

One of the questions I get asked a lot is what do we do at Betfair? My answer is simple – we do cool stuff! Whenever you look for a company to work for, the biggest thing you usually look for is the challenge – do they have hard problems to solve? Am I going to be bored working for this company in a few months? When I was first approached by an agent to work for Betfair I must admit there were a lot of questions that went through my head – how hard could the problems a company doing online gambling actually be?

I was surprised to find a company roaring into Web Scale, with all the problems that go with hundreds of thousands of users, hot demand for product, nasty distribution problems – frankly everything you could ever ask for! Since the big challenges of Google and Amazon have been reduced (well, almost) to add more boxes, Betfair is the last frontier!

For a lot of the developers working for Betfair is a dream job – working with big systems, or their favourite application (Poker is hot at the moment) or creating new user interfaces for new products (there's lots of them) – the business side of things is certainly different and demanding. For others, its all about the problems we've got to solve – and that's certainly where I get the most excitement – and learning from the things that haven't worked in the past. We've also got great people to learn from with experience from both Betfair and the IT industry.

Some of the challenges that I've been looking at over the past 6 months are incredibly varied – how do you identify a user action when its been stripped of everything to identify it for privacy? Can you deliver a sub second speed to a user who is working in both Australia and Europe at the same time? And is that player on an online poker table a robot or not? How do you manage risk in a football match once its started? The algorithms to solve our problems are often complicated by additional legal and business requirements making the challenge even greater – or by historical factors – which just makes it more interesting.

The problem that originally attracted me to Betfair – and is still one of our core problems – was how to scale the core bet placement engine and adapt it to new types of activity. We had to go back to first principles computer science, something I never had to do in industry before. It was a great learning experience – and certainly sticks out as one of the best parts of working here.

Something that makes Betfair different is our commitment to research and development – we've got a dedicated team of 11 R&D engineers (the Betfair Advanced Technology Group) and we've just recommitted to a Google like 20% time programme for all development teams. We are members of the World Wide Web Consortium and the about to be formed Event Processing Technical Society (EPTS) and have active links to universities.

I think we've got a great work culture as well – its' easy to find someone to go for lunch or a drink with, we've got a games and TV room and have a great view out to a park and the River Thames. During summer its great to take meetings outside and chat in the sun (or just go outside and think about a problem). There's plenty of people to discuss problems with or just hang around with after work.

The best thing about Betfair is that we're changing – constantly – as we learn better ways to solve our business problems. Something you should never be at Betfair is bored – there are so many things to improve from core event processing and distribution problems to the user interface. The need to change is balanced against our need to keep delivering to our customers and making the transition easy, something that is sometimes as difficult as the original technical challenges. If you are up for a challenge, a really big one, talk to Betfair!



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