

The Agile Developer

Developing software at Comsof, the company behind FiberPlanIT, requires much more than coding skills. Initiative, flexibility and insight are compulsory requirements.

There is nothing as frustrating as a slow internet connection, be it for a gamer or for the average internet user. Fiber To The Home (FTTH) networks provide for far faster connection speeds and carrying capacity and are now rolled out all over the world. Designing them however is difficult. Compare it to planning your route on your GPS: how to get from A to B in the most efficient and 'economical' way possible and with a minimum of effort? How do you know you're taking the right route? You'll get there eventually but how much time will you have lost? The answer lies with Comsof, the Belgian software company that developed the FiberPlanIT solution to making FTTH network planning easier and smarter. Since 2006 FiberPlanIT has assisted in the planning of more than 65 million homes – worldwide.



Comsof consist of a small team of highly passionate engineers and they are assisting telecom operators, consulting engineering firms, communal and national administrations, ... with their challenges by moving the fiber closer to the user, more efficiently and at a competitive cost. In the end, FiberPlanIT makes internet faster for the user.

Jonas Van Nieuwenberg (26) is one of the team-members and as a civil engineer in computer sciences, he works as a Lead Developer at Comsof.

How did you come to work at Comsof?

After finishing my studies I started work at a consulting firm that had Comsof as one of its clients. They gave me an assignment here during which I started to appreciate the activities, the work environment, the flat structure, the openness and the colleagues. I already knew that this was a cool place to work and when the opportunity came I switched to Comsof where I was hired as a developer. But I had no experience in Telecom, which is quite essential for a company designing FTTx networks. However that wasn't seen as an obstacle by our management. At the beginning I was trained as a consultant and worked for a year in that capacity in order to gain the required experience. I quickly learned the ins and outs of the Telecom world and started to get a clear view on the different and diverse requirements clients can have and how these could be translated into code.

How do you perceive and experience your work as a developer?

When I was a consultant I became well aware that a lot of stakeholders, here and abroad, really want fiber. The challenge for a developer is to translate the real-life issues, inherent to the design of fiber networks, into solutions central to their needs. And that is, in a first instance, not always a mathematical problem. You need an engineering point of view on how to solve a problem. Take for example a Telecom company that is prohibited by law to deploy its cabling underground but has to install it on the house fronts (or vice versa). You cannot solve that with a simple formula. You have to assess the situation and adapt accordingly. FiberPlanIT developers are not solely code writers. They are problem-solvers.



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Lead Developer at Comsof



Our software tool is state of the art and we are constantly developing it by integrating feedback from the client's real life situations. Our biggest challenge is to keep guaranteeing the flexibility of our products. This has an impact on the user interface, the optimization algorithms and the data-model. Everything is interlinked. There are many types of architectures within fiber designs and each and every project is different. But nonetheless, all the information has to be collected and brought together to develop one product. It is compulsory for the development team at Comsof to think flexible and create future-proof software.

Do you also develop new software or do you only work on the standard suite?

The standard suite is in constant development as we have to keep abreast of the worldwide developments and the needs of our clients. And in that sense we are already working on software that is successfully used from New Zealand, India, over Canada and the US to everywhere in Europe. Pretty global and efficient I would say.

That said the software is so flexible that it can be used - as it stands - just as well for smaller as for larger projects, which require a more detailed and involved architecture. We do, of course, help to adapt the architecture to the clients' needs. And herein lies the everyday challenge of the development work. How to adapt a solid, yet expandable and flexible system, to these sometimes completely different needs. We never start from zero but are specialists in adapting our basic software, which says a lot about the strength of our core software.

How do you see your future here at Comsof?

Well, in a mere 3 years I grew from consultant to developer and then to lead developer. Initiative and

feedback are vehemently encouraged at Comsof. For example when a consultant has a question it first comes to me, then, if necessary, the whole team, from developers to consultants, is quickly brought into the loop to find a solution. And if interesting enough, product management is involved to gauge how we can integrate it into our offering. I'm already having quite some responsibility in my present function. But we are still growing and learning and getting even better so the possibilities as a developer are numerous. Do we know what those will be? Not necessarily. I didn't know that I would grow so quickly in my job. There are still a lot of FTTx networks needed in the world, aren't there?

How would you summarize your job at Comsof?

Let's first look at the environment. At Comsof you never work on an island. The complexity of the work requires close co-operation and the flat structure and dialogue culture makes for a work environment where you feel 100% supported. You receive a lot of responsibility but you also know that there is help when needed. The client driven approach makes swift and quick reaction compulsory. Nothing gathers dust here and this makes for a buzzing feeling.

On the 'developing'-side you can really make a difference and bright ideas are appreciated. You need to be agile and not restrict your view only to coding. In a growing international market this opens possibilities for growth both personal as well as for the company. Comsof is a young and vigorous company where one can express oneself 100%!



FiberPlanIT
BY COMSOF

www.fiberplanit.com

Interested in a job at Comsof? Let's talk!

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