



TECH STAR



Ruslan Vildanov: At the Forefront of Connecting through Technology

[By Akbar Ali]

As director of engineering for Social.FM, the Internet's leading social music web service, Ruslan Vildanov plays a critical role in ensuring that web and mobile users have access to the company's long line of innovative products, including social networks, user-contributed content, internet broadcasting, and what is collectively known as "social music discovery." Connecting technology savvy consumers to their peers is something Vildanov knows a lot about. Aside from his work with Social.FM, Vildanov has spent many years working on other peer-to-peer web applications which have revolutionized not only the way individuals communicate but the notion of what is possible through the Internet and other media.

A native of Ufa, Bashkortostan, in the Russian Federation, Vildanov says that technology was always something he had an avid interest in because it allowed him to solve problems and "play" at the same time.

"Computers have always been my hobby from the moment I met with an unlicensed copy of a Z80 machine in 1990. Even though I had graduated with a non-IT major, I switched to this field later."

In college Vildanov studied math science and computer science, two subjects which would be vital to his later career. His initial professional leanings, however, were in a completely different direction.

"I studied at Ufa State Petroleum Technological University (in Russia) for five years. It was pretty hard for me at the beginning. I didn't expect to encounter the level of pressure we had in the university. But after the first six months I learned how to handle dozens of tasks simultaneously without exhausting myself. I believe the most important thing college teaches is how to learn. It gives you the ability to study, analyze, and understand new things quickly. Of course, studying wasn't the most exciting period of my life; I met many interesting people with whom I keep in touch on a regular basis."

Vildanov confesses that his time in school was oriented primarily around his studies

and his technology hobby. His focus allowed him not only to develop his skills but to assert his social independence.

"I was never interested in things others did just because 'everyone is doing it.' I was into chemistry and computers, but I was always involved enough in the social life of our campus without getting tagged as a 'geek' in school."

His entry into the IT industry came in a rather roundabout way: he transitioned from

one field of engineering into a completely different universe of technological engineering.

"I was definitely touched by the IT industry in college in terms of basic usage of computers for math modeling of chemical processes, but still, I was more oil engineer than software engineer. I got fully immersed in the [IT] industry, going beyond the hobby level, only after I started working as a software engineer in 2002. I was most shocked by how deeply the hobby differed from commercial experience."

After graduation, Vildanov went to work in one of Russia's most in-demand industries: petroleum refinement. In the oil-rich country, careers in the oil industry are readily available for qualified professionals like Vildanov.

"I went to Siberia to work at a huge petroleum refining factory with more than 5,000 employees. [And] yes," he adds, "it's very cold up there. I'm happy to be living in California right now!"

His time working as an oil engineer proved to be less than stimulating for Vildanov, who eventually made the critical decision to turn his "hobby" into a full-blown career.

"I had been working in the oil industry as an engineer as far back as my third course with the university; then, two weeks after

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Spend time with my wife and friends.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. Depeche Mode — *Music for the Masses*.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *MSDN Magazine*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. I don't watch TV.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Varies by day.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. Cosmo Kramer.



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graduation I moved to Siberia. After a while I realized I wasn't being challenged enough, and that industry is very traditional. So I made a hard decision to switch to software development, which has changed my life."

Since making the transition, Vildanov has never looked back, pioneering a number of technological breakthroughs with the various companies he's worked for, among them Morpheus, where he served as both team leader and software architect. His greatest achievement, however, has been pushing the envelope on innovation at Social.FM.

"Working on a mobile application called [Social.FM](#) was an incredible journey for me. I mean, we did some amazing things there that had never been done before. [Social.FM](#)

is the first and only social music service for Windows Mobile, Symbian, and Linux phones that allows consumers to enjoy their favorite music anytime, anywhere, directly from their mobile devices."

Vildanov attributes his success not only to his technological know-how but to the influence of various individuals who have served as mentors throughout his career.

"Everyone I worked with in my career helped me to grow professionally and personally in different ways. I can't really point to one particular person. I'm still learning and I truly believe that's an endless process."

When asked about any advice he has for the aspiring tech professional, Vildanov

says he believes that professional success can be achieved through a core of key concepts: constantly learning, adapting, and maintaining an attitude of professional humility and community.

"I would advise all young people who want to tie their lives with the IT industry to never stop their professional growth; learn from everyone around you; keep in mind that there is always more you can achieve; and share your knowledge with other people. I also believe you have to be truly passionate about what you're doing in order to be a great success!"

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