



Are you interested in a technical career in Microsoft UK?

## Application Development Consulting

In a company that lives and breathes software, in locations all over the UK, is the role of an Application Development Consultant (ADC). Our consultants are one of Microsoft's premier offerings to our most valued customers and partners to guide them through their software development projects using our full complement of products and technologies.

This document is intended to give you an insight into the ADC role and what it's like to be an ADC. Hopefully you'll get a good idea of the services we offer, the customers we engage with and the types of work that we will be involved with. Should all this sound the sort of opportunity you're looking for in your next career move, we have also detailed a little around our interviewing process.

### What is Microsoft Application Development Consulting?

Microsoft Application Development Consulting are a team of Developer Consultants who offer our customers proactive, personalised consulting services for all their development needs, enabling them to exploit the potential of Microsoft technologies. We are part of the broader Microsoft Services organisation which is the technical support, customer service, and consulting arm of Microsoft UK.

The majority of our engagements are long term with customers being allocated a designated ADC. The ADC builds a deep understanding of the customer's systems and objectives, putting them in the ideal position to provide advice and guidance on all their software development challenges. We pride ourselves in becoming trusted advisors to our customers, helping to architect, design and implement their solutions.

We provide our customers with a mixture of onsite and remote consultancy tailored to their particular needs. We work with our customers throughout their full development lifecycle through a broad number of activities; architecture and design reviews, proof of concept and prototyping work, performance and scalability testing, and technical workshops to name just a few.

### What does the job involve?

Each ADC is typically assigned to a number of different customers. Within these customers they are responsible for providing advice and guidance around the entire range of Microsoft technologies and tools.

We strive to achieve great customer satisfaction by demonstrating depth of technical knowledge and a proactive approach to engaging and assisting our customers with even the most difficult of technical challenges.

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Although an ADC could be called upon to advise their customer on any one of the Microsoft technologies, no ADC will be required to have in depth knowledge of all Microsoft technologies and languages. Where the customer requirement is for more in-depth skills than an ADC can deliver this will be covered by another ADC from the team whose specialist area best covers the requirement for this work.

The role therefore provides excellent opportunities to learn a wide breadth of Microsoft technologies whilst working in an environment which is perfectly suited to supporting ADCs in becoming experts within their chosen specialist areas of interest.

The environment within the team is very much set up to encourage sharing of information and knowledge. We hold regular team meetings where every ADC is encouraged to present on their particular area of expertise to ensure everyone in the team has a core understanding of every technology. Team members support each other via internal events such as these, as well as by delivering into customer engagements or by simply offering advice and support where it's needed.

ADCs are committed to remaining competent in a broad range of Microsoft technologies, as well as delving deeper into those that are of particular interest to them. There are numerous resources available to individuals that allow them to achieve this including classroom training sessions or interaction with the product groups as well as self-study materials.

## What kind of customers would I be working with?

Two thirds of our accounts are Independent Software Vendors (ISVs) from various different industry sectors. These can range from household names making shrink-wrapped products, to those with a very specific target market. Many of these customers are Microsoft Certified Partners or Gold Certified Partners. Within these accounts the ADC is often the customer's key contact within Microsoft.

The remainder of our accounts are enterprise customers. These include many world leading, FTSE and blue chip companies. They are typically larger engagements and we have customers in a number of different industry sectors. Within these customers the ADCs work as the key development- focussed resource as part of a larger Microsoft account team who deliver account management, enterprise strategy and day-to-day support.

## What technologies would I be using?

ADCs will cover all supported Microsoft developer products and technologies. They also bring a lot of experience and knowledge around general software engineering and architecture. ADCs are heavily involved with the usage of the Microsoft Developer Tools and Languages such as Visual Studio, Visual Studio Team System, C#, VB.NET and C++.

With these languages ADCs are working with the various flavours of Microsoft operating systems and technologies such as Windows Server and its integrated technologies such as the .NET framework, IIS and COM+, utilising a vast array of the Microsoft Server platform such as SQL Server, BizTalk and SharePoint.

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ADCs will work with both pre-release (Alpha and Beta) technologies as well as any Microsoft released and supported technology. Often as the ADC is in a long term engagement with our customers it puts them in an ideal position to provide advice and guidance as to where Microsoft technologies will provide best value within a customer's architecture.

## What is the scope for career progression?

We take career progression extremely seriously within Microsoft. All ADCs report to a Professional Development Manager (PDM) whose responsibility it is to contribute significantly to employee satisfaction and the career development of consultants by helping them to expand or deepen their skills in areas aligned with our customer's requirements and hopefully their career goals.

Opportunities for technology growth within the group are large and varied. The type of work that we get involved in is often using the latest technologies and our customers are very demanding in terms of technology excellence. We also give our people training in the technologies and techniques that they need to be successful at their role and in front of their customers.

Within the team we have a hierarchy of roles and consultants enter at a level relevant to their experience, ranging from Associate Consultant up to Senior and Principal Consultants. Generally we expect the highest level of consultants will be amazing in front of our customers, will have an industry wide profile, be technically excellent, be able to work at both a highly detailed code level and also take an architectural viewpoint where necessary and have a great track record of being able to deliver solutions within Microsoft technologies.

Growing our consultants requires us to ensure that:

- We have the right types of people in the roles. This means hiring great potential; people that are passionate about technology and customers.
- We ensure that we get our people the right types of training, access to the best reference materials or people
- We encourage and find opportunities for them to gain lots of experience with our technologies and products as they go through our own Microsoft Lifecycle. This may mean working with beta and pre-beta technologies and projects, and maybe working directly with the product groups.
- We work to ensure that our people have opportunities in lots of leading edge customers and with cutting edge technologies to really stretch them
- We ensure that they are given great coaching, feedback on their performance and ways to improve
- We set them goals about being some of the best technologists that we can make them

Typically consultants will spend a number of years within the team moving through the grades. Many of our consultants will eventually move on to take on other roles within the company such as program managers, technical writers and developers within the product groups for products such as Visual Studio, Office and Windows. Others consultants have joined our pre-sales Developer Evangelist Group here in the UK.

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## Do I have what it takes to be a great ADC?

Not all great developers, architects or testers will make great ADCs. When we look for ADCs we look for people who understand the core platforms that they are building upon. As such we look for a solid foundation in areas such as the .NET CLR, the Windows Platform and SQL Server.

ADCs come into contact with far more products and technologies than anyone can be an expert in. We understand this and our whole team working supports this notion. ADCs therefore must be able to work within a team and proactively support each other.

Equally as important to the ADC role as technical knowledge is the rapport that our consultants have with their customers. Therefore we look for people who are excellent communicators with strong customer facing skills and who are able to effectively manage customer's expectations.

We appreciate that no applicant is the same, nor do we want them to be. Each candidate will have a passion for different technical areas, coming from various different backgrounds, and bringing with them a variety of experiences of technology and how it's applied.

## How will the interview process work?

Typically the interview process will consist of the following parts:

### **Web Test -**

An online test which consists of a series of timed technical questions to assess your knowledge of technologies that we see as core to the ADC role.

### **Telephone Interview -**

Lasting approximately 45 minutes, this interview with a member of the ADC team will give us a chance to chat to you about technologies as well as allowing you to find out more about the role.

### **Face to Face Technical Interview -**

Held at our campus in Reading. This interview will cover code quality, architecture and consultancy skills.

### **Face to Face Managerial Interview -**

Also held at our Reading Campus. This will include a competencies based interview with our professional development manager and a presentation, based on a brief which you will be given in advance.

## Meet some of our current ADCs

“Code reviews, architectural reviews, security reviews, all sorts!”

### **Jonathan Swift**

Consultant – Based from Leeds

#### **What do you do?**

My role involves helping clients build an application properly from the start, hopefully preventing them from running into trouble when they're 90% done with the build phase. However it can involve fire fighting problems with an existing application and also a lot of performance troubleshooting.

A fun part of the job is running a performance lab in Reading for a client, spending a full week hammering their application and finding the bottlenecks. Code reviews, architectural reviews, security reviews, all sorts!

#### **What is your background?**

10 years of software development and consulting, including a stint as a Microsoft Certified Trainer, teaching .NET, SQL and COM courses.

#### **What does a typical week consist of?**

It can vary wildly, some time is spent on site with different clients. This can be for something as simple as a general catch-up, to finding out why their newly deployed billing system doesn't work!

As well as actual client visits, I'm often in the process of putting a presentation together, either for a client or for internal meetings at Microsoft.

#### **How often do you travel?**

I travel out to clients throughout the week, usually less than an hour each way. Every couple of weeks I go down to the offices in Reading from Leeds, and also up to Edinburgh quite a lot to meet with my virtual account team. On average I spend a couple of nights away from home each month.

“One day could be writing sample code, the next could be reviewing architecture, the day after that in a lab doing scalability work”

“The team members are excellent – it would be hard to find so many adept people in any other place, either Microsoft or elsewhere.”

## **James World**

Senior Consultant – Based in Reading

### **What do you do?**

I am an Application Development Consultant, and am also responsible for looking after the lab facility that we have in the offices here in Reading. Here we help our customers to set up, analyse and tune their system, as well as running benchmark tests.

### **What is your background?**

I've been developing or designing software for my whole career culminating in a role as technical architect for the e-commerce platform for global hardware manufacturer and retailer. I joined Microsoft at the beginning of 2002.

### **What do you like about working in this team?**

The variety of work. One day could be writing sample code, the next could be reviewing architecture, the day after that in a lab doing scalability work.

### **What do you do when you're not working?**

I have a family, including a golden retriever and my wife and I are expecting our first child very soon. That keeps me pretty busy at the moment, but I somehow manage to find time to keep up with the latest XBOX 360 games!

## **Morgan Skinner**

Senior Consultant – Based in Manchester

### **What is your background?**

Prior to joining MS (about 5 years ago) I was a Development Manager at a small software house in Altrincham, Cheshire. That was my first job after doing a BSc in Computer Studies in Liverpool. I started as a junior developer and worked my way through senior developer, team leader to my final position where I ran a team of developers working on Laboratory information systems.

### **What does a typical week consist of?**

There's no such thing as a typical week – most often I have 1-3 days on site with customers, typically some distance away from home, although I do spend most nights in my own bed. We also run customer labs in Reading where you spend a week working on scalability testing – typically there will be a couple of these a year.

"You get to make this job your own, and everyone in the team does it slightly differently."

## **What is the most exciting project you have been working on recently?**

I've been working with the British Library on a digitization project for the past 16 months which has been great fun – for a time I was a stand in development manager whilst they recruited a new member of staff to fill the position.

## **What do you like about working in this team?**

The team members are excellent – it would be hard to find so many adept people in any other place, either Microsoft or elsewhere. Being based from home has many advantages and I don't feel left out but an integral part of the team.

## **Mark Haas**

Consultant – Based in Reading

## **What is your background?**

I studied Computer Science at Brighton University and first came to Microsoft as a placement student working in Developer Support in 2000. After university I took a year out to go travelling before coming back to Microsoft to work in Application Development Consulting as an Associate Consultant.

## **What does a typical week consist of?**

I usually spend 2-3 days visiting my customers on site, and the remaining working from the office in Reading. Currently, my two customers are based in Telford and Basingstoke. Telford is quite a distance from home so I usually stay in a hotel overnight, although this doesn't tend to be more than once a fortnight.

## **What do you like about this job?**

You get to make this job your own, and everyone in the team does it slightly differently. It's great to have the freedom to manage your own time. There is also a good group of people in the team, and it's a great environment to learn in.

## **How do you keep up to date with technologies?**

The team work with so many different technologies that an individual can't possibly know them all. As an individual, you choose to delve more deeply into the areas that are of particular interest to you. In order to do this I use lots of different sources, such as books, videos and slide decks from events. There is also a huge amount of knowledge in the team, so if you've got any questions there's usually someone who can help.

“This role allows me to work with a variety of customers, in a variety of sectors, with a variety of different technologies and at a variety of different stages in the development lifecycle”

## Colin Beales

Senior Consultant – Based in Reading

### What is your background?

I joined Microsoft in 1996 straight out of university working first in the Visual C++ team before working with the COM/COM+ and .NET Interop teams, finally moving to become an Application Development Consultant about 5 years ago.

### What does a typical week consist of?

Ha! A typical week what's one of those? I can honestly say there just isn't one and it's one of the great things about working within this team. Every week is different. Lots of different customers working at different stages of the development lifecycle using varieties of products and technologies. Put all this together there is loads of variety, loads of challenges, loads to learn and loads to share.

### How often do you travel?

I live in the Reading area and have chosen to take some customers around the Thames Valley, London and London Outskirt areas, therefore travel for me is pretty minimal, I'd say up to a maximum of one and a half hours whenever I'm onsite. Occasionally when I'm helping out another consultant by delivering into their customer then I have to travel to wherever in the country they may be based.

### How do you keep up to date with technology?

It's a constant challenge but one we all have to live with...

I think a lot of keeping up to date is knowing what to keep up date with, you have to know that no one person can know it all and be "the subject matter expert" on everything. Therefore you have to pick the areas that you want to take up the "expert" mantle on and make sure you have a good handle on the higher levels of the technologies you're not an expert in.

The ADC role is ideally positioned to support us in doing this as we have then a pool of "experts" in the group in areas that may be our areas of weakness, or just in area that we have no technical interest. The team based nature of the ADC role means that "experts" within the group have responsibility to share what core level knowledge should be known across the group so that each ADC can position each technology appropriately to their customers and bring in the "expert" when the customer requires more in-depth assistance.

The areas we have an interest in learning or want to become an expert in can come from lots of different resources inside and outside of Microsoft such as peer-to-peer workshops, web based training, formal classroom led training, interactions with the product groups, books, websites, blogs etc... The list could go on and on.

In order to get the hands-on view of this I tend to have a number of pet projects on the go at any time that I use to cement my understanding of various products and technologies.

### **What do you like about working in this team?**

Variety is the key for me. This role allows me to work with a variety of customers, in a variety of sectors, with a variety of different technologies and at a variety of different stages in the development lifecycle

Couple this variety with being within a team of very talented individuals in an environment where you are given the resources to go and learn in your own way make this role perfect for me as a Microsoft technology enthusiast.

## Team Blogs

Here are a few of the team blogs, if you want to read more about the technologies we are interested in, then have a look at the below:

<http://www.colinbeales.com>

<http://blogs.msdn.com/pedram>

<http://mehranikoo.net>

<http://blogs.msdn.com/salvapatuel/>

<http://www.thejoyofcode.com/>

[www.willg.co.uk](http://www.willg.co.uk)

<http://blogs.msdn.com/jonathanswift>

[www.jamesnape.me.uk/blog](http://www.jamesnape.me.uk/blog)