 2007 BusyBox began enforcing its rights under the GPL licences in the US courts. There were numerous defendants over a number of years, including Monsoon, Xterasys Corporation, High-Gain Antennas LLC, Verizon Communications, Bell Microproducts, Super Micro Computer and BestBuy.

In each lawsuit it was alleged that the defendants had incorporated the object code of parts of the BusyBox software in the firmware of their products, but did not provide the end...
users of the devices with the BusyBox source code as required by the GPL2 licence. It was claimed that the defendants were therefore distributing the copyrighted software in breach of the licence. BusyBox claimed damages and other remedies for the alleged infringements.

All of the lawsuits were settled on what appear to be the same terms, involving an undisclosed payment of damages, the defendant agreeing to (1) appoint an Open Source Compliance Officer within its organisation to monitor and ensure GPL compliance; (2) publish the relevant BusyBox source code on its website; (3) undertake substantial efforts to notify all relevant buyers of the devices of their rights to the source code.

It's easy to see why, for example, Verizon didn’t want to give their end users the source code to an important feature of their wireless routers, or Best Buy to arm consumers with the source code for part of the firmware of its DVD players. You might think that this is fair enough – why would anyone want to fiddle with a consumer device at that level? Or perhaps I’m underestimating NTJ readers …

The developer of BusyBox thought differently. The purpose of OSS licences like the GPL, according to one of his lawsuits, “is to empower recipients of devices controlled by software to be able to improve the software (and thus the device) on their own, which requires them to have access to the corresponding source code for the software of the device. That is why the requirement that the “complete and corresponding source code” be given to downstream recipients of programs like Busybox is so important. Without that source code, and without it being complete and corresponding, the whole purpose of the free and open source software licensing model is defeated”.

These cases (and others) show that users and distributors of OSS can’t assume that they are safe from pursuit if they don’t comply with the terms of the OSS licence, and nobody knows when the next series of cases similar to Busybox may come along. The safest approach is to make sure that when you use OSS in your code base, you comply with the licence terms; and that you have a system for monitoring and ensuring compliance, without being forced to put one in place as a result of a lawsuit. Proper OSS compliance reduces the risk profile of your business and increases its value on exit.

Of course, the issues aren’t restricted to distributing source code. There are a lot of other requirements, including the notorious and complicated “copyleft” (which can seriously damage your commercial interests if you get it wrong, but is usually fine with a little effort) about which I will explain further in another article.

I’ll talk more about compliance in future articles. In the meantime, if I can help you with any OSS concerns, please get in touch.

“...Of course, the issues aren’t restricted to distributing source code. There are a lot of other requirements, including the notorious and complicated “copyleft”
Working for a Startup

Working for a startup has its risks but it also can also yield some great rewards. I’ve been working for SoccerHubb, a local tech startup, since August 2013 and I love it. That being said, working for a startup certainly isn’t for everybody.

The first obvious risk that immediately jumps to mind when working for a startup is job security. What happens if the startup doesn’t get the traction it’s hoping for or it struggles to find investment? What happens if the startup doesn’t have the financials to pay your wages? These factors will often deter people from working for a startup company, and rightfully so if I may add.

Additionally, startups tend to be very high stress environments, much more so than already established businesses, which also acts as a potential deterrent for people considering working for one. With a startup, when it comes to reaching a milestone there tends to be no margin for error because if you miss a milestone, you and your product fall behind. If your product falls behind, it will take longer to generate revenue which directly adds additional financial pressure to the startup and everyone involved.

As briefly mentioned, working for a startup isn’t without its rewards. First of all, if the startup does take off, you will be secure for life. Microsoft, Google and Apple were all startups once, just like Facebook. Mark Zuckerberg is now one of the richest people in the world and Google, Apple and Microsoft are three of the biggest names in tech. Even if the startup takes off but later down the line you decide you want to pursue a new career path or options, being able to add to your CV that you were a founding member of a now well-known startup is a great addition that will certainly differentiate your CV from the rest.

Furthermore, working for a startup can be extremely gratifying. It’s a great confidence boost, and in all fairness, an ego boost when you can give yourself credit for building an amazing new product. Without going too far into the psychology, it’s important to feel valued and appreciated for the work that you do in order to maintain a healthy and happy work life.

This next point doesn’t apply to all startups, but it’s the main reason I enjoy working for SoccerHubb so much. Being part of a new startup, especially in tech, often means getting to use the newest and most cutting edge tools. For example, this could mean using the most recent release of a programming language or even a new programming language completely. Not only does using the newest tools satisfy the needs most of us have for the cutting edge but it also adds to your employability and prospects, as people with knowledge of the newest tools are always in demand.

Ultimately, deciding whether working for a startup is right for you is a choice only you can make. I love working for SoccerHubb due to the feeling of being important, the recognition and being able to learn the use the most recent technology. Whether it’s right for you depends on what you’re hoping to gain from the position.

…Being part of a new startup, especially in tech, often means getting to use the newest and most cutting edge tools
Email Marketing Tips: Learning From Spam

It seems no matter how hard we try the spammers still get through. Even the likes of Google & Microsoft using some of the best algorithms ever invented can’t capture it all.

They do do a very good job. My preference is for Gmail and the amount of spam this filters is amazing in comparison to only a few years ago.

What I notice though is that a lot of the spam in here is a relatively easy catch.

Why Is That?

Really, it’s down to lazy marketing. Don’t get me wrong we’re all busy and automated email marketing systems are something we’re all used to using.

Spam in Gmail

As you can see there is some pretty generic stuff in here. Some of it I may even have signed up for!

So how does the other stuff get into our inbox?

Obviously if we give it permission, by excluding it from the spam folder on purpose. Or through our interaction with it.

Google is especially good at tracking which emails we open and those we don’t. It can also glean an emails intent. Which is where it’s new tabs come in.

Tabs in Gmail

These tabs don’t catch spam but are an attempt to filter email for you in a pre-determined “priority”.

The Problem with Tabs

From an end user’s perspective these tabs can be a real benefit. Personally I find them a massive time saver when prioritising my inbox.

For the email marketer they are another “venus fly trap” for your honest newsletter.

My preference is for Gmail and the amount of spam this filters is amazing in comparison to only a few years ago.
Staying Out of The Fly Trap

Whatever algorithms are in place there are some emails that always seem to make it through. You know the ones I mean:

Subject: Performance Based Website Designing Proposal
To: paul@salesdepartment.co.uk

Hello

Thanks for giving us a few moments of your valuable time!

We are an INDIA based Bespoke Web Application Development Company and serving clients all across the globe. We mainly focus on Website Designing & Development for both Open Source and Microsoft Technologies Platform.

We maintain Web 2.0 standards and W3C validations in all the websites we design and develop. The website we develop includes:

1. Great first impression
2. Good navigation and usability
3. Quick loading
4. Search engines to access your content

We have a dedicated team of 35 experienced designers, developers and SEO experts. In Graphic/Flash/3D designs, we thrive the idea that design makes a difference. We can provide you with a fresh, professional image and unique LOOK & FEEL via a recognizable trademark or logo design.

The fact these people actually think I would buy a service from an unknown source through the equivalent of a 21st century cold call is beyond me.

But email is easy to create and cheap to send. Which is the trap many marketers fall into. They are too generic, and are easy to stop.

Whereas, our spammy counterparts from the Indian/Asian continents are sending emails from “real” email addresses. With “real” text in them, often personalised with our names.

There are no glossy images or BOGOF offers in here. They are all formatted in a similar way to “real” email.

Okay let’s qualify the word “real”, by this I mean as in appearance. It is hard to distinguish between this style of email and one you may receive from a colleague or friend. Which is why the algorithms have such a hard time with them.

They are usually sent from unique email addresses, block one sender, it just gets replaced by another.

Yes they are an appalling attempt at solicitation when read by humans, but machines have a tough time handling them.

6 Quick Email Marketing Tips

Based on the success of these emails what can we do to improve our own efforts?

No I am not going to suggest you should start sending spammy messages, but that you take the useful pointers and add them your quality offering.

Get personal - send your marketing emails from a real person. By all means use the right email marketing software to do so, but make the email from: Sean not ABC Ltd.

Mention me - get the recipients name into the subject line, they are more likely to open it, and if they do the more likely your emails get through in the future.

Less gloss - if I want to view a masterpiece I’ll go to an art gallery. Tone down the graphics, they put spam filters on high alert.

Get to the point - keep your messages simple and to the point. Provide a hook and a link to further information if required. But I want to get through my inbox, so grab my attention fast.

Let me go - make unsubscribing easy, you want people on your list that want your emails not ones that just ramp up your monthly charges. By keeping your open and click rates up the algorithms score you more highly, you’ll appear in more inboxes.

Every send is a test - you should be analysing the results of every email campaign you send, however small. If you only test one thing it should be the effectiveness of your subject lines. Get these right and everything else will follow.

So remember, going pro with your email marketing doesn’t mean it needs to shine like a Ferrari. A Ford Mondeo will do, as it can easily slip into an inbox unnoticed by those pesky algorithms.
Who needs a social media manager?

To be quite honest with you I think this job title is used a bit too easily.

I often see online somewhere, somebody calling themselves a social media manager and I feel like writing ‘LOL really??!’ which of course I wouldn’t because I’m too professional. I firmly believe that you should use the words and the talk to attract the job that you want, but if you use the word manager there should be something there to back it up.

Let’s say you’ve heard you need a social media manager, but what do you need one for and what should you look for?

One word of advice is don’t just employ someone because they’re social on Facebook, there is actually a lot more involved than pushing out “stuff” and liking a few comments.

Brand

Your social media manager or whatever you want to call them must understand your brand and it’s voice. What does your brand stand for, who is it for, what is the unified message? What type of voice does your brand have? Is it fun and funky, is it informative, is it mature, or could it be strict like an Aunt?

Before you let your social media manager go off being social with everyone they need to know the ins and outs of the brand, the internal brand, the culture and the story behind the brand.

Business

Your social media manager needs to understand your business, therefore recruiting internally for this role is ideal. They should be able to provide informative, industry related posts to hook your audience and educate them.

Develop campaigns

The campaign may mean they have to juggle different platforms, internal departments, understand how and where your consumers are communicating and predict their behaviour to the best of their ability. The campaign could be around a launch, a new product, a new service, an expansion or a worldwide mission, whatever it is your social media manager must understand how to roll one out.

Inbound marketing

Your consumer has an interest, they’re looking for a solution, your social media manager needs to align content to attract them. Inbound marketing isn’t intrusive, it’s always in the right place at the right time, appealing to your customer.

Content creation

They should be able to create sticky content and be able to distribute one piece of content in many ways. For instance they write a blog post, they should then be able to create an audio version of that article and even a slide show. Your social media manager should be able to maximise one piece of content, no need for lots of different content, just different ways of distributing one piece of content.

Sales funnel

There are some who just push content with no understanding about attraction, sourcing, bait and are completely clueless about a sales funnel. How do you get from attraction to conversion? You’re in business, it’s not a game. Who you hire for the social media manager job has to understand attraction through to conversion. They must understand what the goals of the company are and help get them achieved.

Never panic

Sometimes someone will say something negative about your brand, purposely create some disruptive social noise, steal some content off your blog, a competitor may troll you, whatever happens your social media manager has to remain calm at all times and deal with it, whilst remaining friendly and professional.

Tracking

How many people push “stuff” out and have no idea if it worked? Lots and lots and lots! Your social media manager will know how to track, monitor and report the results back to you regularly.

Trends and technology

Someone who does social media day in day out for just your business or many businesses should be up to date on all the latest trends, changes, tools and technology. Social media changes every day and they should be in a position to advise you accordingly, which may mean altering your strategy. If they are averse to change and still go on about the good “ole” days of Myspace be concerned.

I often see online somewhere, somebody calling themselves a social media manager and I feel like writing ‘LOL really??!’...
The evening before NorDevCon, I went along to the pre-conference special meetup which was held at the Liftshare offices, followed by a meal at Pizza Express where we had a chance to speak to some of the presenters and other attendees.

This was my first visit to the Liftshare office and I think it looks very smart and modern. I enjoyed the quirky décor such as the hanging egg chairs in the reception area. Also, many of us had a go on the Liftshare slide before the talks began, which was fun!

The session kicked off with Russel Winder and his talk “Why wait for Java 8 when you have Groovy?” Russel explained that Java 8 changes the whole Javaverse. It is a massive revolution in Java despite being an incremental change and it is due for release on 18th March. The new features include Nashorn, JavaFX, Lambda expressions (the single most important feature) and enhanced collections. Russel explained that Groovy already has these features, so you don’t have to wait until Java 8 is released to try them out.

From a straw poll of the audience, the majority of Java developers present were still using Java 6, with a few using Java 7.

Here is a brief summary of each of the new features:

**Nashorn.** Nashorn is a JavaScript engine developed in the Java programming language by Oracle. This will allow users to embed JavaScript in Java applications via JSR-223 and to develop standalone JavaScript applications.

**JavaFX.** JavaFX is a set of graphics and media packages that enables developers to design, create, test, debug, and deploy rich client applications that operate consistently across diverse platforms.

**Lambda expressions.** Lambda expressions (anonymous functions) are designed to allow code to be streamlined. The point of Lambda is to be able to pass some code to a method rather than objects. When a Lambda expression is written, it is translated into a functional interface at compile time.

**Enhanced collections/Java 8 streams.** In Java 8 there is new collection called a “stream,” which is a one-time-use object. They are meant to make manipulating the data easier and faster.

**No more PermGen!** G1 garbage collection is now the standard. The Permanent Generation (PermGen) space has completely been removed and is kind of replaced by a new space called Metaspace.

Russel argued that Java has a reputation for being verbose, and that Groovy was designed to have a very light-weight syntax.

I personally haven’t used Groovy. In fact my manager advised me against learning it, saying that it’s mostly aimed at people who are moving to Java from PHP and similar scripting languages.

...Jon explained that influence is both a cause and effect, and that nothing is ever influenced in just one direction.
Next up was Jon Jagger talking about Systems Thinking. This involves thinking about systems as dynamic, evolving patterns of interaction and feedback. Jon explained that influence is both a cause and effect, and that nothing is ever influenced in just one direction. As an example, if a development project has bugs, does this cause lateness or is it the other way round? If a project has bugs, this can cause lateness due to the time required to fix the bugs and re-test the changes. On the other hand, if a project is running late, it could result in bugs being introduced as developers rush to get it completed.

Jon also introduced the interesting “scrum buses” theory, which explains why you sometimes end up with 2 or 3 buses arriving at once.

Le Chatelier’s Principle says that systems tend to oppose their own proper function. An example of this is how the body regulates its blood-sugar levels, to prevent hypoglycaemia and hyperglycaemia.

Jon explained that moving from 75% to 95% utilisation increases variability by 25 times. So, there needs to be some slack in a system for it to work most effectively.

Jon wrapped up the session by discussing the Law of Unintended Consequences – aka the “cobra effect”. I found this fascinating and it occurs when an attempted solution to a problem actually makes the problem worse.

The meal at Pizza Express

This was the first time I’d visited the Pizza Express branch on St Benedict’s Street. I really enjoyed the meal. I sat near Chris O’Dell and Cyrille Le Clerc and we discussed our jobs and the technology we use. Overall, it was a good warm-up for the main conference the following day.

1 - http://jonjagger.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/scrum-buses.html

Drinks at the conference itself were rather delightful!
After some initial networking in the foyer of Norwich University of the Arts (NUA), the group headed for the lecture theatre to hear Marie-Claire Isaaman’s experiences of working in the games art and design sector.

Marie-Claire has led NUA’s BA Games Art and Design undergraduate course for the last 7 years, drawing on her experience as an artist and creating a curriculum that relates art and design practice to the creation of digital games. She explained how games embody a mix of art, design, science and technology and how they balance a tension between artistic practice and corporate orthodoxy. She described how important history is to help with creating future innovation and how evolving technology gives new tools for expression and allows new things to be created and built. She shared the success of some of her graduates, such as Rosie Ball (www.rosieball.com), who is now working for Disney Interactive’s London studio.

Marie-Claire has worked hard to promote and encourage diversity on her course, in terms of students and the mix of lecturers and has herself been recognised as one of the Top 100 women in games. But there is still some way to go to overcome some of the dismissive and hostile attitudes towards women in this sector. The Q&A session led to an interesting debate about whether there is enough in Norwich to retain NUA’s graduates, and although there are some useful networks like Norfolk Indie Games Developers (NiGD), more needs to be done to stop them leaving at the end of the course.

The discussion at the end was lively and reminisced about the excitement of technology in the 1960s and 1970s, with the space race and the start of computers in the home. This helped to encourage women into the sector. Interest in technology and computers waned a bit after that, but is now re-emerging around the digital revolution, opening up new enthusiasm for all things tech. There was also an interesting conversation about the way in which technology is taught in schools and how it needs to move beyond spreadsheets and word documents. This is starting to happen, but more needs to be done and faster if we are not to be left behind! The group then headed to The Rumsey Wells to continue the dialogue that had been facilitated by the two speakers.

Thanks to Tipsy and Tumbler for the drinks and NUA for the food and venue.
Ipswich CoffeeScript Clinic

Come along, learn CoffeeScript, get help with your projects or just geek out with other CoffeeScripters. All abilities welcome.

What
CoffeeScript Clinic (@COFFEESCRIPTERS)

When
Tuesday, April 15, 2014 @ 6pm

Where
At HTK Chapmans Warehouse
Wherry Quay, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 1AS

http://coffeescriptclinic.com/
Although the course is free we do ask for a voluntary £10 to go towards expenses.

SOLD OUT
BUT STAY TUNED FOR FUTURE EVENTS!
CRAFT CONFERENCE:  
WHY DOES SOFTWARE CRAFTSMANSHIP MATTER?

Why does software craftsmanship matter?  
Even though there is a huge amount of material on  
this topic, the problem of maintainable, sustainable  
and successful software development is not yet  
solved, so it is important to have events dedicated  
to this topic, where people can learn about and  
collaborate on how to deal with these problems and  
how to push to find better solutions. There are not  
many conferences dedicated specifically to this topic  
which is why we started to organise Craft.  

It will take place 23rd–25th April 2014; the 23rd  
will be a day of workshops and the 24th and  
25th will be session days.

Why is this important for companies?  
The importance of software craftsmanship is  
increasing constantly. Software development  
made right can unlock a lot of hidden potential in  
organizations, a conference like Craft could help  
companies to understand how important it is to  
invest in the way they develop (including product  
development). Nowadays it is more and more true  
that only those companies where change is part of  
the DNA, those that can learn and react fast, can  
be successful and survive. Without focusing and  
investing in software craftsmanship this goal can’t  
be achieved.

Is Craft only for software developers?  
No, our goal was to create an event where  
any developers, team leaders, Agile coaches,  
engineering managers, executives/founders, UX/  
product people etc. can learn a lot, and we believe  
we have been able to put together a really unique  
speaker line-up to achieve this goal: http://craft-conf.  
com/2014.

The conference has three pillars:

Language agnostic methods, best practices (TDD,  
BDD, DDD, CI, CD, security, performance, service  
oriented architecture etc.) that can be successfully  
leveraged by individual developers, so they can  
come better in their profession and they can be  
more useful from a business point of view (even  
the most beautiful code is worth nothing without  
representing real business value).

Team/organisational level topics, best practices  
(Agile, DevOps etc.) that can help companies work  
more effectively. This includes different Agile topics,  
some advanced DevOps practices, and some  
interesting subjects such as how neuroscience can  
help in creating better teams. It is not easy to evolve  
from a great developer to a great leader, Craft will  
provide great tips on this topic as well.

It is becoming increasingly important to be familiar  
with new trends and emerging technologies,  
(functional programming, languages, distributed,  
CRFTs, nosql etc.) This pillar includes topics like  
Erlang design patterns, RAFT protocol, browser  
cryptography and many others.

Who are the speakers?  
The speaker line-up includes Douglas Crockford,  
who hates to be called the father of JavaScript,  
Bruce Eckel, the author of one of the most popular  
Java and C++ books, Dan North, who is a world-  
known Agile expert, Gojko Adzic, who is an expert  
in producing high quality software, Jeff Hodges,  
who builds distributed systems at Twitter, and  
will teach us how to do it, John Willis, who is the  
father of DevOps, and will talk about the upcoming  
challenges on this field, Michael Feathers, who  
rote one of our bibles, Mitchell Hashimoto, the  
creator of popular DevOps tools like Vagrant, Packer  
and SERF, or for example Michael Nygard, who is  
one of the most popular speakers on the field of  
resilient architectures, and Jonas Boner who will  
teach us why reactive applications are important,  
and how should we write them.

Of course there are many other amazing speakers:  
you can learn about how Facebook develop their  
Android application, why should we learn functional  
programming, why Erlang is flourishing, why  
platforms like Typesafe or Pivotal are important, how  
you can build a CDN which runs in your browser and  
many other interesting topics.

You can find the full program on our webpage:

http://craft-conf.com/2014/#speakers
Norwich Gaming Festival

Over the last few years we have seen a growing desire to support the burgeoning games industry in Norwich.

In October 2013, NIGD hosted a two-day videogame expo and conference as part of the Norwich Sound+Vision Festival - the first time such an event has been held in Norwich. It was a great success, identifying and bringing together game developers in the area, and attracting the attention of local media, business groups and local MPs, as well as informing the general public. Following the success of the event, the group has been invited to organise another, larger, civic event - the “Norwich Gaming Festival!". The Festival is taking place at the Forum - a popular and celebrated venue in the city centre, and will host a variety of events over a 10-day period from April 7th-16th, aligned under three broad streams:

To entertain the public with a wide range of gameplay experiences, including playable latest-gen devices, a retro arcade of consoles from the last 25 years, and a showcase of award-winning independent games from around the world. To promote and develop growth of the local games industry by exhibiting a range of games being made in the East of England, a gallery of game art created by local digital artists, and hosting informative and inspiring presentations by a host of established, award-winning UK developers.

To educate the public about the creative and technical skills and processes involved in creating games through a range of live coding workshops and tutorials and the opportunity to participate in a mass public game jam.

All events taking place during the festival will be free to attend and open to the general public. It is being hosted by The Forum in partnership with the Norfolk Indie Game Developers group, together with principal sponsor, GAME. The festival is also being supported by a number of national and local partners, including Norwich University of the Arts, Unity Technologies, and UKIE - the association for UK Interactive Entertainment.

If you are interested in volunteering for the event please get in touch with Robin Silcock @RobinSilcock or Alastair Aitchison @AlastairA.
InDigital Connect is a conference/event, being held on the 1st May 2014, that brings together digital professionals & agencies with businesses across East Anglia.

The event covers 4 digital themes – Local, Social, Mobile & Cloud, across 2 streams – Innovate & Learn. The themes have been selected to provide businesses with the opportunity to learn & gain insight into how to make the most of existing & emerging digital services to improve their business. **Local** How to leverage digital to gain more local customers. **Social** How to maximise the potential of social media. **Mobile** How to benefit from the smartphone revolution. **Cloud** How to gain efficiencies using cloud based services. The streams are structured to enable attendees make the most of the opportunity to meet high calibre digital professionals & agencies.

Learn Workshop style sessions designed to help you learn from digital experts. Innovate Keynote presentations from digital innovators presenting emerging digital services. Businesses & Students can attend the event at no cost thanks to the support of West Suffolk Council & West Suffolk College.

Professionals & Agencies can attend from £35.

Professionals & Agencies who register before the 5th April 2014 will get an inclusive stand space and be able to bring popup banners and demo laptops/screens.
Software in the City & CoffeeScript is for...

**What**
Software in the City & CoffeeScript is for...

**When**
Wednesday May 7, From 18:30 until 21:30

**Where**
At Virgin Wines
4th Floor, St James’ Mill, Whitefriars,
NR3 1TN, Norwich

http://www.norfolktechjournal.com/event/event-software-city-coffeescript-norfolkdev/
Free to attend

Burkhard Kloss (@georgebernhard)

The news is full of tales of trillions of derivatives being traded in global financial centres. This talk will give an insight - with thinly veiled anecdotes, and possibly some humour - of how the software behind these trades really gets developed, and what it’s like to be in the thick of it. Burkhard has been writing Software in the City of London for longer than he cares to mention these days. Starting in C++, but occasionally venturing into Python, Java, .Net and sometimes VBA (but we don’t talk about that), he has seen the good, the bad, and a lot of the ugly side of what really happens in “The City.” CoffeeScript is for...

Anders Fisher (@atleastimtrying)

Anders Fisher will be giving an in depth look at the pros and cons of coffeescript as a compiled language as well as some of its advantages in encouraging good practices in JS development and encouraging different approaches. He will also be going into some of the diverse projects he has used coffeescript for including mobile development. If it sounds a bit much, remember, it’s just Javascript with a fancy hat on! Anders Fisher is a seasoned front end developer working daily with a variety of clients helping to implement a variety of approaches to front end development.
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A bag full of hunches. That might mean something.

I have a hunch. A number of hunches all rolled into one, in fact. My bag of hunches has been tested in a couple of projects, and I think there’s something in it.

I think that there’s a concrete advantage, set in hard cash, to software development centred on people.

The kind of procurement we used to be involved in mandated a specific list of features for a project, and invited fixed-price responses which would be judged on a number of criteria, often weighted heavily on cost. That brings with it a number of issues. The speed of use of change in technology and how it’s used means such feature lists are never “right” by the time the project starts, let alone finishes. There’s a risk for the supplier in getting that estimation accurate, of course. For the customer, I believe the cost of that estimation is eventually passed on somehow.

We’ve tended to come unstuck in these kinds of procurements, I think because it doesn’t fit our way of working terribly well. We prefer to be set problems, rather than given something to deliver. I talk about empathy a lot, and about how developers’ empathy with the people who will use their software helps make better software. Procurement-by-feature-list makes this a lot harder.

There’s an overwhelming tendency to add more features to a digital service. However hard you negotiate on price for this long list of features, it’s still a long list, and it’s still work that needs doing by someone somewhere. I know that what people-centered software development does, what development that focusses on user needs rather than feature lists does, is bring a real focus onto what needs to be done above what might be done. My hunch is that what needs to be done will be a subset of what can be done, and therefore involves less development work. Another hunch is that the time it takes to define the most important work will be less than the time it takes to define a list of features less constrained by their importance to people.

Naturally, people who procure software want to be assured that what they are getting is the right thing. I think that that desire can mean that the time taken to draw the feature list up in the first place lengthens. More cost, though it might not be visible as specifically attached to the project. Our instinct is that focussing on needs is how to be sure that a project delivers a good digital service.

Above that is invariably the desire to get a project procured at the right price. To us, that means making projects smaller not larger. Cutting a project into smaller elements means you can take smaller steps, and measure your progress more often. Focussing on the most important issue first seems to us to be a great way of making a project smaller.

So my big hunch is: don’t procure on the basis of feature lists, procure on the basis of people, and what they need. You’ll get cheaper projects, and better outcomes.

// HARRY HARROLD
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