Jamie is an IT consultant for [Graham Golden Technologies](https://www.grahamgoldentech.com/) based in Denver, Colorado. Graham Golden Technologies is a team of nine IT professionals who provide customised IT solutions for a variety of businesses, from small to fortune 500 enterprises. They help guide companies strategically in order to keep them ahead of their respective industries. The company does not advertise, and clients are found through networking with company directors. One factor to note is, even though it is an IT firm, the spin is to help business progress. They adhere to best practices in the industry, as this ties to their reputation.

Jamie interacts with clients regardless of industry, as every industry requires different IT infrastructures and software. Due to the variety of companies he works with, he is continuously learning more about IT specialisations and the demand to stay apprised is essential. At the moment he is learning more about firewalls, as his main concentration is network administration.

Most of the team's communication happens through MS Teams, as well as email. The need to keep everyone involved in a client up to date is essential, so a "client distribution group" through email is essential.

Due to the onset of COVID 19, most of Jamie's energy goes into setting up remote work services for companies that have been forced to transition. The main challenge is to do this in as little time as possible while maximising effectiveness. The benefits of this work are that Jamie can do this all from home, without having to compromise any data security or change anything about his hardware.

One challenge that keeps Jamie occupied is configuring networks. This all depends on the clients' capabilities and equipment available. Often remote backups need to happen as natural disasters can strike, or power surges can eliminate power supply, and hold back business operations indefinitely.

Below is the full transcript of the interview.

**You mentioned you are an IT consultant, tell us a bit about what you do.**

We have a lot of clients that are either small enough that they do not have the money to afford an IT person. Some clients can afford it, but they like the manoeuvrability and rapid response of a firm like ours. Being IT consultants, we are incredibly careful of our image, and we are business consultants, so we must dress in slacks and button-downs. On an average day, I will be talking to two or three different CEOs, so it is interesting. It is an excellent way to learn a lot about IT, because, on an average day, I touch four or five, to eight different environments.

**So, you deal with different industries in that sense?**

We have a lot of healthcare. We have lawyers, stockbrokers; there’s a pretty widespread.

**On an average day, what kind of work do they have you doing?**

It depends, recently with COVID 19, we have been deploying a lot of remote access solutions. It has been particularly interesting to be a part of. We have some clients that have the IT infrastructure and appreciate what IT can do for a business, and they will invest in it. We have a real estate firm, who before COVID 19 had three different ways for anybody in their company to access any of their data, programs etc. When the quarantine was announced, they were able to transition extremely smoothly into an entire work from the home environment without losing any productivity.

On the other hand, we have clients that do not appreciate IT and don’t understand what we can do for their business. They are struggling now because they’re scrambling to have us build a remote access solution, and it’s just not that quick.

**So, plenty of IaaS, SaaS, and PaaS?**

Yes, platform, we do software. We provide a host of services; we will do everything from your network administrator to system administration. We dabble in IT security, by that I mean we do best practice, we are not a security firm, but by following IT best practices, there is inherent security bulwark around that; having firewalls, having network diagrams, asset tracking, we do everything.

**When it comes to the interactions within your company, is everyone in the company an IT professional?**

Including the two owners, there is only nine of us. One of the owners is heavily involved in the tech; the main guy is into administration, signing new clients, governing everything. Then we get down to the two associate principles, and then the consultants. It’s nice being that small because the teamwork is very inherent in our environment. One of the practices we use is each client has a client distribution group. For example, client x @ graham golden tech, whenever I email that client, I’ll cc their distribution group. Hence, everyone else that works for that client sees that communication, and if I’m pulled away from working on something somebody else can seamlessly pick up that project if they’ve read the email thread.

**So, you use communication platforms like MS teams?**

We do, internally very intensively. It makes it so much easier just to send an IM, especially working apart as we are now. Teams and email, we try not to be on the phone to save time, unless we’re actively working a ticket.

**Having a smaller team is excellent, are most of your clients in the Denver region?**

Most of them are, we do have a few countrywide. We have a law firm in Iowa. One of our stockbroking firms is in New York, so we get to travel a little, which is fun.

**What aspects do you spend the most time on when it comes to meeting your client’s’ needs?**

I specialise in networks, which is my favourite part of IT. I do a lot of work with switches, firewalls, and routing. I am actively learning about firewalls as we speak. When I first started, they had me on server-side stuff and system administration. We all do a lot of tech support. When a VP of a company calls saying their email is not working, it is not something we can ignore. So, helpdesk-oriented roles are mandatory on top of our specialised services.

**I would assume everyone has a different specialisation.**

There is a lot of overlap. You want more than one person that can do something. One of our consultants focuses mainly on security. She keeps very apprised of any Microsoft vulnerabilities, and she tries to stay abreast of what may impact our clients so that we can have an internal meeting before the client hears about it. That way when a client brings up something like a zoom exploit, we already have documentation, we have already patched their systems and can tell them all about it and what we did to keep it from affecting them.

**Tell me some more about the network aspect of it. It sounds like something you find to be a significant challenge.**

When I was in school, my focus was on information systems. The path was either security or enterprise resource planning systems. I did security and was extremely interested in it until I got to where I am now. One of the fundamentals of security is networking. I had to work hard on understanding security concepts, but networking just clicked for me. The day to day with that, configuring network equipment, you have a new switch, and you have a new firewall. Your building had a power surge, and you did not have UPS battery backup, so everything came down. We now must rebuild everything; how do we do it quickly and efficiently? There’s a lot of disaster recovery solutions as well. The nice ones can be back up and working on the same day.

**When it comes to servers and network, do you use local data centres?**

We have a lot of clients that have on-prem, with enough space to host their servers. It is nice to have that. We have a data centre in Denver our company uses.

We like to do hosted, most of our clients are on hosted exchange, hosted VoIP. It’s great because the companies that provide that service have a 99.93% uptime. That .07% is minuscule versus an on-prem solution, where you do not have an email if your exchange server is down.

**What are your interactions with clients and investors? Are there any challenges?**

There are challenging clients, the ones we must teach to appreciate IT. Our hourly rate is expensive, so some will try and get everything out of us as soon as possible. That can be difficult, especially when they’re already hostile. The other side of that is appreciative about what we do, and they are effusive, it’s a mixed barrel.

**When it comes to the industry itself, you are in a place that does the whole lot. What is something you or your team does that captures the essence of IT?**

With the onset of COVID 19 and the work from home strategies, there are a few different ways you can give somebody access to their work. Our goal is to provide you with the least amount of downtime that we can, so you can keep making money. When focusing on IT, a lot of people think about the backbone like servers, and computers, without thinking about the people aspect of it—something our company does well is it captures the perspective of how IT helps your company succeed. We strive to present to you in a logical and thought out manner why we recommend you buy this business class, expensive stuff. We do very well in presenting how we can help you meet your goals. That is what I love about IT. It’s not so much the technical side; it’s how we can help a company become more profitable, successful and happy.

**You mentioned packages you would offer, does your company produce them, or does your company package them?**

We have coupled together several different solutions that we enjoy ourselves. Our email spam filter is something called Proofpoint, and we enrol our clients under it. Our two main business models are man and service plans, or time and material. Time and material, you pay by the hour, and you only pay for what time has been spent. Man and service we charge a monthly fee, where we take care of everything for you. We’ll do the maintenance on your servers, which can be running windows updates, patching the vulnerabilities, cleaning the active directory environments. Specifically for the MSPs, we’ll throw in backups, antivirus, remote solutions that give us access to your computers, so I can fix everything you need within five minutes remotely. We generally deploy our antivirus and remote tools to our clients regardless of time and material because that bill is five bucks for ten gigs of data, so you’re spending 25 dollars, and you have all of your data backed up. Companies don’t shy at that.

Where we are more profitable ourselves is with the man and service plans, we like this appliance called Adato for backups. It stores your entire environment offsite; they have a location in Australia. It doesn’t matter where the US is hit; we can still recover your data. They offer cloud hosting solutions for your servers so we can spin your server up in the cloud. At the same time, we order you the new physical server to replace what was damaged. Our goal is to make it so that your environment is stable; you don’t need our help. That’s where we make the most money.

**Does your company plan to expand, or work more maintain your current client base?**

That one falls on the owner himself, who’s a very particular man. He is very concerned with our reputation, that’s why we’re business consultants, and we dress up. He doesn’t advertise. We have clients because he goes to the Denver athletic club and has tea time with the CEO of a law firm and pitches our IT service. Because of that, I don’t think we’re ever going to take off. We have a very competent and agile core team. We’re able to respond well to a large amount of work we have as a small team. That way, we are more profitable at a smaller scale.

**Sounds a lot more sustainable having relationships with his clients.**

It’s a lot about the relationships the consultants have with the clients to. We casually refer to it as "owning the client", where a consultant works with a client so much, we know the ins and outs of your environment. I have three or four that I almost exclusively work with, you call me and say I need help with this specific program that is unique to my company. Another consultant can review through our documentation and learn what they need to do to figure everything out as oppose to me or whoever the consultant is. I have your server IP addresses memorised, I know what your WAN IPs are, I know what the software is and I’ve seen this area before so I can fix it in a couple of minutes. Due to this nature, we do end up focusing heavily on specific clients.

**Regarding hardware, does the company keep on top of it, or do you feel like everything you do is looked after on the backend?**

That is very client dependant, some are willing to write the cheque for the top tier firewall, for a server that has a six array and all the bells and whistles. Then we have the client that can’t or don’t want to spend the money, and we have to find alternate means to get the stuff that will fit their environment. I’m not sure if you're familiar with Power over Ethernet switches. It's a switch that provides power to your wireless access point. POE 48 port switch is about 1200 dollars, so that’s out of the realm of possibility for some people for an initial payment. How are we going to make it work? We’ll buy a 400 dollar switch and buy POE injectors that plug into it that make it have POE saving you 700 – 800 dollars. With the caveat of no warranty behind it, or quality of manufacturing service. We have to stay up to date, as we’d like to present to our clients the best, but we also have to work with our clients' means.

**Have you noticed the availabilities of this hardware become more common in the past decade? Has it become more affordable?**

With everything going to the cloud, these solutions have been pushed hard by MS and Amazon, and so many companies. It’s actually almost fortunate for the on-prem stuff, if you can host your entire environment in an amazon cloud-based environment, you don’t need to on-prem site, or the employees to come to the office. I think that’s driven the price of hardware down. Remote work has been on a steady incline, there’s become increased demand for laptops and desktops, but the infrastructure behind it can be hosted somewhere else that’s safe and more affordable, it is a very good solution.