

Bindi Karia

Hot desking in London

When the dot com bubble burst during the first few years of the 21st century, London-based Bindi Karia, '93 BCom, was part of the fallout.

“It was an incredibly tough time and I worked hard to get through the downturn,” says Karia from her mobile office in downtown London.

Armed with a cell phone, laptop computer, and car, Karia now works as a Senior Business Productivity Advisor for Microsoft Ltd UK. As a “hot desker” in the world’s financial capital, Karia interfaces with big corporates, especially major banks, advising them about how to maximize their productivity and realise the potential of computer technology.

She deals with high-level executives and has to stay up to date with technology and its potential to deliver business benefits to enterprise customers.

“My role is exciting because I am working with banks to become early adopters of new and innovative technologies,” says Karia.

In a business world that is increasingly concerned about computer security, Karia’s role with a big international company like Microsoft is crucial to convincing companies that the future of their businesses depends on maximizing the benefits of computer technology.

Getting the job with Microsoft ahead of hundreds of other applicants in a very competitive job market has been a big career highlight for 33-year-old UK-born Karia.



“You are one person in a million and you have to convince people of the one thing you have that makes you different and that is challenging,” she says. As a 1994 Gold Key Award winner at the U of A for her contributions to life on campus, it is not hard to imagine the energy and initiative that sets Karia apart from many others.

“It was a very sobering and humbling experience moving from Alberta to London, sending out hundreds of resumes, and wondering if anyone would take notice,” Karia adds.

Over the last ten years, this enthusiastic and vivacious woman has proven she can make it in a competitive job marketplace. She’s worked as a Strategy Management Consultant at PwC Consulting London (now known as IBM Global Consulting Services) on a number of challenging e-business consulting projects in both the banking and telecoms industries,

established her own consultancy after the dot com crash, worked for a technology startup in the City of London and, finally, for a technology-focused venture capital fund. Today, she has a promising future with a top international company.

Her personality and positivity radiates throughout the conversation as she talks about life in London. "I love this city. It's big and fast and dirty and ugly, but I love the location, the culture, and the fact I can fly anywhere in the world from here," she says glowingly.

"I also really love the people and the cosmopolitan nature of this world capital," she adds. "When you first move to London, it can be twice as hard to make friends and, in spite of being a big city, it can be very lonely too," she says.

Born in Manchester, Karia and her family moved to Alberta when she was five. "I still go back to Calgary, Kenya, and the US often because there is still family there and I also have a ton of family in London, which is great," she says.

"But I am an Albertan at heart and do my bit to fly the Canadian flag over here in London," she adds.

Karia is the U of A alumni representative in London and says keeping in touch with fellow Canadians is very important. Every year, she hosts a Canadian Thanksgiving dinner that includes bringing out some favourite board games, turkey dinner, and a whole lot of fun. Americans, British, Australians, South Africans, and New Zealanders are all invited over to at-

tend the festivities.

"There is a huge ex-pat community here and you can easily meet people from all over the world."

As a singer in a small band, Karia also provides fun and entertainment for other Londoners. "I sang from when I was five till 25 and was in the U of A Concert Choir but lost touch with my singing in London."

A friend found out about her passion for singing and, before she knew it, Karia was singing backup vocals in a band.

"We play in the style of Norah Jones and Sade at little pubs around Soho," she says adding that a gig for an upcoming IBM Consulting prom has added to their rehearsal timetable a little.

Karia says, since leaving the security of Alberta for London, she has learned a lot about herself but likes where she has got to. As we talk over the phone, the din of traffic and clatter of people talking threatens to drown out her voice.

It was 5:30 pm in London and Karia was

off to another meeting, a hot desker on the move. Enthusiastic and motivated about her new job with Microsoft, Karia says she can't imagine where else she would like to be right now. It's a fast-paced world that she thrives in.

Whether it is training for her first triathlon, singing in a Soho pub, or jetting off to visit family in Kenya or Alberta, Karia says living and working in London suits her just fine.

"But I am still an Alberta girl at heart."



Q&A Bindi Karia

1. What is my fondest memory of business school?

- 1) The intense group projects - great practice and preparation for the management consulting world.
- 2) My fellow students - a great bunch to study with!
- 3) Ok, and the parties. :-)

2. What advice would you give to current students thinking about moving to the UK?

Just do it - take the risk, you have absolutely nothing to lose! If you hate it, you can always head back to Alberta - it's always going to be your home, right?

3. What are my perceptions of being a Canadian in the UK?

At first, the Brits think you are just a more boring version of an American, and then, once they get to know us - they like us, they really really like us :-)

How do I know this? First, you need to take the time to get used to the absolutely fabulous British sense of humour. The rule of thumb here - if they 'take the piss' out of you, they like you. If they are polite, they 'couldn't give a monkeys'.

It took me around 3 months in my first job in the UK before I realised that my entire team was 'taking the piss' out of me - it was just that subtle and I was just that slow to realise. And let's just say, the sparring session between the Brits and Canadians reached legendary proportions by the end of my tenure in my first UK-based role...a move in the right direction for UK-Canadian diplomatic relations.

4. Why did I move to the UK?

I went to the UK to experience life on a different continent, to pursue my career, to further develop my obsession with traveling, and finally, to spend time with my extremely large extended family. And, of course, to experience life as a big City girl - it's hard to resist the fast-paced but very fun lifestyle in this fabulous city!