

TALKING HEADS:

TODD DENNING SOUTHERN

IT SUPPORT ENGINEER



Our IT Support Engineer, Todd Denning Southern, shares his perspectives on life at Harmonic as a Gen Z employee, including the challenges and opportunities of his role and the value of autonomy and hybrid working.

You left school and started your career during a pandemic. How have the unprecedented times impacted your career path?

Like most 18-year-olds, I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do when I left school. I studied cybersecurity and forensics at university for two months before deciding it wasn't for me. After working for the National Trust for a couple of months as a circuit-breaker, I launched my IT career at Bupa Dental Care. I worked on a service desk, taking calls and fixing problems internally. It was interesting and gave me experience of the little-known world of bespoke dental imaging scanners and software!

I joined Bupa in January 2020 and was in the office five days a week until lockdown hit. I then worked remotely for the remainder of my 18 months with them and grew to appreciate the benefits of working from home. When they told us with a month's notice that they wanted us back in the office five days a week, I handed in my notice and saw that as four weeks to find another job.

I was lucky enough to be contacted by a recruiter from Harmonic while I was on holiday – the perfect time to be offered your dream role! I started in July 2021, and I've been with Harmonic ever since.

What does your 'dream role' as an IT support engineer for Harmonic involve?

Everything and anything to do with IT. Breaking, fixing, resourcing, creating, destroying – the whole shebang.

When new colleagues start, I set up their accounts, laptop, licences, phone if they need one... I then take care of any day-to-day issues they have, fixing things when they break and attending to quick interim problems.



Harmonic is a very supportive company that allows me the autonomy and flexibility I want. People who are more senior than me treat me with respect, regardless of my role.



Since Harmonic's acquisition by KBR last year, I have also been involved in the rewarding challenge posed by the IT integration of a mid-size company with a Nasdaq listed one. This has exposed me to all sorts of crazy stuff: cloud infrastructure migration, managing accounts, new devices, security protocols... It's an excellent project due to its difficulty, with lots of challenges that I've never seen before.

You work in a hybrid way. What does this mean in practice and what are the benefits?

I've taken on office management responsibilities in Harmonic's new Bristol office for the past couple of months, so have been in the office five days a week. But going forwards I will do two to three days in the office, as and when I'm needed. The aim is for our Bristol office to be a resource for people to use when they want to – those who live nearby come in regularly, while those who live further afield might only come in once a month. The office is very well-equipped, with aircon, big screens, big desks, break-out rooms, a coffee machine...

Although as already mentioned I really appreciate the benefits of working at home, I live alone so it's also nice to have the chance to see other people. You don't realise how much you've missed it until you have a few days talking to other human beings face to face! Bristol is a nice place; I live in a rural area so it's good to get a change of pace and scenery by coming into the city.



Of course, as an IT guy I've got the biggest and best in my home set-up. In my job it's very useful to have lots of worktop space, to enable multiple laptop and phone set-ups, along with my main work desk and any repair jobs I have going on. This, combined with the fact that I spend most of my personal time on electronics projects and repairs, has meant that all living space in my flat that isn't my actual bed has been converted, to the point where I sold my sofa so I could fit in a desk running the length of the living room. One of my personal repair projects, an eight-slot toaster, sits four feet from where I sleep (much to the dismay of my girlfriend). The result is a techie's dream, with a dining table covered in battery cells, soldering irons, a benchtop power supply, and every cable and replacement part under the sun, plus a computer desk set-up straight out of The Matrix.

Harmonic is a rapidly growing organisation. How are you futureproofing IT provision?

The best way to futureproof with IT is to buy the latest and greatest you possibly can.

We don't skimp on tech at Harmonic; our machines are all up to date and very high quality. For example, our finance team members have recently been provided with new top-spec machines they can access remotely. For a relatively small investment, this will save productivity by minimising risk to day-to-day operations from power outages.

In terms of infrastructure, we're trying our utmost to make sure everything is cloud based, which takes a lot of the potential management problems arising from the ever-increasing pace of technology out of your hands and into the hands of the cloud provider.

You jokingly describe your role as 'laptop monkey' – but dealing with IT issues day in and day out takes a lot of skill. Why do you think you're well suited to the role?

I like to get stuff done! I take great satisfaction in a job well done or a problem solved. So having a role in which I fix problems helps me stay motivated and interested.

I'm very happy to bounce around and spin multiple plates, attending to smaller ad-hoc issues in the middle of larger projects. As long as at the end of the day everything that needs to get done is done, I'm relatively free to pick in what order I want to do things. I really appreciate having autonomy in my role.

What are you most excited about for your future as part of Harmonic?

I'm currently shooting to get an apprenticeship, which would be absolutely awesome. As I mentioned, I dropped out of uni so I don't have a degree. The possibility of the company financing and supporting this is a brilliant opportunity.

If you had to describe Harmonic in a few words, what would they be?

Speedy – everything happens very quickly, in all regards.

Intelligent – as a broad concept. I don't think I've met anyone at Harmonic who I don't view as a very intelligent person. It's always possible to have an in-depth and interesting conversation.

Friendly – you can hit it off and have a cool conversation with anyone.

To sum it up, it's a very supportive company that allows me the autonomy and flexibility I want. People who are more senior than me treat me with respect, regardless of my role. It's just brilliant for all the above reasons.

