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Question: What is your educational background? How did you decide to work as an IS/IT professional?

Answer: I originally studied physics at university, and I decided to go into IS for a number of reasons. One, I enjoyed programming computers, and I'd done that as a teenager with the very earliest computers like the Spectrum and the ZX81, and during my degree, although I really enjoyed physics, I found that I enjoyed a lot of the computational aspects of that. Increasingly, even when I was at university we were using computers to model experiments and to find out results, and that was the bit of it that I enjoyed the most, so I thought that I would enjoy working in business in that capacity.



Question: If you were to mention one aspect in which your job has changed over the last 10 years, what would it be?

Answer: The biggest single thing in technology is that it's become really at the forefront of a lot of industries in a way that it never was originally. Probably prior to 10 years ago IS systems and technology were seen as enablers to just support the business process; billings, do accounting, move stock around and run the business, but in many industries, especially in the media and entertainment sector, the technology is part of the product now, and because of that it's a lot higher profile.

Technology tends to be represented at the highest level on the boards of companies, which in the past was not the case, and it's something that media companies have to get world class at in a way that they never used to before. So it's really core. That's the biggest change.

Question: What are the new challenges that the rise of digital contents (ebooks) poses to publishing companies, and how can publishers respond to them?

Answer: In a sense everything is changing because of technology. Publishing companies tended to be business to business companies, so we generally sold books to wholesalers or to big retailers who would then sell them to customers, and with the advent of digital we are increasingly selling direct to consumers, which is a huge shift for any business to make. On one side you go from having maybe a few thousand customers to many millions of customers, so how do you handle that complexity?

You go from having a relatively small number of high margin transactions to having a huge number of smaller margins and very low margins, sometimes transactions, so you have to get a lot more efficient. You have to get very good at managing large data sets and looking for trends in consumer behaviour, segmenting consumers and understanding how to market to them.

I think marketing is one of the areas that technology has to increasingly play a role in, in the future, and already today people are finding out about content, books and other things, increasingly through social networks and through recommendation engines online, and in the past we had a very traditional approach to marketing which was largely based on traditional advertising, and that's all changing as well.

Question: If you were to mention one way in Information systems can make a difference and add value to the activities of a publishing company, what would this be?

Answer: The biggest change that publishing companies are going through is that the product that people can consume has got a technology component, and that tends to be created by or designed by someone that we call a product owner. That's probably the single biggest new thing for publishers. It's a skill that we don't currently or haven't traditionally had.

The equivalent in the physical world is like a product designer or someone who would draw a picture of how something would look and how it would work, and what features and functions it would have, and now that we are building technology products; sometimes in the academic world that might be a learning management system, in the trade world it might be rich multimedia content that comes with a book.

Somebody needs to design how does that look, how does it work, what features and functions does it have, and having really good people that do that in a publishing company would add tremendous value to it.

Question: Finally, what advice would you give to students who want to work in the IT sector in the future?

Answer: I think the single most important thing is that you actually build some software yourself. Even if ultimately you want to be in a management position or a finance position, or something else in a software company or any company that uses technology, I think there is no substitute for the innate understanding you get when you've actually built something yourself.

Even on a very small scale, just a website or some html or a database, or even a macro in a spreadsheet, to start at that level and try and progress and get a feeling for what some of the issues are in building software, because on a small scale they're actually very similar to on a large scale, and I think whenever you're in a management position or a senior position and you're looking at or evaluating a software product or a company with a lot of technology in it, that understanding that you got from building things yourself will be absolutely invaluable.