Ethan’s questions

**1. Please tell us about your IT work. What exactly do you do?**

I am developing a social Web app, for a niche demographic.

**2. Please tell us about the industry you work in.**

There are hundreds of social apps available, but only a few are well known. It is a very competitive space, especially if you want to make a living from your app.

The GDPR regulations that was implemented on the 25th of May 2018 in the EU, makes it very difficult to launch a social app over there. However, the GDPR protects users from the misuse of their personal information and I am all for it.

I guess everyone who develops a social app sees Facebook as the giant they have to face, no pun intended, but Facebook is banned in China. This provides an opportunity for exploiting that demographic, with an ‘acceptable’ social app.

There is another bright side to all the social apps; it shows that different people use different social apps and sometimes more than one, which leads me to the -humble- conclusion that there will always be people who will find another social app useful for their specific social space.

**3. What other kinds of work do you have to do?**

Developing this Web app requires knowledge of a few things;

* HTML
* CSS
* JavaScripting
* PHP
* SQL
* Webservers

Fortunately, there are several tools available for free. Since the tools are regularly updated, I check the providers’ websites on a monthly basis for updates.

The IDE I use to make development easier is NetBeans. I use XAMPP to provide PHP, a Webserver and a database for development and testing on my PC. XAMPP is a “completely free, easy to install Apache distribution containing MariaDB, PHP and Perl”.

There are several PHP frameworks available, which also helps to make PHP development easier and quicker. I use CodeIgniter, because it was recommended by a friend who works for a large company. I find it easy to use.

I use jQuery for JavaScripts. “jQuery is a fast, small, and feature-rich JavaScript library. It makes things like HTML document traversal and manipulation, event handling, animation, and Ajax much simpler with an easy-to-use API that works across a multitude of browsers. With a combination of versatility and extensibility, jQuery has changed the way that millions of people write JavaScript.”

Learning to use these tools properly can be time consuming, but it is something that needs to be done and makes development easier once you got the hang of it. Fortunately, documentation and forums are always available.

I document every day’s work and keep record of the lines of code I have written. I am doing this, because it is easy to lose track of time and the work that has been done if you spend most of your day coding. This enables me to look back by the end of a week, month or year to see what I have done.

I use git and make backups at the end of the day, if I have written new functions, made significant changes to existing code or before I do a language or framework update.

4. Who are all the different people you interact with in your work? Please tell us about them.

I mostly work alone, but I have a friend who helps me when I get stuck. We met at Uni and I am fortunate to have him as a friend. He works as a developer at a company.

5. Please tell us about your interactions with other IT professionals.

I have a few friends who are IT professionals. They are always willing to give advice when I need it. We try to avoid talking about IT when we are socialising, but it is not easy, because it is a shared passion.

6. What about your interactions with clients or investors?

I don’t have clients at the moment. I have done a little bit of research on investors and was told that you have more leverage when you can present investors with a finished product, so I will contact investors once my app is done.

7. What aspects of your work do you spend most time on? Please tell us about these.

Testing on different devices and different browsers. It is very time consuming to make changes to pages that has a perfect layout on one device, but simply won’t work on another. It means changes have to be made to CSS and sometimes even that does not fix a problem. I usually try to resolve those problem by creating a layout that works best on a larger screen size, but is still acceptable on a smaller screen size, at least according to my standards.

Apple mobile devices has given me a few headaches with JavaScripts, which simply does not work on it, but works without problems on Android devices.

A recent example is a button which scrolls a page to the top in a smooth way. It works on Android devices as well as Apple devices, but then blocks the execution of other scripts on Apple devices.

After trying for a day to resolve that problem, I removed the script and used a link to the top of the page: defined as a button at the bottom of the page. When the button is clicked, it immediately takes you to the top of the page. Although it works, it is not smooth, and I wasted a day trying to figure it out.

Testing is always time consuming, but it is worth spending time to know for certain that your app will work on the devices that you have tested it on.

8. Which aspects of your work do you find most challenging?

I have learned the hard way that it is better to test the whole app when I do a language or framework update instead of discovering that somethings are not working anymore, a month later when I do a test and accidently find a problem that did not exist previously.

It can be a huge challenge to find the cause of the problem and rewrite code to fix it, especially if you don’t read the changelog before you do the update. Having a backup that was made before the update is valuable in a situation like this.

9. Finally, can you share an example of the work you do that best captures the essence of the IT industry?

You can buy a mug on Amazon that states: “ENGINEER Solving problems you didn’t know you had in ways you can’t understand.” I think it is also a humorous way of describing the essence of the IT industry.

Did anyone, except Mark Zuckerberg, knew that not having Facebook is a problem that needs to be solved?

The Free Dictionary defines IT as:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Noun | 1. | information technology - the branch of engineering that deals with the use of computers and telecommunications to retrieve and store and transmit information |

<<https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Information+technology+industry>>

My Web app makes use of computers (servers, databases, mobile devices, etc.) and telecommunications to transmit information provided by users to a database where it is stored, and from where it is retrieved and transmitted to other users with whom it is shared.