

# Tasha Morrison Interview Transcript

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

COVID impact, Solutions Architect, hybrid working, behaviour analytics, Internet of Things, social media marketing, email marketing, Whitbread, career progression, technology landscape, remote work, employee flexibility, innovation manager, technical design, business requirements.

## SPEAKERS

Tasha, Tom

**Tom** 00:00

Hello. Welcome to the archives of it. I'm Tom Abram. It's the fourth of March 2022, and I'm talking today on zoom with Tasha Morrison. Tasha is a Solutions Architect with Whitbread who also runs her own social media and email marketing company. We met first with Tasha two years ago, just before the COVID pandemic struck, and she told us all about her career in IT and what had motivated her to get into the industry. Two years on, we're catching up to see what progress and what her plans are now as COVID been a an obstacle to your career, or an enabler? Would you say?

**Tasha** 00:49

I think it's accelerated. It to be honest, I was still on the grad scheme at Whitbread when COVID hit, and I just had a new boss start as well, the new head of architecture start. So before COVID, I was, I think my priorities were different. I was very much, where's where am I going to end up when I come off the grad scheme? What's what's going to happen? I was very kind of tunnel visioned into that. When COVID hit, it changed things, both professionally and personally for me. So I was living at home, and my mom had to shield. And my now fiance, he his pilot training got cut short, and a lot of you know, uncertainty around that, and he couldn't go to work if we were living with my mum. So we were like, right? We needed to to move out. So that was personally, it was a big, you know, acceleration there as well. And then professionally, I wasn't furloughed, which I'm really glad that I wasn't, because I don't think I could have, personally got through if I had been I needed to work. And so that really helped, because I was around some senior leaders, helping them to solve the real problems with reacting to the pandemic in a hospitality company, you know, one of the hardest hit. So from that perspective, I feel like it really enabled me to experience a lot more, a lot quicker. And I got to come off it as a solution architect then in the September 2020, so although I was on a solution architecture grad scheme, I was able to become fully fledged within within the pandemic. So it was nice that I was able to still achieve what I'd been wanting to go for and experience a lot more whilst there was a lot of other stuff obviously going on in the world.

**Tom** 02:51

So have you been working at home, mainly for the last two years, or were you going into the office, or

**Tasha** 02:59

What? Yes, I was, everyone was full time work from home, which was hard because I was in a one one bed flat. So I was in a on my dining room table, basically for for the about the first 18 months, I think so, yeah, it was, it was very different,

**Tom** 03:19

yeah, miss the people contact.

**Tasha** 03:22

Yeah, I am a very social butterfly, so I really didn't like the work from home. That being said, though, coming back into the office, as we have been since Christmas this year, we're doing a hybrid working so we need to be in the office two days, and that did take some adjustment. I think everyone felt very tired after the days in the office, because they're just not used to the commute.

**Tom** 03:49

Could you just say in a few words what a Solutions Architect is?

**Tasha** 03:53

Yes. So Solution Architect works on projects and with the business to help put forward technical design options and solutions. They have existing knowledge of the technology landscape and and therefore work with suppliers and business to understand what needs to change and how it will have further impacts to both the people and the technology. So work very closely with the project managers, the business and the business analysts in particular.

**Tom** 04:27

So do you do coding and stuff?

**Tasha** 04:30

No,

**Tasha** 04:31

I don't code. I have coded in like at university, but solution architects don't normally. But there is a often a career path from developer into solution architect,

**Tom** 04:41

Right? So it's a developer that does the coding. Then,

**Tasha** 04:44

Yes, yeah.

**Tom** 04:46

So as a solution architect, you're you're working as a relatively high level to kind of match bits of technology to business requirements,

**Tasha 04:57**

Yes, yeah. So they'll map out the... See the current state of the technology, and then work with the business to and the business analysts to understand the requirements and map out what the to be landscape will look like.

**Tom 05:13**

So you need to understand kind of what software is available and what systems are available, and how they map on to what your business is and how they can be used.

**Tasha 05:25**

Yes, yeah, yeah.

**Tom 05:28**

Okay,

**Tom 05:29**

so if I, if I can just go back to what you said to us two years ago. You sounded very optimistic about the impact of technology on us, and the role of the Internet of Things unlocking a new generation of technology that would do great things for us.

**Tasha 05:54**

I was thinking this morning of how I utilise the internet of things myself. So just through my phone, I can unlock my car, but I can also create a presentation whilst on the train, or, you know, all through that one device. So for me, it's that seamless technology to help my daily tasks. That really is where I see a huge benefit to everyday life. I think moving forward, though, it's how companies are going to start using, how people behave and the behaviour analytics from how they use the technology given to them that's going to shape the future more so how we we can provide all this technology, but if people aren't going to use it, or they're using it in different ways than to be expected, that's going to accelerate the where we go in the future.

**Tom 06:51**

You use the phrase, there behaviour analytics. I think. What's behaviour analytics?

**Tasha 06:58**

Yes. So something I'm looking at at work, actually. So I as a user, have all the tools to my spent, basically. But companies are going to be interested in not only how I use the design and do they need to make a design impact. So if I'm always going to click this button, but I never click this one. They're going to want to understand why. If I go to Facebook, and then I move across to Instagram, and some a new release comes out on Instagram that forces me back to Facebook, for example, I they're going to want to understand why I'm doing that. So there's a lot of not only what I'm doing online, but also how in physical spaces, there's a bit of emerging, of, I'm going to say, extended reality, where it's going to track where people are queuing in the retail store, or how they in a restaurant, they might always go to the left corner to sit in a booth over there and ignore the tables on the right. So all of those kind of behaviours are going to need to be understood to influence what comes next,

**Tom** 08:19

Right? So there's a whole, whole area of study there about people's behaviour. Nothing, nothing much to do with machines and computer science and stuff. It's just how people behave, and therefore how systems need to interact with them.

**Tasha** 08:39

Yeah, yeah, I think that's where technology, instead of being a gimmick, but turns into facilitating an activity in the background.

**Tom** 08:51

Very good. So, so you gave us some examples there of how, how the Internet of Things and the interaction with systems is developing. Do you feel that's moved on a lot in the last two years?

**Tasha** 09:09

I think there's been other areas that have probably been further accelerated in the last two years, particularly that the future of working from home and the future of the workplace in general is, is something that I think all companies are very much invested in. The Microsoft Teams, for example. I mean, we're on Zoom right now. The the upward trend of of using them I've I was involved in trying to get people off Skype and onto teams before the pandemic, and we really were struggling to just answer the 'Well, so what?' Why should I move over and now it's something that's just ingrained in us. Every day. You open your phone, you open teams, it's just there. So I think that's probably a bigger area than the Internet of Things. How as we start going back into physical spaces and getting out of our house, that's where the Internet of Things is going to start accelerating again.

**Tom** 10:12

So I think you said earlier that you were working in hybrid mode. Now, I think you said two days a week in the office and three days a week at home. Do you think that's where it's going to stay in future?

**Tasha** 10:28

I think it's a healthy balance. I also think people have re evaluated what's important to them over the last two years, and it might be that people were going to leave a company that want a hybrid while working because they only do want to remote work or the other way around. You know, so personally, there might be someone who goes, No, I want to be back in the office five days a week. And it's that flexibility that I think companies are going to have to adapt to, because we each have our own kind of if I want to come home early to, you know, if you've got kids, then you're going to be wanting, probably to work from home and and that flexibility is going to be really key.

**Tom** 11:16

So this is, this is you make it sound more user employee driven than employer driven? Is this the age of employee power?

**Tasha** 11:27

Then...

**Tasha 11:28**

it's a very good question. I'm I think, I think after proving how well companies have been able to run and how productive employees have been, it would be hard to ignore the facts of you know you need to be back in the office five days a week and ignore the employee one...

**Tom 11:49**

You were also starting your own business around social media and internet marketing, is that still part of your work?

**Tasha 12:03**

Yes, yeah. So actually, I moved into a new role at Whitbread in December called Innovation manager. So it's a new role, and I'm starting to carve that out still early on, still within the wider team of solution architects. So yeah, busy, busy doing that for the day job, and then still continuing with my own company, with some small business clients helping them do social media work. And I find often that the marketing and communications that I'm learning from my own company really helps to influence my day to day job, and especially when I'm trying to business partner and talk to the business put presentations together. It's I'm trying to be less technical focused and more being able to explain the problem to anybody.

**Tom 12:57**

It's just again, in a few words, explain what what social media and email marketing actually means in terms of what you

**Tom 13:07**

do.

**Tasha 13:07**

Yes, of course. So for each small business, they will have either themes or a particular goal of what they want to get across on their social media channels and email marketing so often there, there's two different goals. Social media is mainly looking at keep keeping the lights on, promoting what they're trying to do, looking at what hashtags and engagement ratings are for certain topics. And then the email marketing is more looking at the wider text piece of latest news, offerings, products and what's going on. It's more of a tailored push to the clients that have subscribed, right?

**Tom 13:53**

So the email that tailored push that you mentioned means that you've got a list or a set of people that you want to communicate that to, whereas the social media is more a kind of scatter gun approach,

**Tasha 14:10**

Yes, yeah. I mean, there are key followers that you'd want to target, and I use different tools that have given me reports. So again, going back to the behaviour analytics piece, you can understand, you know, okay, a post about X gives me 15 likes, what post about Y gives me 38 so I'm going to continue to push down that route.

**Tom** 14:36

So there's a lot of analysis in there, a lot of understanding of customers and analysis of their of their behaviour?

**Tasha** 14:45

Yes, yeah, a lot of insights, I think, is because if we can learn from that, then we know where to go. We should be listening to that front line, I would say.

**Tom** 14:57

so do you do see both of those strands? Is of your career continuing in parallel, or are you going to veer onto one rather than the other?

**Tasha** 15:06

Yeah, I don't know. I'm very open at the moment to what the future will bring. I would like to get into some freelance either speaking or writing, which would be in my kind of own company side, but I'm also really enjoying learning and being part of a large corporate company, so I'm enjoying, while I can still toggling between the both.

**Tom** 15:38

Yeah. I mean, do you have an ambition that you might one day, you know, have the leading social media and email marketing consultancy in the UK or something.

**Tasha** 15:50

I mean, I wouldn't turn it down. But I also think I am sometimes a bit more technical, and so working, working with just that, that would be quite a niche area, whereas I like being across a lot of domains are quite generalist, I would say so not, yeah, not going to close any doors, but we'll see what will happen.

**Tom** 16:18

So have your ambitions developed at all in the last two years? Or does your career plan remain roughly the same as it was when we last spoke?

**Tasha** 16:29

Career wise, I think I didn't realise I could get to the stage that I have within Whitbread as quickly. It's definitely been accelerated. And so where I thought I would be in five years, I'm probably already got there, so I'm reevaluating at the moment, what, what's the next step, and what's the what's the end goal? I mean, I don't want to sit here and say, Oh, I would love to be a C level executive without actually gaining a lot more experience at the level that I'm at. I think that's that's something that the pandemics really helped me to see, is that I was very much planned my life to the nth degree before I'm when I got my A levels, I had a plan, A, B, C and D. Of you know, if I didn't get my grades, what was going to happen, but now I feel I'm a lot more fluid, although I like still having an end goal, I'm more open to other opportunities. I don't want to be so tunnelled anymore.

**Tom** 17:34

As your advice to people about a career in it changed or developed, or what would your advice be now,

**Tasha 17:46**

i think it's still similar about educating yourself. Big believer that when I was in sixth form, I went to a history taster University session and a computing one, and I never thought I could do computing at university, and I'm so glad I went to that taster today. That was the turning point for me. And so I really encourage everyone, if they think they want to do a certain career, they should do a work experience, go for internship, you know, try, try and get yourself and be proactive and get out there, because at the end of the day, you're the person choosing. But I think there's also some pressure at sixth form, or say, Sixth Form College, that kind of you know when you're at school, to pick one direction. And what I love about it is that I work with people who have come from such a huge range of backgrounds, you don't need a IT degree to work in it. So I don't think and whenever I'm mentoring some six formers at the moment, and I keep saying to them, like, getting into university is so important, it feels like such a huge part of your life right now, but you might start that degree and go and think, Oh, this isn't for me. I'm going to change. And that's perfectly fine as well. So don't be as hard on yourself as you think you need

**Tasha 19:14**

to be.

**Tom 19:14**

That's great. That's really helpful. Thank you very much. Is there anything else you wanted to say?

**Tasha 19:19**

No, that that would be great. It's just great to be part of this, and thank you for for interviewing me.