systems Xpert

Consulting | Enterprise Architecture | Custom Software

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Ben Slack – Principal Consultant

Quick Tags

Enterprise Architect – Business Analyst – Work design – BPR – KPI design – ERP – SCM – TOGAF – UML

Profile

I enjoy solving puzzles. Problems, mysteries, conundrums – can't get enough of them. I'm particularly interested in developing evolving, self-improving systems to solve business problems. Good system design must focus on people; owners, managers, staff, customers, suppliers, the situations where they interact and the IT they use. In 18 years of business experience I've learned listening to people is the key skill required. When you concentrate on the outcomes they require then the best process and best value for money follows. With a smart team, engaged stakeholders and a tailored project methodology that draws from proven approaches like TOGAF, OpenUP and Agile, I can create any optimised business system in quick time.

Blog: http://ben.eficium.net/

Key Career Achievements

- Designed, project managed and partly developed a multi-lingual software transformation on an SCM software-as-a-service (SaaS) product. The success enabled V-Net Solutions to successfully enter the Japanese market, immediately winning a six-figure contract with Electronic Arts and potential for sales to Sony Entertainment and Nintendo.

- In the same project my skills and experience enabled me to query supplier proposals in detail and negotiate favourable contracts, saving at least $600K on development work by IBM's iSeries team in Armonk, NY. The whole project was completed for just under $400K, significantly lower than the initial budget.

- Software architecture knowledge of symmetric multi-processing (SMP), multi-threading and asynchronicity transformed Datgel's geotechnical analysis software (.NET WinForms / SQL Server / MS Access) to run computations 5x faster, saving important customer relationships and significantly improving marketability.

- For the same client I implemented and developed customisations for an e-commerce system based on the NopCommerce project (C# / Entity Framework / LINQ / SQL Azure) improving marketing and distribution costs and providing the ability to better distribute software to customers worldwide.

- Lead business analyst in startup subsidiary of Bovis Lend Lease. I worked with management, logistics and operational staff to engineer cost-effective business processes and SOPs that optimised interaction with the automated systems under development on the Salesforce cloud computing platform.

- Lead analyst/programmer and then managed the last half of an $800K project to begin replacing the ABC's aging Web publishing system. I led the analysis of system requirements, personally authored a Request for Tender document and led the evaluation of the responses, the resulting contract negotiations and a proof-of-concept development. This project was completed within its very tight budget.

- Developed several of the ABC's Web applications in C# / SQL Server, including online forums, user registration and management and a complex polling/voting system used as the basis for the annual "triple J Hottest 100". The voting system used an inversion-of-control (IoC) architecture which allowed it to support future development of any kind of "election" application with any number of business rules.

Education

<u>2002 to 2005 - AGSM (UNSW & University of Sydney)</u>
Master of Business Administration – MBA (Exec)

<u>1993 to 1999 – Macquarie University</u>
Bachelor of Arts   BA (Hons Class 1), Critical and Cultural Theory, Faculty of Arts
Bachelor of Laws   LL B, Macquarie Law School

Analysis Skills Summary

Business process engineering	Market study and analysis	Cost and NPV estimation
Requirements analysis	KPI design and improvement	Risk analysis and management
Managing change	TOGAF Architectures	IP management

Systems Experience Summary

Knowledge management	ERP, SCM and CRM	Scientific analysis systems
Web content management	Inventory management	Sales and promotions analysis
Web community and collaboration	E-commerce	Financial analysis & reporting

Industry Experience Summary

Broadcasting	Mining and construction	Government
Investment fund management	Marketing consulting	Software-as-a-service (SaaS)
B2C and B2B dotcom startups	Retail business services	SMEs

Consulting and Employment History

2006 to Present

Principal Consultant, Systems Xpert Pty. Ltd., Sydney

Client – Datgel Pty Ltd, Sydney

Datgel are a small software firm providing resold and in-house developed geotechnical data analysis software to many of the biggest names in mining and construction worldwide including Rio Tinto, Bechtel, Golder Associates, the NSW RMS (formerly RTA) and other roads authorities in Australia and overseas.

Since 2008, I've worked closely with Datgel in all aspects of their business. Initially responsible for advising on MS.NET software architecture, I've also contributed in various roles including hiring development staff, software project management, introducing OpenUP methods, Web site design and development, source code reviews, negotiating GITC contracts for government panel requirements and writing and reviewing technical documentation and proposals. My knowledge of multi-threading and symmetric multi-processing provided significant improvements in the performance of Datgel's flagship CPT Tool product for cone penetration testing data analysis.

Additionally, my legal knowledge and commercial experience in managing intellectual property and negotiating and managing GITC and commercial contracts have contributed to Datgel's ongoing success.

Client – V-Net Solutions Pty Ltd, Sydney

Systems Xpert's largest project to date was project managing and partially developing a complete multi-lingual conversion and upgrade of V-Net's "Vision" software. This application is a supply chain management SaaS product facilitating the "vendor-managed inventory" (VMI) business model. The application is a J2EE Web app with a DB2 back-end. V-Net's clients include Woolworths, Big W, Coles, Target, K-mart and all of their DVD, Blu-ray and computer game suppliers (including Sony Entertainment, 20th Century Fox, Paramount and Electronic Arts). The project was required for entry to the Japanese market.

Third-party suppliers managed included IBM's iSeries development team at IBM HQ in New York state. The initial IBM quote for work was $1.2M. I led negotiations and critical analysis leading IBM to reduce the quote to $750K. At this point I was still dissatisfied with IBM's approach and experience in the project requirements. Using my professional network I was able to find a contractor who worked with Systems Xpert to successfully complete that portion of the project for $100K.

To deliver the project Systems Xpert directly employed offshore and Australian-based programming contractors necessary to deliver the project's requirements.

Between 2007 and 2011 Systems Xpert also provided assistance with V-Net's technical recruitment and all manner of advice on IT issues including infrastructure selection and procurement, migrating from legacy systems, software architecture and development team management. I developed and delivered 2 bespoke training courses in object-oriented programming and the SQL language.

Client – Bovis LendLease Ltd, Sydney

In 2010-11 Bovis LendLease created a new business selling residential solar panel installations to complement their existing industrial solar plant business. The business was planned for all mainland capitals and Newcastle, Wollongong and Geelong.

I facilitated analysis on business process design for the customer-facing operations. The key processes were orders, quotes, invoicing and payment; scheduling and optimisation of travel time; tasks, scenarios and decision trees for visits by salespeople, third-party scaffolders, third-party electricians and the Bovis Lend Lease installation team; and reporting visit outcomes to management.

From the analysis I helped the operations manager supervise development of standard operating procedures and the introduction of these processes when business commenced.

The backbone of the business was a complete MIS using standard and bespoke functionality on the Salesforce cloud computing platform. I supervised development of the test cases and scripts for the interface between business processes and the MIS.

Unfortunately, when the NSW government repealed the Solar Rebate scheme, the project was no longer viable and work was abandoned after only a few weeks operation.

Smaller Projects

I have worked on a variety of smaller projects for businesses big and small. These include a market study and recommendation report for the ABC on bulk text message receipt and management; a technical feasibility study on developing actuarial software for a consulting mathematician; a small business Web CMS for micro-businesses, used by 4 different clients; business strategy development and business process design for a small mining company and an online e-book and interactive content Web application for the UNSW Press.

Systems Xpert has also created and managed IT infrastructure for a few select clients including JCIS Consultants, a heritage conservation consultancy and Silos Estate, a small winery and B&B in Berry, NSW.

Entrepreneurial Ventures

When not engaged in work for clients, I've attempted a number of software-based entrepreneurial ventures in ERP/CRM, online/offline data management and multi-party online data exchange. At the height of activity in 2009-10, Systems Xpert employed a full-time business analyst and part-time systems administrator on the software-as-a-service ERP product "Account Xpert".

Confidential Projects

A personal medical and legal MIS and two B2C dotcom startup projects cannot be discussed for confidential information reasons. Software developed included a C# / SQL Server desktop application, a C# / SQL Server Web application and a Java 3D applet.

2002 to 2006

Australian Broadcasting Corp. (The ABC), Sydney

Project Manager, Web CMS

Reporting to the Heads of IT and New Media Systems, I was lead analyst and later project manager of the initial phase of a multi-million dollar project to replace the ABC's Web publishing and content management system. This included supervising a team of 4 (to 5) with preparation and evaluation of a large government tender process, reviewing and evaluating all business and requirements analysis and working with tender winners and in-house system analysts to design a proof-of-concept implementation. I personally authored the RFT document and the evaluation regime.

Senior Analyst/Programmer

As a senior member of the internet development team, I developed several of the ABC's Web applications in C# / SQL Server, including online forums, user registration and management and a complex polling/voting system used as the basis for the annual "triple J Hottest 100". The voting system used an inversion-of-control architecture which allowed it to support future development of any kind of "election" application with any number of business rules.

A large part of the role was in gathering system requirements from the very disparate mix of journalists, graphic designers, Web site producers and managers who each looked after a small part of what is by far the largest Web site in Australia. Maintaining the ability to liaise with all these people, balance their competing needs and resource requirements and facilitate a consensus on requirements is probably the biggest relationship challenge of my career to date. I believe I did a pretty good job of it.

2000 and 2001

Contract Senior Analyst/Programmer, London and Edinburgh, UK

During a 2-year stint in the UK, I took 3 contracts.

Xansa PLC, Edinburgh

In Edinburgh, I worked for the UK's largest listed IT services company, Xansa (formerly FI Group PLC), in teams developing a financial information management system for Deutsche Bank subsidiary and a start-up executive remuneration (stock options) cloud-based SaaS system using Microsoft ASP and Oracle RDBMS.

William M Mercer (a Marsh McLennan subsidiary), London

For HR consultancy and pension fund manager William M Mercer Ltd. I developed a system producing annual performance reports to customers using VB6, Microsoft Transaction Server and SQL Server. The application used state-of-the art stateless and asynchronous processing to optimise availability and reliability. Additionally, I performed support and maintenance on existing document management and equity and bond pricing analysis systems.

uniservity.co.uk, Guildford, Surrey

My first UK contract was developing Web applications in ASP and SQL Server for a dotcom startup backed by venture capital firm 3i Group. Called "uniservity.co.uk" it was a Web community and portal aimed at university students. The site provided almost identical features to those Facebook would offer five years later. I was responsible for the initial development of the user and session management system, student and society profile publishing and online discussion forums.

1994 to 1999

AC Nielsen Ltd. (and subsidiaries), Sydney

While studying Arts/Law I worked 2-5 days a week with global market research firm AC Nielsen.

Digital Imaging and Analyst/Programmer (Casual), Retail Consulting Division, North Ryde, 1998-99

I belonged to a team developing, maintaining and marketing Visual Basic applications for retail space and category management. Retailers and manufacturers I worked with include Coles Myer (Grace Brothers, Myer, K-mart, Target), Soul Pattinson, Mattel, CUB, Coca-Cola Amatil, Reckit Benckiser and Johnson and Johnson. On occasion the role required consulting work at client premises in Sydney and Melbourne.

Prior to 1998 I worked for Nielsen as a Market Research Telephone Supervisor and Interviewer.

Software Project Skills

As well as business analysis and consulting and as detailed in the job history section, I have considerable experience as an Analyst/Programmer.

I am expert in:

- Microsoft VB.NET / C# / ASP.NET / ADO.NET / LINQ / Entity Framework / COM+ / MTS / MSMQ
- Microsoft Azure cloud-computing platform – Web sites / SQL Azure / BLOB storage APIs
- RDBMS – relational / ORM design, SQL – DDL, DML and procedural (SQL Server, IBM DB2, PostgreSQL)
- Web markup and client-side scripting - HTML 5.0 / CSS / JavaScript, AJAX and jQuery
- XML / XSLT / XQuery / XML implementations like NewsML, Mozilla XUL and RDF

I have significant expertise in:

- Java / JSP - Tomcat and App Server / EJBs / Applets / Hibernate
- Apache open source tools - XALAN / Xerces / Cocoon / OfBiz
- SQL Server ETL / SSIS / Replication / SSRS / Cubing & Matrix reports / legacy Crystal Reports
- Bespoke data transform – XML, flat files, SQL Server and DB2 export formats, scripting
- Distributed processing - Web Services / SOA / .NET Remoting / Java RMI / message queuing
- Scripting – Python / PHP / PERL / UNIX shell / awk / sed / VBA / VBScript / JScript

I'm familiar with these tools and methodologies:

- TOGAF / RUP / OpenUP / Agile methodologies - iterative, prototyping and test driven development
- Visual Studio / eclipse / TFS / Subversion / git / VSS

And I have good recent experience in Salesforce and Android SDK app development.