

A Day in the Life of an IT Consultant

As an IT Consultant you must show a high level of flexibility as you will seldom be located in a single location. Good communication and team working skills are paramount. You can expect to work with ambitious, highly motivated people who thrive on finding the best solution possible to maximise the benefit to the client. The roles that you will perform as an IT consultant vary from month-to-month, project-to-project. You may find yourself involved in any stage of the project lifecycle from conception through to delivery or live support and maintenance. You may be responsible for gathering requirements for a new proposal or working with the requirements to design and/or deliver a solution. The size of projects varies greatly from fairly small, simple tasks to monstrous solutions for market leading global companies.

7.30am to 9.00am

A typical morning starts with my alarm ringing at 7.30am. I am currently being put up in an apartment on a Monday to Friday basis 200 miles away from my hometown and base location in Edinburgh. This is a typical scenario to be working away from home and although difficult at times, on the whole I really enjoy it as you meet some great people who like you are living away from home midweek so you are never short of things to do after work. I like to be at my desk at client site in Yorkshire by 8.30am however the hours are not fixed so this is by no means a requirement; you are given a certain degree of flexibility in choosing your working week's structure providing you put in the hours and ensure all deadlines are met.

The first task every day is to filter through a seemingly endless number of emails – some relevant and some not. There is usually one or two that require action so I tend to take a note of these and plan some time for resolving any issues before the close of business that day. Checking your email is very important; controlling your inbox is a skill that must be mastered in order to keep on top of constant requests.

9.30am to 12.00pm

My current role as a Programme Office Analyst involves the provision of a number of project management support functions to enable the account portfolio of projects to run in accordance with IBM and Bradford & Bingley guidelines.

One of the major activities that our small team of 5 individuals carry out is a weekly timesheet scrape; this allows us to bill Bradford & Bingley accurately for our services. At the turn of the New Year an overhaul to the existing excel application for staff on the account to record their hours was required in order to enhance and update various elements. I was given the responsibility of making these alterations/enhancements and ensuring that the new timesheet was rolled out smoothly.

I spend an hour discussing the required changes with my manager and gathering the various requirements ensuring that there are no ambiguities; any issues are better resolved at an earlier stage as opposed to during the actual implementation. Happy that I am now entirely clear with what is required I set about altering the existing application. It has been developed in Microsoft Excel using a mixture of standard excel functionality and a number of more complex Visual Basic (VB) procedures. I am not wholly familiar with VB so some on the job training is required via web sites and expert colleagues. As an IT Consultant you often find yourself having to adapt quickly to unfamiliar technologies. I have 7 days before the new timesheet needs to

be rolled out so I set myself an early preliminary deadline giving time to make any unplanned changes before rollout.

12.00pm to 1.00pm

Time to take a break and grab some lunch; it is a good opportunity to network with friends from other areas on the account and above all a well needed rest bite.

1.00pm to 2.00pm

I am involved in benchmarking activities which is essentially the process of comparing our performance against the practices of other leading companies to allow us to improve. It involves analysing selected projects to obtain benchmark data that is then passed on to an independent 3rd party - Gartner, who in turn provide feedback to both IBM and BBPlc. I have a 1 hour meeting with a Project Manager to gather as much information as possible about their project and attempt to complete a Gartner data collection form. At the end of the meeting I sum up what has been discussed and issue the PM with a deadline for the return of missing information. After all I have to ensure that Gartner receive all the project data by the end of next week so I have important deadlines looming.

2.00pm to 5.00pm

I have a number of weekly/monthly administrative reports which I must produce for employees on the account. For the most part the report formats have already been coded into our database so it is simply a case of clicking a few buttons and saving reports into specific locations on the network drives. There also tends to be a number of one-off report requests that come in so I often find myself spending time creating SQL queries to extract the required information; once I have the information it is simply a case of presenting it in an easily readable format.

Back to the main task at hand; the new timesheet application. I spend time carrying out the simplest amendments however I am unsure as to how I am going to resolve one of the issues as Visual Basic is not my native language! I decide that the best approach is to print out some relevant tutorials for tonight's bed time reading!

Quick email tidy-up, pack my bag and head off to the gym!

Career progression

In my gap year between school and university I worked full time for a large pensions company as a trainee pension's administrator. This gave me experience in a real life business environment. I subsequently read Computer Science at the University of Edinburgh and graduated with Honours (2.1) in 2006. Whilst at University I spent the summer months working in Ibiza promoting various nightclubs and UK brands. Besides from being the best summers of my life I also gained a great deal of experience through living and working abroad. During semester 2 of my ultimate year at university I applied to IBM for a place in their graduate scheme as I was aware that they had a superior scheme that was year-on-year being recognised as first-rate in the Times annual surveys. After proceeding through four application phases I was offered a job as an IT Consultant, based in Edinburgh and happily accepted.