



RT: I'm so excited to interview Melissa, because she's a strong woman in IT, and has been in the industry since she was 19. She's worked up from an apprentice to a managed service provider (MSP) and has now joined IT Glue, one of the biggest-growing companies in the MSP sector.

First of all, who are IT Glue and what do they do?

MS: IT Glue are a documentation platform, SaaS (Software as a Service) based, storing best practises, standard operating procedures and other documents in one place. They also integrate with other vendors such as AutoTask, Kaseya and Continuum so you can manage them through our platform.

RT: Let's talk about your career, specifically as a woman in IT. It's fair to say it's a male-dominated industry, so let's rewind to when you were 19. What drew you to want to work in the industry in the first place?

MS: I really enjoyed playing around with different technology, and pulling my laptop apart and see if I could fix it myself. I always found the industry interesting, which was what drew me to it. I wanted to be a woman who could do IT as well.

RT: Where did you start out? What was your first role?

MS: My first role was as a service desk apprentice, which was for about 14 months, although I finished it a bit earlier because I was so keen to progress onto the service desk role.

RT: Where did you do the apprenticeship? Was it at a managed service provider?

MS: Yes, at ProDrive, who are based in Guildford.

RT: And what was it like as a young lady, coming into a male-dominated industry?

MS: It was a little bit scary, especially at just 19 years old. It was different from what I was used to, because in the past I'd worked in retail, which was quite mixed. Working with just males is fine!

RT: What would you say that was the biggest challenge? Was there anything that kept you up at night going in to work in a male-dominated industry?

MS: I always wanted to feel that I could do the job just as well, so if there was anything I wasn't sure on, I'd try to research the problem first without asking, so that's how I spent most of my evenings. I'd go home and research the problem I was working on and be able to tackle it the next day, if I didn't get the chance to research it during the day.

I always wanted to see if I had an answer, and if not actually fix the problem then have some way to go with it. I felt that I always wanted an answer of some sort.

RT: I'm intrigued. We talk about the IT industry being male-dominated, which it is, and that needs to change, but I'm curious, because the customers that MSPs such as ProDrive deal with aren't male-dominated!

They tend to be small businesses which have men and women in equal parts, so what was the reaction from the customers to a young lady working on a service desk and helping them with their issues? Was there any reaction or was it accepted?

MS: Even now, there's still a bit of reaction, because my current team is all male. People can be quite surprised when they hear a lady on the phone, and sometimes feel they can have more of a conversation, especially when the caller is female too.

They quite enjoy it, because they can relate to being a woman in an organisation. If they feel they've got a silly issue, they feel more comfortable speaking to me about it rather than a male colleague.

RT: So fast-forward to the modern day. What would the Melissa of today say to 19-year-old Melissa who was starting out in the IT industry?

MS: Be more confident, because I wasn't very confident when I first started out. I would say be confident that you can do the role just as well as a male.

RT: Let's go back to your managed service provider days. You started off as an apprentice and went through that at high speed. What was the next role there?

MS: I went on to be a service desk engineer, which was basically the same role as an apprentice, but being able to tackle the more advanced tickets and going onsite to see customers. We'd have a particular customer where we always had to be onsite, so I was able to join that rotation, and I was able to be more hands-on.

RT: What did you do on a day to day basis? What did a typical day look like?

MS: Day to day, we'd start with doing the backups, which could take anything from an hour to four hours, especially when people used tape backups. Then it was working through tickets from the previous day and making sure the customers had been updated.

Next, taking on new tickets, as well as trying to progress. I spent some of my time researching stuff, working with my colleagues, and always trying to advance my knowledge.

RT: What was your favourite bit about that time in your career?

MS: I loved being able to resolve tickets on my own, using all my knowledge and research to start tackling bigger, high-priority tickets – that was a good feeling.

RT: You spent a year being a service desk engineer. You actually left the MSP you were working for – what did you do during that time?

MS: After I left ProDrive I went to work for a large construction company, where it was a pure service desk role, because I wanted to get more exposure in a bigger organisation. I was there for about 10 months and then realised I wanted to go backwards again, because I wasn't able to work on the bigger tickets – we had to work on them a bit and then pass them on.

I wanted more hands-on work dealing with technical issues, so I moved to a communication company, where I got more hands-on opportunities but not quite enough. I bumped into a colleague I'd worked with at ProDrive and decided to go back.

I felt that after leaving I wasn't able to find a role which satisfied and challenged me enough, so I worked as a service desk engineer again for around 11 months, and then I was promoted to service desk manager.

RT: The service desk manager role – how old were you at that point? How did you feel about taking on a team of predominantly men and managing that service desk?

MS: I was 23. It was really good, and I liked the step up and the challenge. I had to learn a lot about managing, so it wasn't just the tickets, it was also managing a team. I enjoyed the promotion and the chance to learn new skills that would stay with me in my career.

RT: What was the biggest challenge for you at that point, taking over the service desk as a manager?

MS: The biggest challenge was myself, as in - learning to be a manager. I'd never done it before, and it was a lot of learning how to manage different people – that was challenging. I did a management training course, which was really helpful, and I was able to use a lot of that material for my team.

RT: What would you say was the number one thing you learned during that time? What sticks with you today about managing people?

MS: Everyone is different, so they have different ways to be managed, not everyone is the same and they won't all like your management style.

RT: You were a service desk engineer and you were friends with the people on the team and then you step up to be the service desk manager. What was that like, because there has to be a bit of distance, and you have to ask people to do things they don't want to do?

MS: I'd always had good relationships with my team and they respected me, and we were quite friendly. Because of that, they were able to do things when I asked them, so if there were tasks to do they would get on with them.

RT: How long were you a service desk manager? I should say that at this time I was mentoring Melissa through this.

MS: It was just over three years.

RT: So, fast-forward three years and the opportunity came to join IT Glue, and you were already familiar with them, because you used it at ProDrive?

MS: Yes – we implemented it in 2015, so I'd been heavily involved with the implementation of it, and I took it on, making sure we were progressing, keeping documentation up to date and so on.

RT: Why did you find you had an affinity with the IT Glue platform? Why did it stick out? We can use pen and paper to document something, so why was it special?

MS: It was so easy to document something, does all the formatting, and has many other advantages. It does the auditing, and if someone changes a password we could go back and see what the previous one was. It was a really easy system to use and we could put all of our information into one platform and monitor all our devices.

RT: So, the opportunity came to join IT Glue – what did you find so attractive about them as a company? Talk me through what happened when you joined them?

MS: It's such a successful company, and I actually had three interviews, which was quite intense. Each person I met was so friendly and made me feel part of the team, even though I didn't have the job yet.

Everyone is a self-starter and wants to see the product grow, so it's really nice to be part of a company where everyone believes in the product and wants it to go as far as it can.

RT: You need the product intimately at this point from using it as a managed service provider. You're working with IT Glue partners on a day to day basis – what would you say is their biggest hurdle to getting the product implemented?

MS: We hear a lot that they don't have the time, but there are always ways around it. I used to hold 'gluing' sessions, where I'd get the team together on a Friday afternoon to spend four or five hours to get all the documentation done. I suggest this to new and existing partners as a way to get more involved.

With IT Glue we also have the engagement feature, so you can see who's been doing the most documentation and work that into team KPIs (key performance indicators) and incentives. For instance, you can offer a prize to the person who does the most.

RT: I suppose that comes from your days in the MSP, when you were encouraging people to use IT Glue?

MS: Yes. When I speak to partners, I also try to give them a bit of feedback on my experiences of implementing it, just so they know that I've been in their position. I try to give them ideas and ways to get their documentation done, the best standards and so on.

RT: How many people are in IT Glue in the UK now?

MS: We have a team of seven.

RT: And that's growing quite rapidly, because they landed in the UK in March of 2017. This interview is being recorded in Dublin at the TotallyMSP Roadshow, so what brings you here today? What is your role for IT Glue?

MS: We're here to meet any potential new customers who are interested in IT Glue, to show them the platform and answer any questions, as well as meet any existing partners – it's good to do this face to face. I pick up a lot of the support stuff so it's good to meet them and answer their questions too.

RT: I want to go back to women in IT again. I don't want to gush too much, but I'm so proud of what you've achieved! You've joined the industry as an apprentice and worked your way up, and you're a rockstar in the field now. I'm hearing great stories from IT partners about the work you're doing for them as well.

There needs to be more Melissas in the IT industry. From your perspective, as a woman in IT, how do you think we could attract more, younger women into the industry and not scare them away? What do we need to do as employers to get more women into IT?

MS: More social interaction – use social media to show that there are women in IT and promoting it more. I think some women are a bit scared of going into IT because they assume it's all males and that they wouldn't fit.

RT: If we were to go back to 19-year-old Melissa, what might have held you back from getting into the IT industry? What would you say to her about her fears?

MS: Just go for it, because if you don't try you don't know. I'm pleased I went for it, although at the time I was a bit worried. I wasn't sure if I'd fit in or if I'd be able to do the job, but I was so eager and wanted to be successful that I put the effort in. I did a lot of my coursework outside of work, and I wanted to progress. If you're determined, you can do it.

RT: What's in the future for IT Glue in the next 18 months? What can partners expect from the company in the UK, and from you personally?

MS: Now we have the UK office we can respond to our partners quicker, whether that's on the sales side, or the support side where I work. I get a lot of tickets coming in, and I'm able to get to them quicker, rather than our partners waiting until Canada comes online.

We can also give quicker responses to people wanting to sign up to IT Glue, because we have the sales team. We're able to accommodate the timing better, and work around Europe so people don't have to wait until evenings to get demos. We're very conscious that we have a lot of EU customers and want to make sure we meet their needs.

RT: And you've just opened the EU data centre as well?

MS: We have. Our new partners go straight into the new EU data centre, and we're working on migrating over our EU customers from the American data centres.