The Ring

The journal of the Cambridge Computer Lab Ring

Issue XIX — September 2008 — £20

www.camring.ucam.org

Ring news

London Ringlet Bars

The London events attract enthusiastic support. **Alastair Gourlay** reports.

Over 25 Ring members enjoyed the early December 2007 event. It took place at Old Doctor Butler's Head in the City and it was great that so many newcomers joined the regular crowd. We were delighted to welcome Ring members from both France and Scotland who had dropped by during their trips to London.

We were most grateful to Brian Collins (CHU83), CIO of KBC Financial Products, who generously sponsored the event. KBCFP is an enthusiastic supporter of the Computer Laboratory and a keen employer of Lab grads.

The evening was lively and additional excitement was provided by the televised Cambridge United game. While a passionate set of CU supporters kept us in touch with the score, the rest of us chatted about new business ideas, the state of the financial markets, computer security, skiing holidays and the approaching party season. As midnight approached tired staff ushered us out into the cold.

Our next event was held in February 2008. There was a great turnout and everyone was keen to catch up after the Christmas and New Year break.

Shortly after the Ring's annual dinner, we converged on Balls Brothers in the City. While a number of regulars were unable to come, the smaller turnout gave everyone an opportunity to mingle and have a good chat.

Fortunately the weather was kind when 32 of us met at Henry J Bean's in Chelsea for the London Ringlet Bar at the beginning of June. We were grateful to John Brimacombe (T91) and Sussex Place Ventures who very generously sponsored the event. John, a serial entrepreneur and partner at Sussex Place Ventures, is an active and keen supporter of the Ring.

I had the chance to chat with Ring members from venture capital, private equity, software, banking and the Internet, as well as a selection of brave and imaginative entrepreneurs. While the evening provided a great opportunity to participate in some productive networking, many were content to enjoy the party in the evening sunshine.

Events calendar

2008

September

Wednesday 17th
Cambridge Ringlet bar
Salisbury Arms, 76 Tenison Road

October

Thursday 2nd, 18:30
London Ringlet Bar

December

Thursday 4th, 18:30
London Ringlet Bar

2009

April

Thursday 2nd, 19:00
Ring annual dinner
Queens' College, Cambridge
Reception 19:00; dinner 19:30
Admission by ticket only

Visit the Ring Web site at www.camring.ucam.org for the latest news about Ring events.

Hall of Fame Awards: call for nominations

The 2009 Hall of Fame Awards, honouring the achievements of Computer Laboratory graduates, will be announced at the annual dinner on April 2nd 2009.

There are three categories:

- **Company of the Year**, open to all Hall of Fame companies
- **New Product of the Year**, open to all Hall of Fame companies
- **Publication of the Year**, awarded to the most significant peer-reviewed paper by a Ring member of Lab member published in the calendar year 2008.

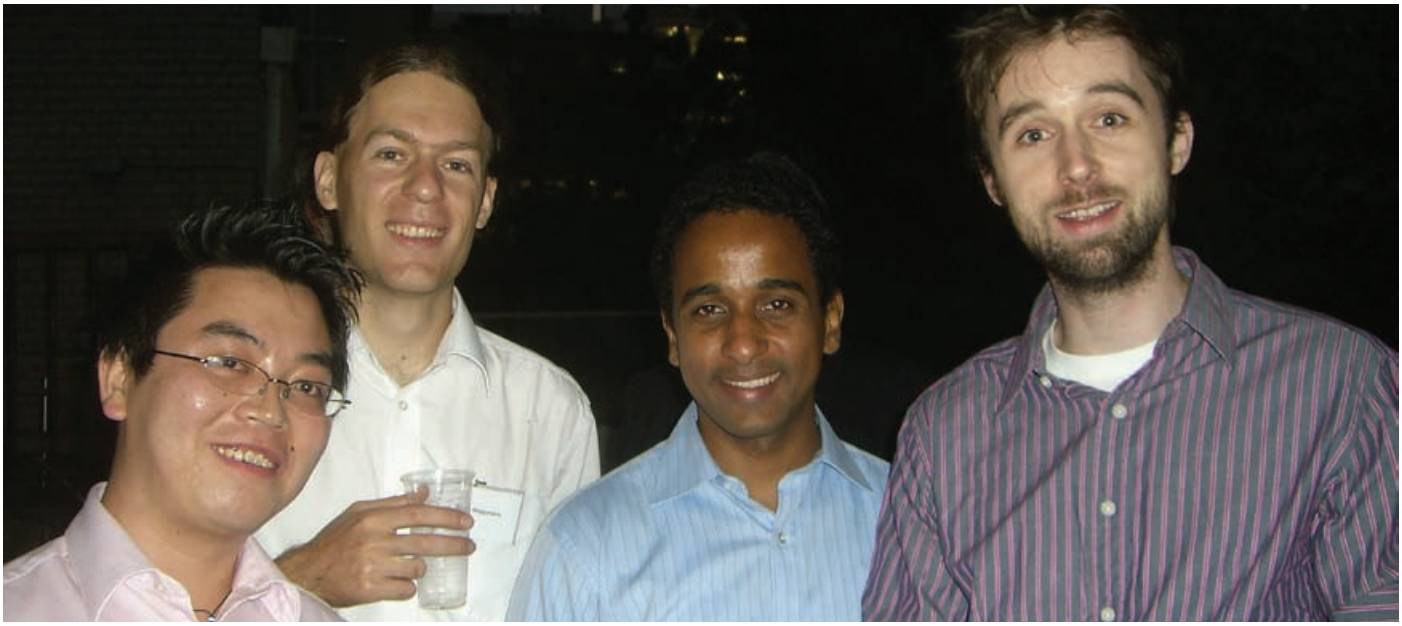
For the first two awards, please note that the company must be a member of the Ring Hall of Fame, as shown on the Lab Ring Web site. If a company is eligible for the Hall of Fame but not currently listed, please contact the Ring office to ensure that it is added.

For the New Product of the Year award, the product concerned must have been (or is planned to be) released commercially in the calendar year 2008, and principally developed by the company itself. The product must be hardware, software, licensable technology, or a service.

Please send all nominations to jan.samols@cl.cam.ac.uk Please give reasons for your nominations.

London BBQ

Forty Ring members converged on the offices of Operis for the London BBQ. Everyone was very grateful to David Colver (CHR80), Joint Chief Executive, for agreeing to host this wonderful social event. **Alastair Gourlay** reports.



Operis, which David co-founded in 1997, offers specialist project finance advice and due diligence.

Operis's offices, overlooking the Honourable Artillery Company in the City, provided a marvellous venue. Familiar faces caught up over nibbles and drinks, and it was good to welcome many London Ringlet first-timers.

As the numbers began to swell we spilled out onto the balcony. The air was fresh and crisp, and we were thankful that the forecast thunderstorm did not materialise and put paid to the delicious smells emanating from the BBQ.

As more guests arrived it soon became clear that the event had attracted not only London-based members but also many from Cambridge.

We were grateful to our chef for the evening, Daniela Sarikova who, by day, works in the accounts team at Operis. Copious amounts of food and drink helped conversation to flow freely all evening and we were thankful that the weather stayed dry and fine.

Clockwise from top left: Hui Li, Martin Kleppmann, Rashid Moh, Marc Cardle, Richard Tandoh

If you would like to support a London event please contact Alastair Gourlay at mail@agourlay.com

Who's who

Johnson Adesanya (HH Dip96) is a contract developer at the Royal Bank of Scotland in London.

Ajit Ahaliwal (DOW Dip07) is a programmer at Kinship Networking.

Niall Cameron (PEM BA05) is still at Goldman Sachs. He is now working in Foreign Exchange Trading and Sales and is part of a team responsible for maintaining and enhancing the electronic dealing platforms.

Shaw Chuang (K PhD00) is now Entrepreneur-in-Residence at Highland Capital.

Paul Conyers (T Dip80) is director of portfolio strategy at Redington Partners in London.

Charles Corfield (JN BA82) is CEO at SandCherry Inc in Colorado, USA.

Jonthan Davies (CHU BA03) is a PhD student at the University of Cambridge Computer Laboratory.

Peter Dickman (CHU Dip84 PhD92) is a manager at Google in Switzerland.

Mark Dodwell (Pet BA06) has set up his own Web design and development consultancy in West Sussex.

Peter Ferne (T BA86) is CTO at Jiva Technology Ltd.

Julian Gallop (T Dip70) recently retired from Rutherford Appleton Laboratory. However, he has a continuing contract on a specialist task force involving grids standardisation with European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI).

Liam Goddard (CHU BA04) is now working for Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR).

Eric Greveson (K Meng06) is a software engineer at Yotta.

Jagdip Grewal (CTH BA93) is Chief Technical Architect at NHS Connecting for Health.

Ashish Gupta (CL Dip98) is a senior development manager at Oracle Corp in India.

Russell Haggar (CHR BA91) has founded Enlightened Technology, an advisory and project consultancy for technology-sector clients.

Nick Hales (CTH MA02) is moving to Sweden on a year placement, to work as an engineer for Koenigsegg Automotive.

Grant Hyslop (R BA05) is an IT consultant at Accenture.

Simon Jackson (CC BA08) is working at Red Gate Software as a graduate software engineer.

Laura James (CC MEng00 PhD05) recently joined the Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies (CARET), University of Cambridge as a technology strategist.

Juha Korhonen (M PhD06) has founded Cantab Wireless. Cantab Wireless provides consultancy services in wireless telecommunications and emerging wireless technologies.

Alan Lawrence (CHU BA02 PhD) is working as a compiler engineer for Imagination Technologies.

Jochen Leidner (PET MPhil02) is a research scientist at Thomson Reuters Corporation in the US.

Phebe Mann (HH BA01) is Director of Undergraduate programme, Lecturer in IT in Construction in the School of Construction Management and Engineering at Reading University. She is a finalist of the Phi Delta Kappa International Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award for her PhD thesis.

Roger Marlow (CHU BA91) is Managing Director of 7N UK Ltd. 7N launched in the UK in March 2008. It matches the IT development, coaching, testing and consulting needs of customers with the highest quality independent contractors.

Derek McAuley (F Dip85 PhD90) is CTO at Netronome Systems.

Chris Morgan (JE BA01) has recently moved to AVEVA Solutions where he is lead software engineer.

Jason Morley (CL BA04) has left Tokyo and is now working in Beijing.

David Mrva (PET MPhil02) is working as a research analyst at Endeavour Capital.

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The Ring is the journal of the Computer Lab Ring, which is the graduate association of the University of Cambridge Computer Laboratory.

Michael Nabarro (TH BA03) has founded Spektrix. Spektrix is developing software to provide ticketing services to the entertainment industry.

Lawrence Owusu (CLH MPhil 08) is an associate analyst programmer at Tessella Support.

David Oxley (CHR Dip04) is now working at DE Shaw.

Lauri Pesonen (W PhD08) is a senior engineer at Cambridge Consultants.

Peter Polkinghorne (T BA79) is a computer officer (systems) at Brunel University.

Nigel Ross (CL BA78) is a director of global OEM sales at Sun Microsystems.

Matt Rowen (CC BA04) is an engineer at Azuro.

Gaurav Sachdeva (W MPhil05) is a senior research and development engineer at Synopsys Inc in Bangalore.

Charles Southey (T MA90) is VP of IT at Sophos Plc.

Karl Spalding Wall (CTH BA05) is working as a software engineer at Citrix.

Eirini Spyropoulou (W MPhil07) is working as a software engineer at Velti.

Kenny Stoltz (W BA08) is an associate product manager at Google.

Andrew Sweet (T BA08) is a graduate technology analyst at Barclays Capital.

David Taylor (CHU BA81) is a relationship manager at i-flex solutions, a provider of IT solutions to the financial services industry.

David Thompson (Q BA05) is a senior software engineer at Taptu.

Yan Tordoff (CHU BA94) has moved to HSBC where he is Global Head of Strategic Components, Structured Products Equities and Futures IT.

Nicko van Someren (T BA89 PhD95) has been elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

Chris Waring (F BA05) is Head of Business Management at Barclays Commercial. His team is responsible for developing the commercial strategy to attract and retain business with companies with £1 million turnover up to and including FTSE 250 in Technology, Media, Telecoms and Manufacturing.

Wenxiao Yan (DOW MPhil07) is an Internet services developer at Netcraft.

Bjarne Stroustrup

Bjarne Stroustrup was born and grew up in Aarhus, Denmark. He is a graduate of Churchill College and is notable as the designer and original implementer of C++. Bjarne is currently the College of Engineering Chair Professor in Computer Science at Texas A&M University, USA.

What's your favourite gadget at the moment?
My 3lb laptop.

What's your favourite Web site?
Digital Camera Review.

What was the last book you read?
The Ionian Mission by Patrick O'Brian.

What was your first job?
Member of Bell Labs' Computer Science Research Center — there was no place like it on Earth.

What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?
Getting C++ into real-world use.

What's your best quality?
Would I know? Tenacity? (Suggested by Doug McIlroy some years ago)

What annoys you most?
An "ignorant, loud, and proud of it!" attitude.

Who would you invite (past or present) to your ideal dinner party?
That's too hard a question — unfair! There are just too many interesting people in the world (past or present), especially for someone with a sense of history. I'll simplify by picking just five (to make a total of six, a perfect number) and just from computing: Kristen Nygaard, Alex Stepanov, Al Aho, Maurice Wilkes, and Jim Gray. I know from personal experience that they enjoy a good meal as well as generate intellectual fireworks. Leonardo and Aristotle will have to wait for another occasion.

What do you do to relax?
A: Read, dine, and run (not simultaneously)

What's your motto in life?
I have to have one? Don't just minimise the failures: maximise the successes.

Rubicon Software

Alistair Hancock talked to *The Ring* about how Rubicon Software is helping its customers through the credit crunch.

TR: Alistair, you founded Rubicon Software at the end of your second year at St. John's. What motivated you to start the company then and how did you evaluate the opportunity?

AH: I met a charity consultant who said that he used a paper-based system for handling the whole fundraising and donation process. This involved four-part carbon copy cards and bending down various corners of the cards to indicate key attributes of the potential donor. This was 1989 and I was astonished that he was not using a database. Just for fun in 1983 I had written a database application on the BBC Micro to computerise my mother's freezer, checking items in and out so that we would know what was at the bottom! It was clear that the charity sector was a growing marketplace and I thought combining a proven fundraising process with a smart database application would be a good business model.

TR: How did you manage to progress the business while studying for your finals? Did you get any outside help? How did you obtain funds for your venture?

AH: I phoned up NatWest bank and told them I wanted to start a business. This was 9 o'clock in the morning. I met the bank manager at 11am and had spent £3,500 of the £4,000 loan by 1pm. I bought a Compaq 286 and an Epson dot-matrix printer (wide-carriage, for landscape reports). I arranged to have a phone line connected to my rooms at St. John's and bought an answerphone in case people called while I was at lectures. I was a VAT-registered sole trader at 19 but had to ask a friend who was 21 to hire a car and drive me to see one of my first clients in Dover. When it came to finals I crammed my 12,000 word dissertation write-up into 4 days, 4 nights and 4 hours sleep. I think this was excellent training for the years to come.

TR: What were the most difficult problems you faced as you began to grow? When you looked for key people, what attributes did you seek?

AH: I always used to think that finding good people was the key problem. Actually I have been very lucky and have found some excellent engineers over the years. The best people are still with me now and have a good number of share options in the business. I was a little less lucky with business partners and sales people. Ultimately I am an IQ snob: I expect people to be able to think quickly and logically. Those that do are still in the company.

TR: Rubicon has a strong focus on meeting the challenges of financial services organisations. What prompted you to focus on this particular segment?

AH: The products of the company have always been focused on helping organisations manage the long and complex life-cycle of relationships with customers (or donors). This is now known as Customer Relationship Management (CRM). In 2002 we decided to offer a solution to banks and building societies because of their needs to have single views of each customer and prospect, as well as to follow highly regulated sales processes. This combination of technology integration and business process management played to the strengths of our solution and experience.

TR: What are the key differentiators between your CRM product offerings and those of your competitors?

AH: Accelerator, our CRM product, works in the real world. Sometimes people are single, get married, get divorced and re-married all through the life-cycle of being a customer. Our solution copes very well with treating people as individuals, when that is the right thing to

do, and as couples when that is right. Joint mortgage holders do not want to receive a letter each when a "Dear Mr and Mrs Smith" would have been fine. The mortgage and loans market is highly regulated and our system helps our clients to comply with the Data Protection Act, anti-money laundering legislation as well as the very important new initiative from the FSA — "Treating Customers Fairly". There are few specialist CRM providers in the Financial Services space because the cost of entry is so high.

TR: How satisfied are you with the customer base you have built? What have been the key challenges?

AH: One of Rubicon's greatest strengths is that our clients keep coming back for enhancements and new features. We have very loyal clients who all say that they are delighted with the benefits they gain from Accelerator. I only wish we had more of them! The key challenge has been in persuading organisations to adopt a greater reliance on technology. In truth this frees people to do what people are good at, and allows computers to do what computers are good at. In the Financial Services industry the decision-making process is very slow and cultural change is the biggest obstacle to overcome.

TR: Have current market conditions — stricter lending criteria and tighter availability of credit — affected business?

AH: Without question the credit crunch has been difficult for our sector. Rubicon has a solution that has been fine-tuned to the sub-prime broking and lending space. This industry is in melt-down and I am only pleased to say that those organisations that chose to buy our products seem to be weathering the storm better than their competitors. It is difficult for anyone associated with mortgages or secured loans at the moment.

TR: How do you see the market for financial CRM products evolving over the next few years?

AH: I think the need is greater every day. Current market conditions drive businesses to look closely at operational efficiency and automation. This simply equates to technology over people and this is likely to be a trend for the next couple of years. In contrast, the credit crunch has decimated the intermediary mortgage market and I think more B2C solutions will appear in this confusing market place. We are working closely with a number of organisations on solutions that link customers straight to the lenders and think this has significant growth potential.

TR: If you could go back in time, would you do anything differently?

AH: I am not one to look back too much; there is always so much to look forward to but the biggest lesson I have learnt is "It's all about sales". I am more sure today than ever before that agile, entrepreneurial business must place sales at the top of their business agenda.

Rubicon Software is hiring. For information about current opportunities please visit www.rubiconsoftware.com/Careers.aspx

Red Gate Software

Simon Galbraith, co-founder and marketing director of Red Gate Software, tells *The Ring* how the seeds of success were sown when he met fellow Cambridge graduate, Neil Davidson, at school.

TR: Simon, can you tell me about how you started Red Gate with Neil Davidson? How did you spot the opportunity?

SG: Neil and I met at school when we were 16. I won a free place to Charterhouse, the Surrey public school. They were offering free places to people who wouldn't otherwise be able to go there. I'm from the North and was a bit different from the other boys. Neil wasn't the run-of-the-mill public school boy either, so we were drawn together and became friends. We were both quite bright and interested in business. Neil started selling software programs through magazines when he was 16. My business venture wasn't so grand but I had set up a paper round. Even when we left school we had plans to run a business together. After school, Neil went up to Cambridge and I went to Durham. Then while I was at Cambridge doing a PhD, Neil was living in Italy. However, we kept in touch and talked about what sort of business we wanted to start. We finally came together in our mid-20s. I was working for Shell but with the Internet taking off, we decided it was a great time to start our own company. While we had a good product idea, starting a company was more about going into business with Neil than anything else.

TR: Could you provide an overview of your product portfolio and how it meets your customers' concerns?

SG: Red Gate is the leading tool provider for professionals working with SQL Server and .NET. While Microsoft provides some tools it doesn't provide all that's needed, and that's where Red Gate comes in. Everyone using SQL Server should be using Red Gate's tools. They'll make their lives much easier and more productive.

TR:What are some of the growth strategies that Red Gate has employed over the past few years that have helped you move into untapped markets?

SG: Our most important strategy is to hire amazing people. From there we can turn OK products into fantastic ones. It's so important to really understand what customers need so that we create software that satisfies those needs. Seeing how customers use our software in their workplace is key — the user is the primary driver of the development process. We've faced competition in the vast majority of markets that we've moved into. However, while existing competitors have expensive and badly designed products, we have been able to come to market with products that are ingeniously simple and competitively priced. We aim to produce a better product at a lower price.

TR: A number of researchers has identified marketing and sales effectiveness as a constraint on the growth of technology-based firms. Why do you think tech companies have a problem in this area? What are the key distinctions between successful sales professionals and those who have yet to reach that level?

SG: I'd say that Cambridge companies in general — and techies in particular — look down on marketing and sales people. They have a sneering attitude and it's one I come across all the time. I'd say the biggest problem is the curse of knowledge. They know that their product can solve a particular problem but they can't explain how it works to the ordinary customer.

In "Made to Stick", Chip and Dan Heath discuss the curse of knowledge. A lot of technology firms come up with what they think is amazing technology. Because they know how it works they are unable to understand how little others know and they can't communicate their ideas clearly. That's the danger of technology produced in a vacuum without reference to anyone who might use it.

There's a book "Selling the Wheel", by Jeff Cox and Howard Stevens, which identifies four essential selling styles each requiring a different type of salesperson and selling approach. It offers a great insight into the different sales styles that are needed for different kinds of customers as a company grows. There are a lot of clichés about what makes a good salesperson, but the ability to listen to the demands of customers is key. You can get a product out in a few weeks, but it can take years to perfect it to meet your customers' needs. Many people think that developing a product is the end of the story but it's just the beginning. It's the customer's input that makes the product useful.

TR:What suggestions would you offer to those wanting to attain a higher level of success?

SG: The trick is to do what you love. Two pieces of advice have stuck in my mind. The first came from a vicar I met on a train. His advice was "have a go." The second came from a very successful businessman. He said —and I know this sounds contradictory — "do the things that you don't want to." He wasn't referring to big life decisions but to what you do on a daily basis. His key to success was starting the day doing the things he didn't want to do. This forced him out of his comfort zone.

You should also be completely ruthless about finding the best people. You should never compromise. However, best doesn't necessarily mean cleverest. That's the classic techy mistake. Quite often the person that you want doesn't have a degree but has a great set of skills.

TR: How important has having an on-line presence been in helping to build your business?

SG: It's been vital. The Internet prompted us to start our business in the first place so it's been fundamental to our growth strategy. It allowed us to come to market at a lower cost and it took three to four years for people to catch up. So while our competitors were paying for print ads, our marketing costs were much lower. As new technology comes along the challenge is to change your business structure to make the most of it. For instance, if energy costs become so high that it's a problem for people to drive to work, the companies who solve that problem will have a huge advantage over those who don't.

TR:What are the big challenges for Red Gate at this point?

SG: Red Gate has grown rapidly. We now have 135 people so we face all the challenges of running a larger organisation. Product management also poses challenges. Not only do we have to work out what products we should be developing but also what features they should have. At the moment we're good, but to be awesome we've got a long way to go. We spend 50% of our revenue on product development, so if we get it wrong we waste millions.

TR:What do you wish to accomplish in the next couple of years? How would you define success both for yourself and for Red Gate?

SG: Red Gate is world class at marketing and producing usable products. However, we're not yet world class at choosing what products to work on. Our goal is to be a truly great software company. The problem is how to define great! If people said Red Gate was the greatest software company in the UK, I'd be happy.

TR: Finally, are there any books that have had a big impact on you and which you would recommend to others?

SG: Neil and I are voracious readers of business books. They're still my main source of ideas. I don't follow them slavishly but take something from each one.

I'd recommend "Good to Great" by Jim Collins, as well as "Build to last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies" by the same author. Then there's "Hard Facts, Dangerous Half-Truths, and Total Nonsense" by Jeff Pfeffer and Bob Sutton.

I'd also recommend "Crossing the Chasm: Marketing and Selling Technology Products to Mainstream Customers" by Geoffrey Moore and "Permission Marketing: Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers" by Seth Godin.

Martin Bower's book "The will to manage" is virtually unknown but is a very good critique of what it is to be a good manager.

Finally, I'd recommend "My Years with General Motors" by Alfred Sloan and Tom Peters, which is always worth a read.

For more information about Red Gate visit www.red-gate.com

Martin Kleppmann

After graduating from Corpus Christi in 2006, Martin Kleppmann first became a composer and then started a company, Ept Computing. Here he talks to the Ring about life free from boredom.

You go to school, to university and then you get a job. To many, this seems like an obvious and inevitable sequence of events. However life is rarely so predictable. When you leave university and start working, you change your role in society from being a net consumer (of education services) to being a net producer (of whatever you choose to work on). You get paid a salary, which shows that somebody believes that you produce something of value. In fact, they believe that what you produce is worth several times more than what they are paying you — that's how they make their profit.

Question: if your time and brains are worth several times more than what you are paid, how can you make the best use of those resources? Answer: by trading in job security and spare time, and starting a company. However, it took me a while to work that out.

Fortunately I had a lot of options after university. I got the top first and the award for the best dissertation. I usually have a tendency to undervalue myself and don't like showing off, but even I realised that the world was my oyster. Doing a PhD was a possibility. Then there were various interesting job offers. However, I wanted to avoid becoming too narrow-minded, so I won some postgraduate scholarships to study at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD) in Glasgow.

Credit to RSAMD for accepting somebody like me onto their postgraduate diploma course in composition. I had never had a composition lesson and no musical background to speak of. All I had done was compose a number of pieces on a "write something down because I think it sounds nice" basis. It transpired that I was unable to reconcile my teachers' understanding of "nice" with my own, and so I withdrew from the course at the halfway stage. However, my largest work (a musical drama called Die Türme des Februar / The Towers of February) was performed twice. It was three hours long, had 150 performers, a chorus, an orchestra and actors. It broke even and received glowing reviews. I suppose my idea of "nice" wasn't too silly after all.

With my artistic career over, various options presented themselves. I applied to a management consultancy but hated the interview so much that I was positively relieved when they didn't offer me a job. It was then that I thought back to Jack Lang's lectures on entrepreneurship and decided that it really was the best time to start my own company. I was still young, full of energy, very flexible, and didn't yet have the responsibility of a family. If I didn't do it now I probably never would.

That was May 2007. I had a lot of enthusiasm but not much more: no business experience, no particularly marketable expertise, no customers, and a product idea which soon turned out to be nonsense. I originally had a co-founder but we couldn't agree on a vision for the company, so we parted after several months. However, I attended the Ignite course (warmly recommended for similar clueless business beginners) and I found an experienced mentor through the Ring (Peter Cowley, who was so helpful that I brought him into the company as non-executive director). I did a lot of reading and a lot of networking, and boy, was I happy when my company, Ept Computing, issued its first invoice for barely over £100!

It didn't take too long to realise that I would have to make substantially more than £100 to survive and indeed, contracts did get much better. More importantly though I learnt the most important lesson — that customers are what matter and everything else is secondary. It sounds trivial but, being a techy at heart, it took me a surprisingly long time to digest the full impact of this lesson. It's incredibly easy to get carried away with technology but now that I obsess about customers' needs, I have a much better understanding of how the world works.

And things are moving forward. I now have two excellent employees and an office in St. John's Innovation Centre. I have met lots of helpful people in the technology and business community of Cambridge and beyond, and look forward to meeting more. I am working hard because I want our company to thrive, grow and make a difference. I am learning new skills at a dizzying rate. Soon I will have forgotten the meaning of the word "boredom".

Hall of fame news

Bango

Bango has received the top industry award for "Best Contribution to Mobile Content" at the 2008 Mobile Content Awards and the "Best Mobile Internet Use" award presented by the Mobile Data Association.

Camrivox

End-users and resellers can now easily download a 14-day trial of the Flexor CTI software from www.camrivox.com. Flexor simplifies CRM telephony integration as the software is delivered over the Web directly to the desktop and self installs to automatically discover a user's handset.

No telephony servers are required and this reduces support overheads.

EPT Computing

Martin Kleppmann and his team are consultants in Web application development. They have an expertise in all the technologies and techniques needed to make an excellent Web application. These include Ajax, Python/Django, Ruby on Rails, Java, scalable database design, mobile Web and semantic Web technologies.

They will soon be releasing a product for automated testing of Web applications. It was born out of their own need for fuss-free testing of the applications they develop. They have already received very encouraging responses from other Web developers who want to use it.

Finally they are developing new user interfaces, business models and technologies for on-line shopping which will allow sites to speak their customers' language.

Jagex

Jagex, the UK's largest independent games developer, has launched RuneScape High Detail, the latest version of its successful, multi-player on-line role-playing game. RuneScape High Detail has been released as a beta to subscribers with the plan to offer the same functionality to free players in the future. RuneScape High Detail utilises new technology to enhance the game's graphics and, for the first time, runs the game in full screen through an Internet browser.

Lemur Consulting

Lemur's Flax™ search software has been adopted by Lastminute.com founders, Brent Hoberman and Martha Lane Fox, to power their latest venture, mydeco.com.

Mydeco offers users the chance to design virtual rooms and fill them with furnishings and decorative items from hundreds of real prospective suppliers. Flax's powerful search features are used throughout the site for searching products, discussion forums and user profiles.

Linguamatics

Linguamatics' I2E 3.0 won Bio-IT World magazine's Best of Show award for life science information applications at the Bio-IT World Conference & Expo in Boston. Linguamatics has also incorporated in Delaware, USA to support growth in the demand for its I2E Text Mining Platform.

nCipher

nCipher, a leading supplier of encryption products, has reached agreement on the terms of a recommended cash offer to be made by Thales UK, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Thales, for the entire issued share capital of nCipher Plc. As at 10 July 2008, the offer valued nCipher at approximately £50 million.

ObjectSecurity

ObjectSecurity, the solutions provider for model-driven security management and secure information sharing in mission-critical industries such as air traffic control, has been named "Cool Vendors in Application Security and Authentication, 2008" by Gartner Inc.

Patientline

Patientline, the company that provides telephone and entertainment systems to patients in hundreds of hospitals, has gone into administration. The company's assets have been acquired by Hospedia, a newly formed enterprise owned by Patientline's banking creditors, including RBS and HSBC. They wrote off £35 million in debts in return for equity.

Questionmark

The Questionmark Perception assessment management system was named "Best Assessment Solution" at the LearnX Asia Pacific 2008 E-Learning and Training Awards.

Questionmark Perception was selected for its stability, ease of use, interactivity, feature set and suitability for use as an assessment management system.

Sophos

Sophos, a global leader in endpoint security and control solutions, has announced its intent to acquire Utimaco Safeware AG, a global leader in data security solutions for enterprises. Sophos intends to launch a voluntary public takeover offer in cash for all outstanding Utimaco shares.

Concurrently, Sophos has entered into an agreement with Investcorp Technology Partners, the largest shareholder of Utimaco, to acquire its 24.99% stake in Utimaco for cash and Sophos stock upon the takeover offer becoming unconditional.

Ubisense

Marshall Aerospace's use of the Ubisense precise real-time location system has improved search times for tools and test equipment by a factor of five over manual methods, and more than 50% over traditional RFID-based methods.

Independently verified by the Institute for Manufacturing Auto-ID Centre, the search times for operational equipment and high-value test devices have been dramatically reduced, thus proving the ROI for RTLS in the aerospace industry.

Zeus

Zeus Technology, a leading provider of application delivery controller software, has been selected by Everything Channel as a CRN Emerging Tech vendor for its ZXTM software.

CRN's Emerging Tech list captures companies that are delivering high margins for solution providers with innovative and easy-to-use technology that undercuts industry giants.

Job bulletin board

August

Linguamatics Ltd
- *Application developer*

RealVNC
- *Marketing manager*

July

Cityspace
- *Windows system administrator*

Sophos plc
- *IT solutions architects, designers and developers*

Linguamatics
- *QA engineer*

Apama
- *Software engineers*

June

Rubicon
- *Software engineer*

Psymetrix Ltd
- *Technical support engineer*

Kynesim
- *Software consultant*

Context Information Security
- *Technical security consultant*

Governor Technology
- *ASP.NET developer*

Visit the Job Bulletin Board in the Business and Professional section of the Ring Web site for details and more jobs. To advertise a job, click on "create advert".

Don's diary

Robert Mullins urges investment in the UK's leading research centres.

July has been spent focusing on research: dispatching my first grant proposal and contributing to other potential funding opportunities. I work in the computer architecture group, where our current focus is parallel architectures of one kind or another. Funding will no doubt be a continuous activity as we try and grow the group to critical mass. As many of you will already know, computer architecture is in the process of a major transition at the moment, as we make the sea change to general-purpose parallel computers and programming. Making significant contributions in this area will require larger and larger groups due to the breadth of the research required and its significant infrastructure component. This has certainly been recognised at the major institutions in the US, where very large investments in parallel computing laboratories have already been made at Berkeley, Stanford and Illinois. We hope that similar investments will be possible at the UK's leading research centres. This will require us to convince both the scientific community and general public of the importance of long-term computer science research in this area.

This week I was interested to read that Intel is one step closer to exploiting its silicon photonics technology. Our group has been following developments in this area and we are currently developing encoding techniques for multiwavelength optical networks. Long term, this sort technology promises to be at the heart of a wide range of communication applications, from low-power inter-chip communication to high-performance interconnects for data centres. It was interesting to note that the first comment posted after the article was a question asking why advances of this sort are important and what their applications might be. The poster asks "surely there are more important problems facing the world?" I often receive similar comments, from both friends and fellow computer scientists, when I suggest that we will soon be able to construct sugar cube sized supercomputers, containing hundreds, if not thousands of processor cores and gigabytes of memory.

At the heart of this scepticism seems to be our inability to identify, and perhaps promote as a community, the key applications of the future and their benefits to society. What is computer science's vision of the future? Of course I agree that we don't need a kilo-core processor to run MS Word. However, what we are perhaps failing to communicate is how computer science is at the heart of such a wide range of scientific endeavours, and that progress is predicated on continued advances in both computer science and computing hardware. The next 50 years will likely provide us with a million-fold improvement in computing power. This should surely encourage us to be optimistic and imaginative about what will be possible.

Robert Mullins came to Cambridge as a Research Associate in 2000. His research has included work on asynchronous processors, hardware security, on-chip interconnection networks and more recently parallel computing. He is currently a Lecturer in the Computer Laboratory.

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Computer Laboratory news

Celebrating the Diploma course, 1953–2008

On Wednesday July 16th 2008 the Laboratory celebrated the 55 years for which the Diploma Course had run.

Professor Andy Hopper, the Head of the Laboratory, welcomed over 50 visitors, many of them former students, before introducing Sir Maurice Wilkes.

Sir Maurice, who was in fine form, outlined some history, inevitably tied to the story of computing within Cambridge. The Computer Laboratory, originally known as the Mathematical Laboratory, started life in Corn Exchange Street in 1937. There, behind a substantial green door, Sir Maurice led the team that built the EDSAC computer, which successfully computed the first 100 prime numbers in May 1949. Scientists and others throughout the university were quick to seize on the opportunity, and the basic skills of programming began to be appreciated. This knowledge was much in demand, and by 1953 it was appropriate to pass it on through a formal course, the first full time taught computing course anywhere in the world. There were only three students on the course in that first year, but it expanded rapidly as the knowledge base, and the demand for it, grew. Many who took the Diploma have gone on to become key figures in academic research and in the computer industry, and we should be proud of their achievements. The party was a celebration of 55 years during which we had made a substantial contribution.

After Sir Maurice had spoken, Ken Moody, who had acted as Coordinator from the late 1990s until 2007, explained more recent history. The course had long continued to grow and flourish, aided by a number of EPSRC Advanced Course Studentships, which paid the fees and subsistence of UK (and later EU) students on the course. In the late 1990s there was a wind of change throughout student funding. The EPSRC altered its attitude, deciding to support Master's Training packages instead of courses such as the Diploma, which offered an introduction to the fundamentals of computer hardware and software — definitely education rather than training. In the year beginning October 2000 there were about 45 Diploma students, of whom 27 were supported by the EPSRC. That was the last year of Studentships, and in the following year the class size dropped to about 15. We struggled on for a few years more, but inevitably demand dwindled, because few could afford to pay the fees themselves. Only three students had enrolled for the course starting in 2007, and we decided to call it a day.

At Sir Maurice's retirement party in 1980, a couple of engineers from the old Mathematical Laboratory brought in its original green door, which had been rescued when the building was demolished, and Sir Maurice was "shown the door". Subsequently a tradition arose by which those who had worked in the old building were shown the door on their retirement, and their names were added to a brass plaque on the on the door itself. Andy Hopper took the floor again, and asked those present whether it was appropriate for the Diploma course — one of the longest-serving of all the members of the Laboratory — to have a plaque of its own. The idea was received with acclamation.

That was the end of formal proceedings, but the party and the nostalgia continued for quite a while. In the evening about 25 former students and their partners attended a dinner at Downing College, which was kindly arranged by Richard Stibbs (1967).

Demand still strong for the Lab's graduates

In contrast with expectations of a gloomy time ahead in the jobs market, demand for the Lab's graduates remains buoyant.

Indeed the only companies who are disappointed by the current strong demand for the Lab's computer scientists are those who failed to book a place at the Supporters' Club recruitment fair on November 13th 2008. It is fully subscribed and a waiting list is in operation.

www.cl.cam.ac.uk/supporters-club

Computer Laboratory's inaugural Show and Tell event

The inaugural two-day Show and Tell event, starting on September 29th, will offer technical people from industry the opportunity to experience the contributions being made by the Lab's research students.

Event attendees will have direct access to the best technical students in the country and will gain a unique insight into what they do. The Laboratory hopes that the event will foster strong links between students and industry, helping to ground their research. It also provides a unique opportunity for companies to recruit the best researchers.

The event is aimed at anyone with both a technical background and an interest in establishing relationships with research students, perhaps with a view to collaborating, sponsoring, providing feedback or recruiting.

More information and registration at www.cl.cam.ac.uk/show-and-tell

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