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Microsoft

Microsoft UK's new and improved startup event: Here's what you missed

Thursday 1st June 2017

Start, build and grow with Microsoft

In 1975, a scruffy geek founded a small software business after dropping out of university. 42 years later, Microsoft is one of the best-known technology startups in the world. But it hasn't forgotten its roots.



1st June 2017 marked Microsoft UK's revamped startup event, bringing together innovators and business builders from across the country. From recent graduates launching their first business to experienced entrepreneurs, the event quickly filled up with smart people looking for new ways to use Microsoft Azure.

Building on BizSpark

'We really want to support you,' said Gemma Shaylor, Microsoft's Startup Audience Manager. 'We want to take this a lot further than Azure usage credits and the technology we offer through Azure.'

Members of BizSpark have access to a range of industry contacts and mentors who can aid in startup success. From technical experts to industry advisors, the BizSpark community ensures no startup is alone, offering support at every step of the way.

The 30 faces in the room were silent, appreciative of Microsoft's smart conference room and occasionally glancing out of the windows and onto Kingdom Street below.

Among the crowd were two entrepreneurs who had launched Pathfinder, a platform aimed at providing customised career guidance to graduates. Already members of BizSpark, they wanted to better understand how to make the most of the Azure portal.

Designed to aid small business development, BizSpark offers a variety of free services and tools that gives startups a chance to win customers and scale their business. Azure is one such tool.

Introducing Microsoft Azure

'It costs about half a billion pounds to build a data centre,' said David Gristwood, Technical Evangelist at Microsoft. 'With more than 100 data centres across the globe, that makes us the third biggest infrastructure service provider on the planet.'

David's talk focused on infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) and how Microsoft are investing in data centres across the globe to give businesses the freedom of Azure services anywhere. Countries including China and Germany, however, have stricter data protection policies, and with GDPR and Brexit on the horizon data regulation is set to change.

But Microsoft is ready. Their cloud services, including Azure, can help you become GDPR compliant, and since the Brexit referendum Microsoft has invested in two new data centres in the UK.



[A map showing Microsoft's 34 data centre regions across the globe]

But Azure extends further than infrastructure. It helps startups keep their costs down by only spinning up servers and containers when they are needed and then shutting

them down when they're not. Similarly, Azure makes it easy to build systems that scale automatically to match demand, so your applications won't ever fall behind.

Exploring Azure cloud infrastructure and services

'Effectively, our data centres are designed not necessarily to never fail. At some point, there will be hardware that will die regardless,' said William Eastbury, another Technical Evangelist with Microsoft. They are optimised for resilience rather than impossible perfection.

Data is backed up with triple replication and then geo-replication, spreading it across multiple data centres. Service Fabric also means that systems are constantly monitored and if there is a request failure, services restart automatically. To take things further, Azure spreads workloads across multiple racks, too, so that if one rack fails, only a single workflow is affected.

William gave a detailed demonstration of the Azure portal, explaining the use of Azure Resource Manager (ARM). ARM allows you to design and deploy resource groups using templates rather than scripts. This means you can deploy the same resource group repeatedly and easily monitor individual segments, which are containerised and always ready for use.

Rise of the chat bot

If you haven't got AI, machine learning and bots on your roadmap, you should. And Azure can help, according to Technical Evangelist Andrew Fryer.

Andrew explored machine learning, explaining how cognition services and Azure APIs can recognise emotions, vision, text and speech. This results in features like image stabilisation and object recognition, set up using a simple drag and drop process in the Azure portal.

Other cool technology on show included bots, which in Azure are virtually providing 'conversation as a service', and Power BI which uses AI to visualise and contextualise information. Cortana Intelligence Suite and Azure offers a range of machine learning and AI components that can accelerate new application development.

More than just Azure

'The most interesting thing I learned today was understanding the different routes that Microsoft offers startups,' said Kim Aviv, Pathfinder's CEO. 'Also, how to use the portal and the Azure services.'

Today, Microsoft may have revenues of $85 billion and it may wear a suit and tie when it goes to work. But when it looks in the mirror it still sees a young entrepreneur.

At heart, this is why Microsoft has an affinity for startups and works so hard to help them achieve their potential. Perhaps one of the people in that meeting room on Kingdom Street could be the next Bill Gates.

Achieve lift off with Bizspark

The Microsoft Bizspark programme offers free Microsoft Azure Cloud credits to those eligible. But this is just the beginning. This year-long programme will aid in your development of new solutions, while helping you scale-up and engage with new customers.

We offer much more than just technology. We select high potential startups and connect them into the Microsoft ecosystem for the ultimate business opportunity. With the Bizspark programme, you'll have access to:

- £750 a month of free Azure cloud services for one year.
- Exclusive access to current, full-feature software development for three-years.
- Free advice including training classes and professional technical product support.
- A wide range of development software and tools.

To be eligible for the programme, your start up must:

- Be a privately-owned entity.
- Be earning less than one million pounds annually.
- Be between the age of one and five years.

Find out if you're eligible by visiting the Microsoft BizSpark website or by emailing us at [redacted]