Interviewer: Luke Green

Interviewee: Joel Smith

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

Software engineer/Devops engineer.   Primarily work as a backend dev, but my team also owns & manages all of our infrastructure from non-production to prod - so I also do a lot of sysadmin work.

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

Not entirely sure what 'industry' means in this context.  Is it the industry my company/project is part of, or just the general software engineering industry?  I'm not comfortable discussing my company/project (all the NDAs signed and contracts and such make the risk too great), so I'll go with the general software engineering industry.

In essence it is simply producing software to solve a problem.  To me, everything always comes back to a problem - there's no reason to do anything if it isn't a solution to one.  Software engineering is a very fast-paced industry with very constant change.  It's beneficial to always keep up to date with what is going on in the industry.  From trying new languages, frameworks, patterns, etc.  To even have a vague idea of what's happening with major players in the sector.

It's honestly an incredibly exciting industry - and one that is rewarding in many ways (not just financially!).  But I do also think it's very difficult industry.  Software jobs actually tend to be very demanding, but many developers are lucky in that we really like writing code so it is still fun to do.

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

- Writing code (in multiple languages).

- Creating/giving presentations on work that has been done, or new technologies you want the team to try, or sometimes even going out to roadshows and such with the marketing team to help sell your product.

- Performing code review.

- Database Analysis

- Managing cloud infrastructure (eg AWS, GCP, Azure, etc).

- On-call production support (Being available 24/7 to fix any problems in production).

- Lots of meetings with business/stakeholders to get flesh out requirements.

- Drinking excessive amounts of free coffee.

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

In my day-to day work:

- My direct team of other developers & tech lead.   All of us share the same work and it is very much a "if you can do it, then do it" sort of atmosphere.  Job titles are meaningless.  We all do design/architecting, infrastructure, programming, liaising with external teams & vendors, etc.

- Data Scientists that are part of my project.

- Business owners/stakeholders/business development/finance (all those business people).

Less frequently:

- Other teams in the organisation.  Sometimes to organise an integration, sometimes just to share knowledge.

- People in the open source community (raising issues on github, asking/answer questions on Stack Overflow, etc).

- Vendors of products we use.  Only when there's a problem, of course!

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

Given that I have almost always worked in very self-contained teams and projects where we want to own as much as possible ourselves and have as little reliance on anyone external as possible.. I haven't had to deal with 'other' IT professionals a whole lot.  When we do it's usually when we or they need something so it's fairly business-like.  I don't think there's anything particular to note - IT professionals are still just people, so they all have their individual quirks.

Outside of work there's quite a few cool things to do.  Lots of meetups, conferences and stuff to go to which are attended by other developers.  They're pretty fun to go to, always learn a lot.  I guess that's one thing to say about developers - they're always keen to learn new things.

6. What about your interactions with clients or investors?

I have very little interaction with them to be honest.  I guess in this case our 'product owner' works in the role of a client?  They are the ones who make the decisions and roughly define requirements.  I've had one or two bad ones who didn't want to understand anything about development and struggled to make good decisions because of that - but many more who are really easy to work with.  Often they have given my team largely free-reign and always believe us.  If we say something will take x weeks, they'll accept that estimate.  If we tell them something is just a flat out bad idea they listen and try to understand.  I think having a product owner/client that actually respects and trusts the developers goes a really long way in creating a highly productive environment.

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

Reading Stack overflow and documentation.

I'm only half joking about that.  Most of my time is definitely spent writing code or administering the infrastructure, with plenty of code review thrown in.

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

This is actually a hard one to answer. I guess I've been very lucky in that the hardest aspect of my job has always actually been the work itself. I'd probably say it is that we are always trying new technologies to see if we will benefit from their use - trying to do a properly impartial evaluation of a new tool and presenting findings to your peers is something I don't have much love for doing

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

To me there's two defining traits of the 'IT industry' as I know it (from the lens of a developer)

1.  Using software to solve the problem of a customer.

2.  Actively learning, trying new things, and improving everything from code to process.

Number 1 should be core to almost any industry so I won't touch on it.

I think number 2 is adequately demonstrated by the fact that my team gets sent to conferences and paid training.  We get given time out of our regular duties to experiment and try things out - if they work out great then we can implement them for real.