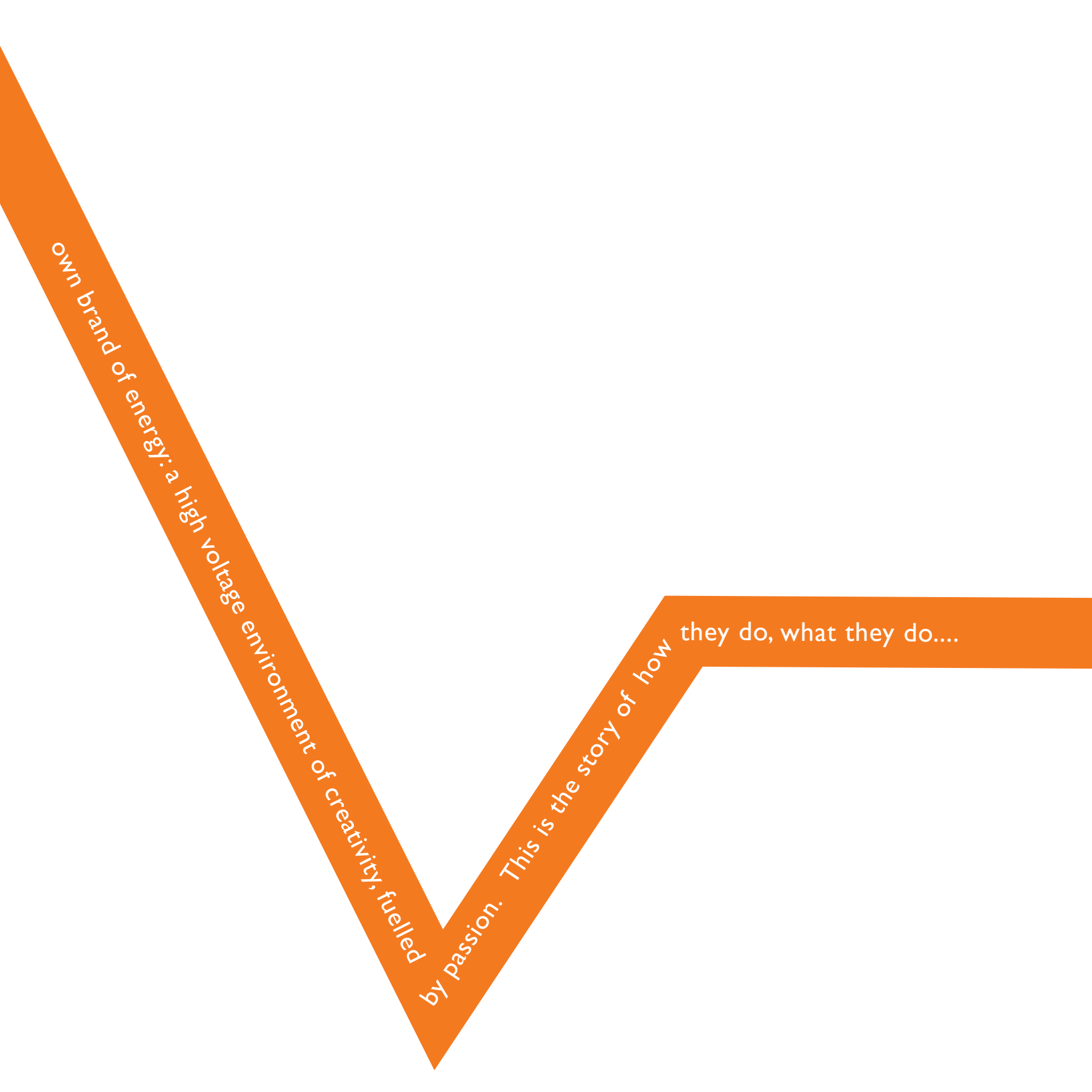


WSO2 is a livewire in the Service Oriented Arcitecture

(SOA) market. The company is constantly abuzz with its



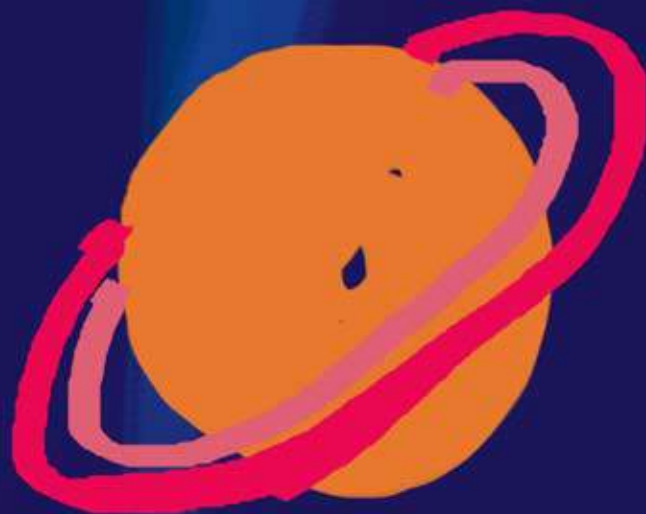
own brand of energy: a high voltage environment of creativity, fuelled
by passion. This is the story of how

they do, what they do....

A Journey to the Middle of (Web) SP

WSO2 has fearlessly forged ahead, in true pioneering spirit, and got exactly where it wants to be: right in the middle.

space



oday the company takes pride in its high voltage environment of tech speak, industry experts, business challenges, creativity and above all fun. In its relatively short history WSO2 has reached beyond the boundaries of the known and traversed stellar heights; fearlessly continuing along a trajectory marked by discoveries and success as it establishes its place in cyber space. The story of WSO2 is one of inspiration, self belief, perseverance, creativity, passion and camaraderie. A journey fuelled by the passion of two men who believed, against all odds, in the power of the humble 'start-up' company.

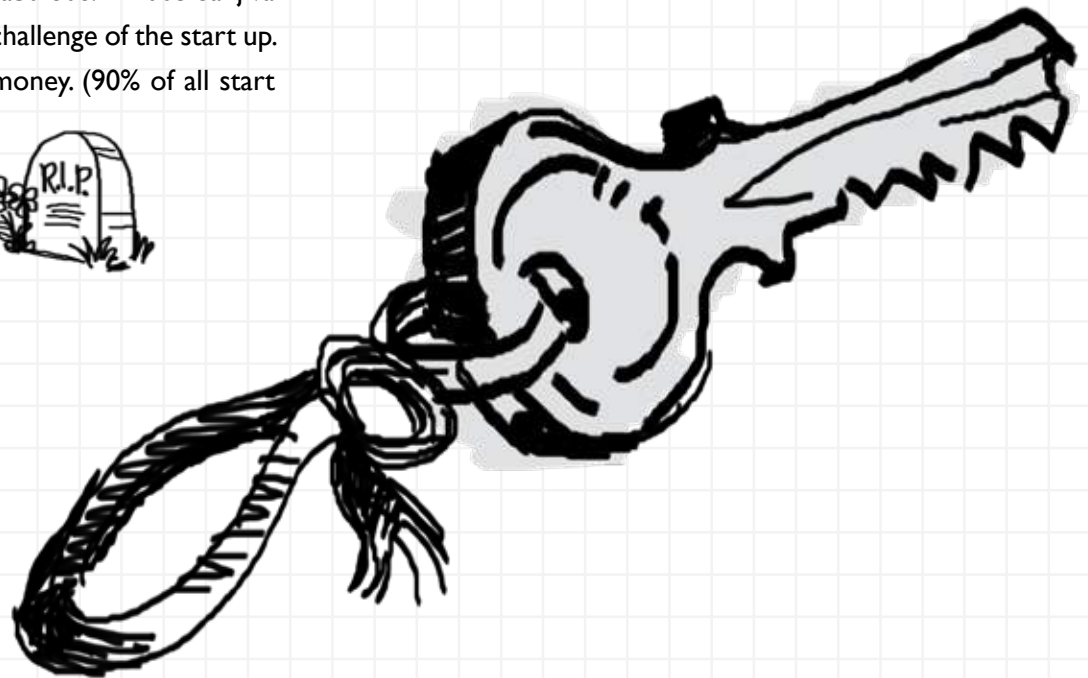
* Hardware, outerware and getting in the middle

As far as word associations go, hardware is linked to software, innerware to outer(wear). The list could go on. Middleware brings to mind the 'middle earth' found in fantasies and fables. Not so, lay person 'middleware' is geek speak for a parallel universe in the world of information technology and internet services as we know it today - a universe that is moving from the fringes into the mainstream. A strata envisioned by the founders of WSO2 - Sanjiva and Paul before the birth of the company.



Start-Up -Up-Start

Relegated to the bottom of the corporate food chain, the start-up is seldom 'the place to be'. It may have many connotations – new venture, hard work, 'here today, gone tomorrow' – but the most significant is of course 'funding', especially the lack of it. The business of the start up is not for the faint hearted and it was Sanjiva's 'brave heart' that made the impossible simply quite fabulous. In 2005 Sanjiva was faced with the quintessential challenge of the start up. He had the brilliant idea but no money. (90% of all start ups, it is said, die in the first year.)





It was also clear to the budding entrepreneur that funding for a start-up all depends upon your credibility in the industry. In a foreign land with n established business presence he knew his credibility did count for something with family and friends, who proved to be his angel(investor) s*. In moments of desperation you call every person you know in the hope that there will be a 'yes, I believe in your idea' at the end of the line. You need to believe in yourself and your ideas to go the distance when the going gets tough. In March 2006 Intel Capital agreed to fund the new venture, that was fast running out of funds and the finance person (Jeewaka) of the start-up was tearing his hair out. (The funds finally came in a few months later).



A start up company dabbling in obscure territory of cyber space - lets make this story more tangible to you with the introduction of the WSO2 founders – who have with their passion, commitment and dedication infused their company with its very own brand of energy. The desire to create, think beyond perceived limitations and enjoy the journey from idea to the commissioning of a product.



The story of a 'visually challenged' visionary..

Sanjiva (brave of heart)

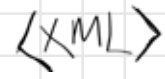
The word around WSO2 is that Sanjiva is colour blind. But more on this visual handicap later. Suffice it to say that it is not something that has hindered his vision for the industry or WSO2. He personifies an affable alert energy that has served him well in his journey to the core of the middle terrain of the web.

Sanjiva Weerawarana studied at Royal College, Colombo and then ventured out to India for his undergraduate and post graduate studies. He moved on to the USA for his PhD. Having

completed 3 years of lecturing at..... he joined IBM in 1997 taking up work in research. While at IBM he got involved (he says this happened by chance) in the research and development of XML (Extensible Mark Up language.) "During these early days of XML, the industry nor I knew exactly where XML would be twenty years down the line" he says. During his time

at IBM Sanjiva worked with the teams that developed XML, Web Services and SOA (Service Oriented Architecture). His thoughts on the potential opportunities presented by these products for a shared language of communication between multiple global pc users were disappointingly not shared by his employer and industry stalwart, IBM, at the time. Undeterred and certain in his vision he left the tech giant to pursue his own vision for enterprise middleware; a leap of faith that resulted in the WSO2 adventure.

Back in Sri Lanka post IBM and fuelled by his experiences in the USA. Sanjiva was motivated by his ideas for what could





be achieved with open source software in the future. The free software movement is the basis for all open source software. At this point in cyber history all contributions to open source software were from Europe and the USA. English being the dominant language in software design and communication there was limited participation from Asia and countries like Sri Lanka. “In 2001 no one from this part of the world dealt in open source software” he says. Working through the Lanka Software Foundation that he founded, it was possible to focus on Sri Lankan expertise, understand the talent available and create greater understanding of open source. At the time the focus was to ensure that talented young people had access to knowledge, information and exposure in the field. Today Sri Lanka, behind the USA and Europe, is one the largest contributors of free open source software (FOSS).

Sanjiva’s experience with the Lanka Software Foundation brought with it the realization that his vision for open source software could open doors and create opportunities. Another reason for his journey back home was to use his experience and expertise in a manner that would enhance the brand value of his homeland. He wanted to move away from the perception of Sri Lanka as an ‘outsourced labour market’ and highlight the intellectual wealth within the country and position Sri Lanka on the global technology map as a manufacturer instead of being a mere solution provider. The idea was to explore commercial possibilities and in the long term build expertise. In the words of Jonathan (who you will get to know shortly) “when Sanjiva says he’s going to do something, he does it”.



While Sanjiva moved back home his co-founder Paul was venturing beyond his home in the UK and taking a bet on the future.

While Sanjiva moved back home his co-founder Paul was venturing beyond his home in the UK and taking a bet on the future.

Paul's story

(not the Octopus of Football World Cup 2010 fame)



Paul is the co-founder of WSO2, who currently works out of the UK. < description comes here >

Paul and Sanjiva first met over Paul's spookily titled book the "Xml Files". Both were at IBM and worked together for 5 years, Sanjiva in research and Paul in product development. The book was based on technology developed by Sanjiva and thereafter they collaborated on projects and shared many new exciting ideas. During their IBM days they worked on about 4-5 projects together including the first IBM ESB (enterprise service bus) project.



In 2004 Paul was invited to Sri Lanka, by Sanjiva, to participate in the Lanka Software Foundation workshop on Apache Software. During this time over dinner they joked about starting to work for themselves. What followed was a 2 day brainstorming session a few months later in London between Paul, Sanjiva and James Clark, an investor. The plans for project WSO2 were hatched "during a very



long lunch at the Nando's in Putney over some very spicy chicken" reminisces Paul. Thereafter they rented a room in a cheap hotel in Putney (The Lodge Hotel) and spent time in a stuffy windowless basement room planning and discussing WSO2. By December 2004 the building blocks for WSO2 had been visualised. Tragically, later that month, the devastating Asian Tsunami hit Sri Lanka and Sanjiva being involved in the relief efforts the plans for WSO2 were put on hold.

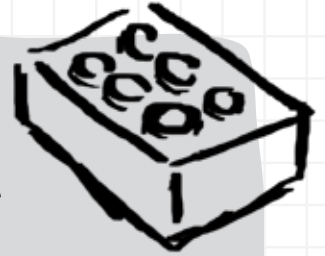
During April/May 2005 Sanjiva had freed up some time to revisit the WSO2 idea. He set up the framework for the company while Paul was still doing time at IBM. From there things progressed swiftly. By July 2005 Paul handed in his resignation notice to IBM and the final paper work for WSO2 was completed. Although it was a

major career decision for him, Paul had no doubts about leaving IBM. He had a young family at the time but his wife was supportive and he believed it was the right time to break away from the security of IBM as opportunities like WSO2 didn't present themselves often. Many people don't have the luxury of doing what Paul did and he is appreciative of the support he has had from family. Paul explains that he was really keen on the project but at the time he never expected WSO2 to be where it is today. He actually thought that in 5 years time WSO2 (in true start up style) might be bought over or would have even gone under instead of being able to stand on its own feet. Paul says his wife was supportive and he believed it was the right time to break away from the security of IBM as opportunities like this didn't present themselves often. Many people don't have the luxury of doing what Paul did and he is appreciative of the support he had during the time he made this decision about his future. Paul explains that he was really keen on the project but at the time he never expected WSO2 to be where it is today. He actually thought that in 5 years time WSO2 might be bought over or would have even gone under instead of being able to stand on its own two feet!

5

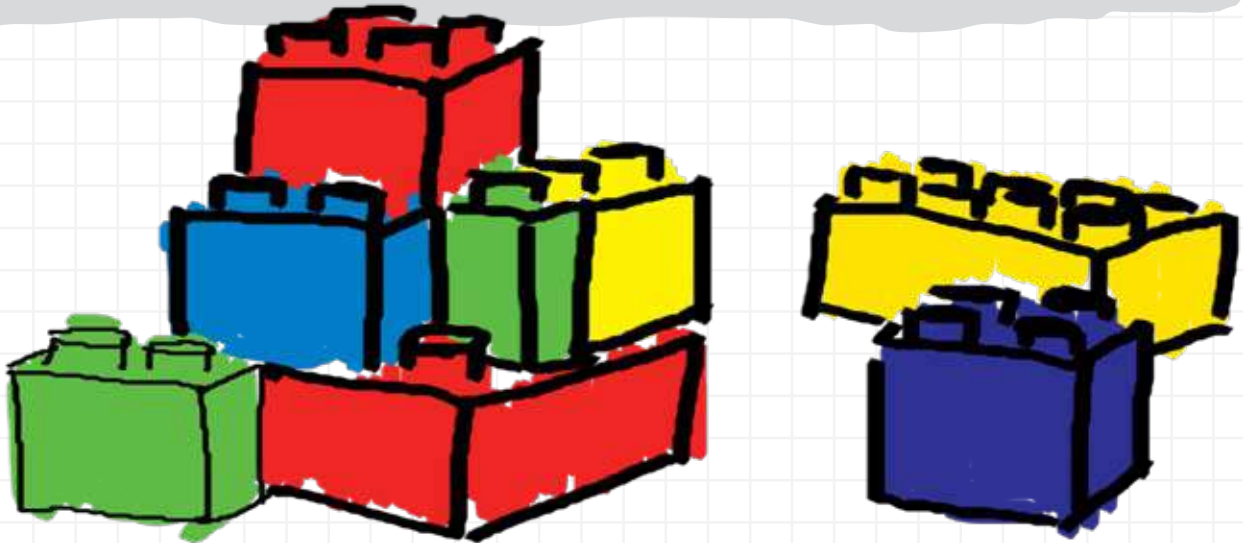


What does WSO2 do exactly?



It's like Lego - Paul explains the vision for Middleware

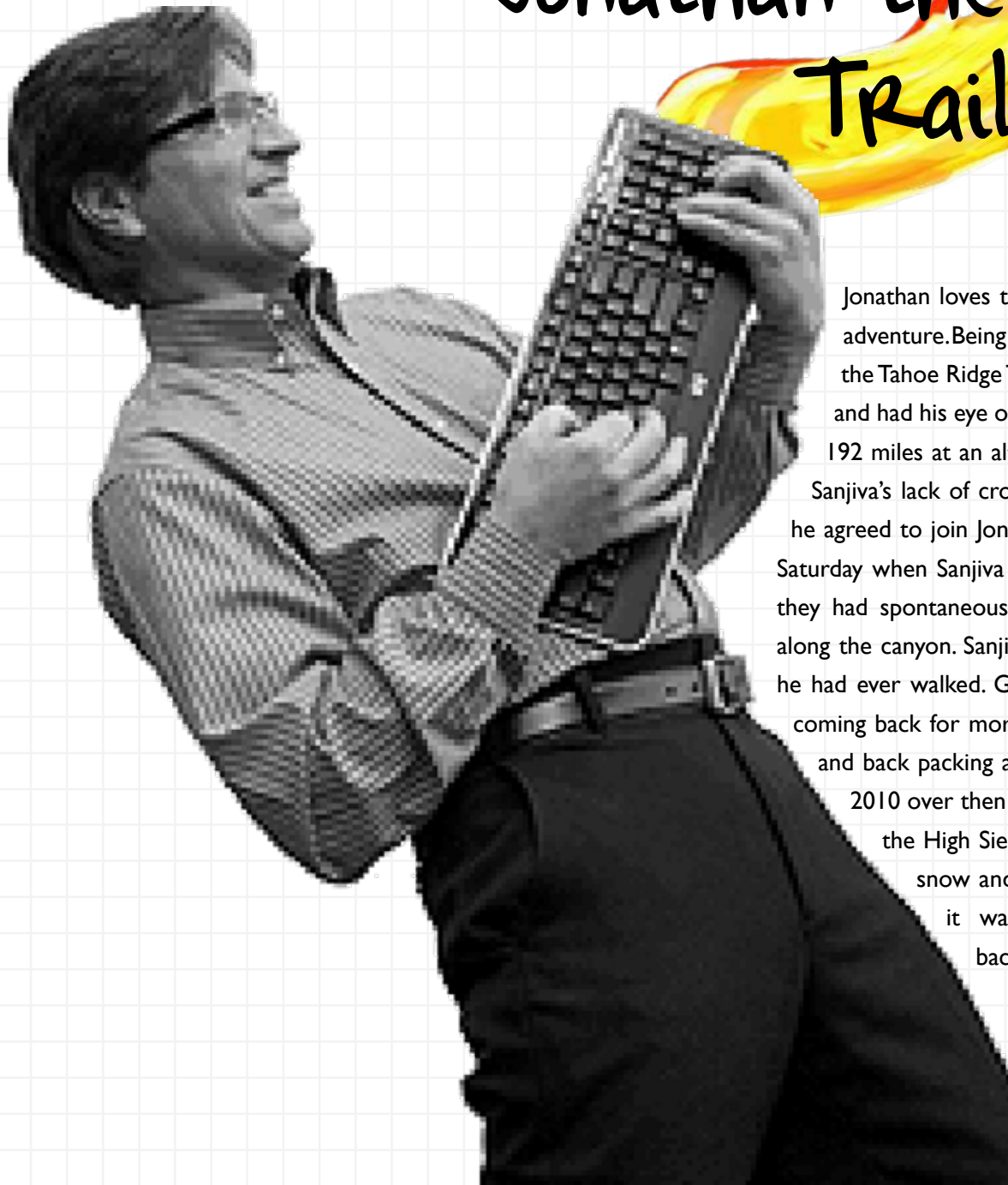
“When we started people viewed SOA as specific integration technology. Competent at just building inter..... and service bus. Sanjiva's idea was to enable people to build distributed applications. Provide a platform for people to build compositional applications. Sanjiva's compositional model is like Lego. Collect the pieces you want to build what you need and then add on anything more that you need as you go along. Instead of having to build what you need from scratch every time, which would be the case if you used clay. Sanjiva's long range vision was broader than mine five years ago.



A US Presence with

Jonathan the

Trail Blazer



Jonathan loves the great outdoors, travel and adventure. Being an avid hiker he had conquered the Tahoe Ridge Trail before his time at WSO2 and had his eye on the High Sierra Route some 192 miles at an altitude of 10,000 feet. Despite Sanjiva's lack of cross country hiking experience he agreed to join Jonathan on this adventure. One Saturday when Sanjiva was in the US with Jonathan they had spontaneously agreed to a 9.5 mile hike along the canyon. Sanjiva claimed it was the longest he had ever walked. Gradually Jonathan had Sanjiva coming back for more. Camping in the wilderness and back packing around Lake Tahoe and in July 2010 over then days they worked 65 miles of the High Sierra Route which included ice, snow and slopes to navigate. Although it was challenging Sanjiva never backed down or complained.



Outdoor adventuring apart Sanjiva and Jonathan worked together on the XML working group while they were at IBM and Microsoft respectively. Jonathan had start up experience and on learning of Sanjiva's ideas for his own company advised him on the paper work required to set up business.

Although Sanjiva extended the invitation, Jonathan was not interested in joining because he had worked in web services for ten years and was getting bored and coming from his Microsoft archive 'open source' was an absolutely repulsive concept to him. Nevertheless he endured the regular progress updates provided by Sanjiva.

During this time Sanjiva was travelling back and forth between the US and Sri Lanka and in August 2006 the 4 million dollars worth of funding came through from Intel. Leaving Jonathan with some food for thought and a ticket to Sri Lanka, Sanjiva suggested that he visit purely with an interest in the production angle of things. Around this time Jonathan was looking for change from Microsoft and the idea of exotic Sri Lanka was enticing, especially since he loved to travel and meet new people. As a part of the funding requirement it was necessary for WSO2 to have a US based VP for business development who would handle the paper work and negotiate on behalf of the company. Sanjiva had found his man in Jonathan and the time had come to set up a US office. A second business development person came on board and there was also interested from

a Google employee. A few of the team from Sri Lanka was also flown out to the silicone valley office. The office space came at a hefty 5000USD per month and boasted of a great location down the street from an ethnic restaurant area which provided much opportunity for gastronomic explorations for the WSO2 team. Jonathan worked with Devaka on sales and negotiated a deal with HP, whilst tracking the sales and financials and a capable sales team was taking shape. Things were looking good. Suddenly however, the new members of the US team left and Jonathan found realized he had the fancy office space to himself and business leads dwindled. By the end of 2008 the silicone valley was in a state of panic as the financial melt down hit and the blogosphere went crazy with worst case scenarios. Many start up companies went down during this time and WSO2 realized it has to cut back. The company was still in the red, not much funding so cutting costs was imperative. Things were looking bleak and Jonathan began to work for half pay even though he put in full time at work. 3-4 months into the recession people started to move towards open source which was good for WSO2. The company made it through the recession by living within its means and being able to fund itself for the next 2 years.



What's in a name?

A lot, in branding and marketing terms. This name, has created a 'name' for itself due to its relative obscurity and deviation from the obvious. The mysterious aura that surrounds the name has its pros and cons but first for some deciphering.

Anyone who comes into contact with the name, as humans are conditioned to do, try to figure out what the abbreviation, or more appropriately the bunch of symbols, stands for. Invariably the question that every WSO2ite is most familiar with will come up. The tone would sometimes be sheepish, sometimes demanding and sometimes plain curious – “What does WSO2 stand for?” or “Does WSO2 mean anything?” Whether it be new recruits, business partners or friends the inquiries are not far behind.

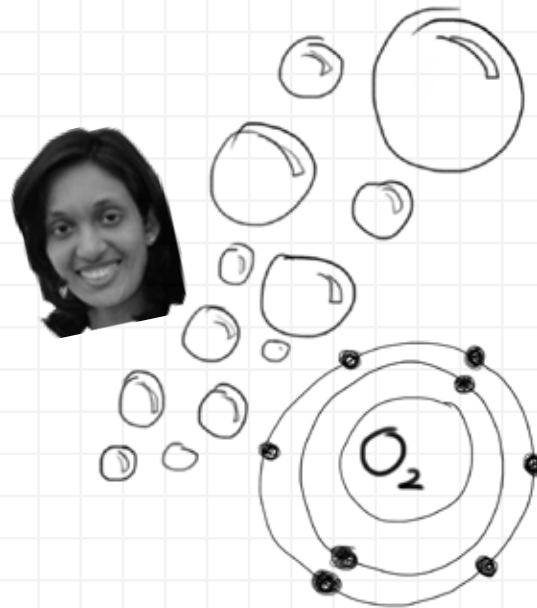
Although it is expected it is also the dreaded moment. How does one explain the nuances of the 'name' to the non tech types?

The moment of revelation (A few attempts can be found here)



“Errm...well..” this is how (much to the agony of Lavi) it starts - which also means that if you happened to ask the question you are not going to get a quick answer.

Hasnim’s sanitized version of the WSO2 creation story goes like this. ‘Having started out as a web services company the name was coined to capture the idea of breathing life or ‘oxygenating’ web services’. (She makes it sound very exhilarating!) However, there is some internal debate on this..Another take is that the founders, who were very much attuned to the elements (the stuff in the periodic table that is), crafted the name. (Based on this WSO2 would mean). Paul on the other hand has hinted of an ‘unsanitized’ creation story, which he rather infuriatingly keeps to himself. You may want to get a hold of him to figure that one out.



SH
SK



If you have been around the company for long enough, you would discover that Sanjiva had originally called the company Serendib Systems – testimony of his love for his country. (Also because the domain name serendipity was not available). WSO2, geeky connotations and all is definitely the better name and more suited to the identity of the company. The man to thank would be James Clark who refused to invest in a company named Serendib Systems.

What the others thought of the name...

"I heard WSO2 from my seniors at university. I liked the name 'cos it is different and new"

Sameera, Software Engineer



"WSO2 - Unique - simple - thought provoking! Less is more? I like to think so. And many of our customers.. share the same thought! :)"

Nirosh from the Sales Team



"I thought it (WSO2) was not meaningful enough. Apparently because I am not all that familiar with middleware architecture! I still think we should have something more meaningful"

Tech Writer, who wanted to be anonymous

fold space

fold space

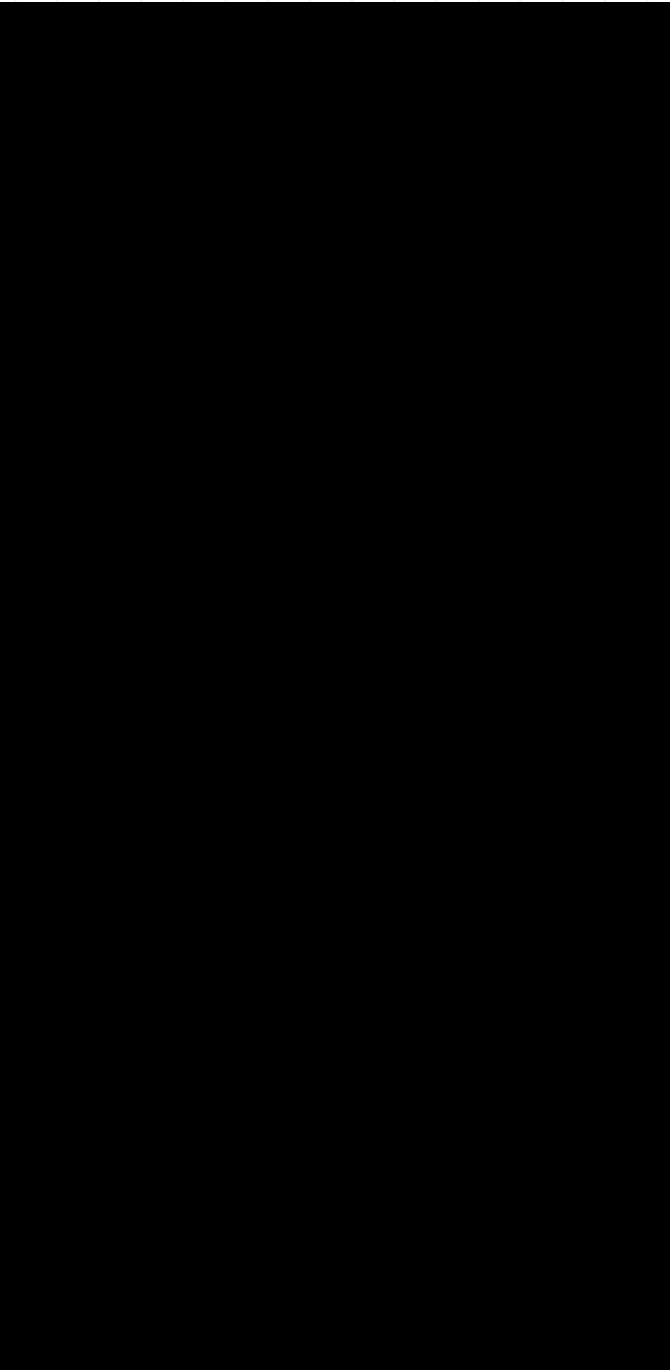
The Spirit Narratives



of WSO2
Unfold

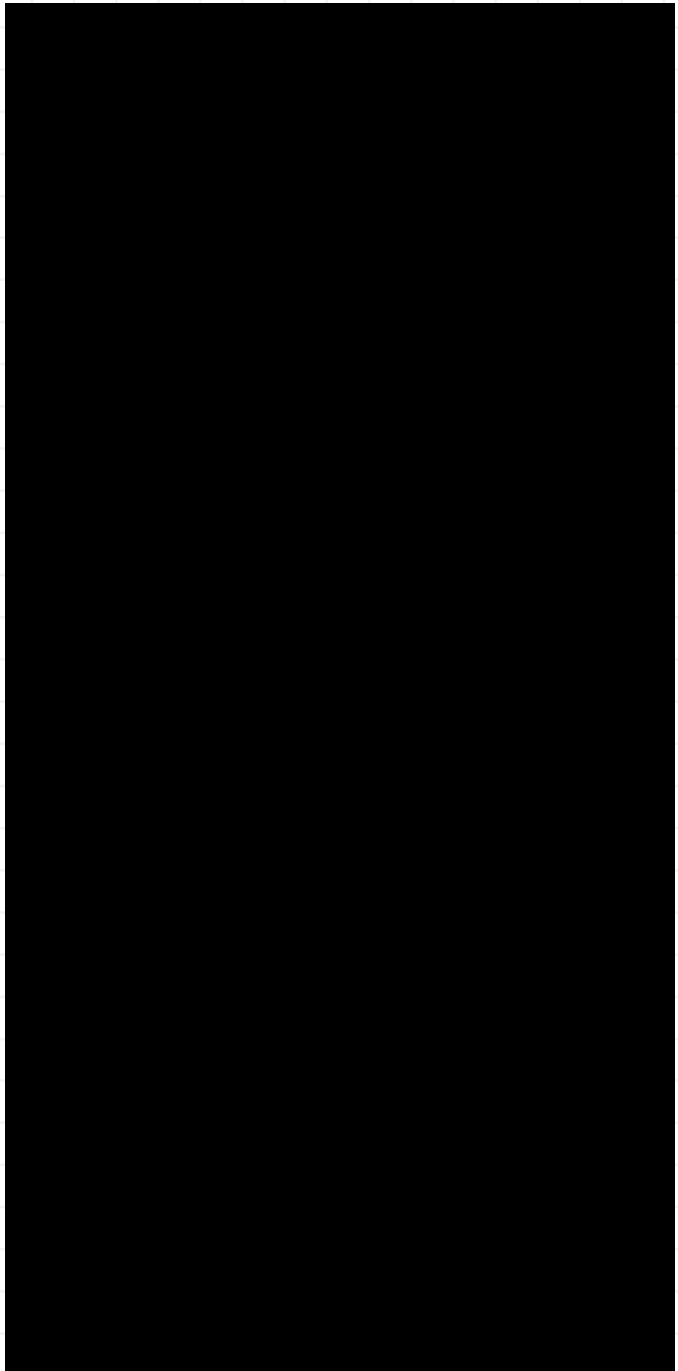
illustration of ne office. will need
pic

fold space



The formalities of setting up the company behind them, it was time for the work or rather fun to begin. The Company was first housed on the 7th Floor of the BOC Merchant Towers, in the heart of Colombo's business district (Colombo 3) and spent a happy two years from 2005 to 2007 at the premises before

moving to the current office space
along the greener and leafier Flower
Road, also in Colombo 3.



fold space



The beginning

new recruits and firsts WSO2 style

Sanjiva having lectured at the University of Moratuwa and also working with the Lanka Software Foundation knew of the talent that was up for grabs. With his keen eye and crystal clear understanding of what he wanted for the Company the new recruits were drafted in.

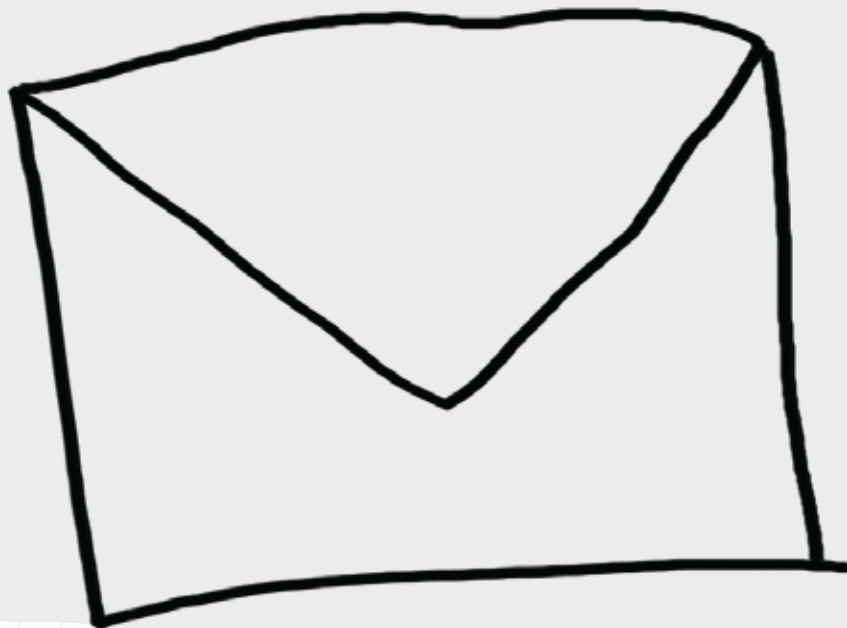
Deepal Jayasinghe and Eran Chinthaka were two of the very first employees of the company and have now moved on to graduate school and a world of new possibilities after leaving the WSO2 nest.

'Possibly the shortest employment letter in FOSS history'

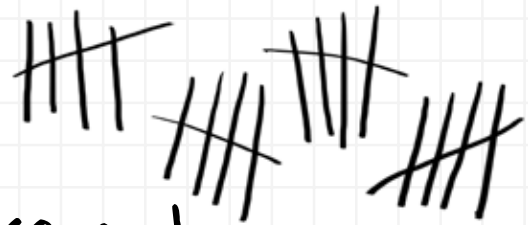
Deepal Jayasinghe One of the very first employees now in grad school

In starting his company Sanjiva knew that he wanted the best talent out there to bring his plans to fruition. No time was wasted on ceremony and a swift and efficient approach was adopted. Deepal tells the story of his employment letter. Deepal graduated from the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. (The University of Moratuwa is a hot bed of Engineering and IT talent in the country). Immediately after his graduation he joined the

Lanka Software Foundation (LSF) to build next generation web services frameworks, which introduced him to the world of open source development. During his time at LSF under Sanjiva's supervision, together with a team of 6 engineers a world class Web service framework (Axis2) was built in a very short period of time. At the end of his fellowship at LSF, he received the following email with a job offer from a non-existing (physically at least) start up company called Serendib Systems.



what do you think of actually pasting an envelope with a copy of the letter inside?



Do I want to join a Small office and only 20 employees?

Afkham Azeez is a long standing 'new recruit' who has journeyed with WSO2 and today has come into his own as a Senior Software Architect and the question for him was "Do I want to join? Small office and only 20 employees...". He did join WSO2 in late 2005 – a few months after the inception of the company. What calmed the waves of doubt in his mind?

exposure, career development, knowledge enhancement, character building and global impact of WSO2.

Following a three year stint at WSO2 Deepal moved on to read for his PhD and says "LSF experiences helped me to learn the power and the challenges of the open source, hence, I knew joining WSO2 was the best way to achieve my future goals. Being an initial member of the company, I knew the vision and the mission of the company well (to be the best IT company in the world), helping me to organize my career path. Working at WSO2 opened numerous opportunities: I gained global visibility by contributing to open source; built a Web service framework used by thousands of people around the world; established a very strong professional network including people from 'big companies'; participated in international and local conferences, not as an attendee, but as a speaker; organized an international branded conference in Sri Lanka; wrote a book and numerous magazine articles; became an Apache Member; above all, found a very good university to continue my higher studies. Even though I no longer work at WSO2 due to my academic work, I continue to feel that I am member of WSO2 family.

"The moment I had my 'interview' with Sanjiva. A snippet of which is reproduced below. Afkham explains, "I was impressed by his friendly nature, and immediately knew that [WSO2] would be a great place to work. Five years on I'm glad that I made the correct decision."

Although the first employment letter was sparsely worded the WSO2 team – from the

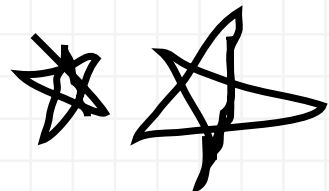
first to the most recent recruits – is not short of words when sharing their experiences and speaking of the

Are you familiar with web services technology?

No...

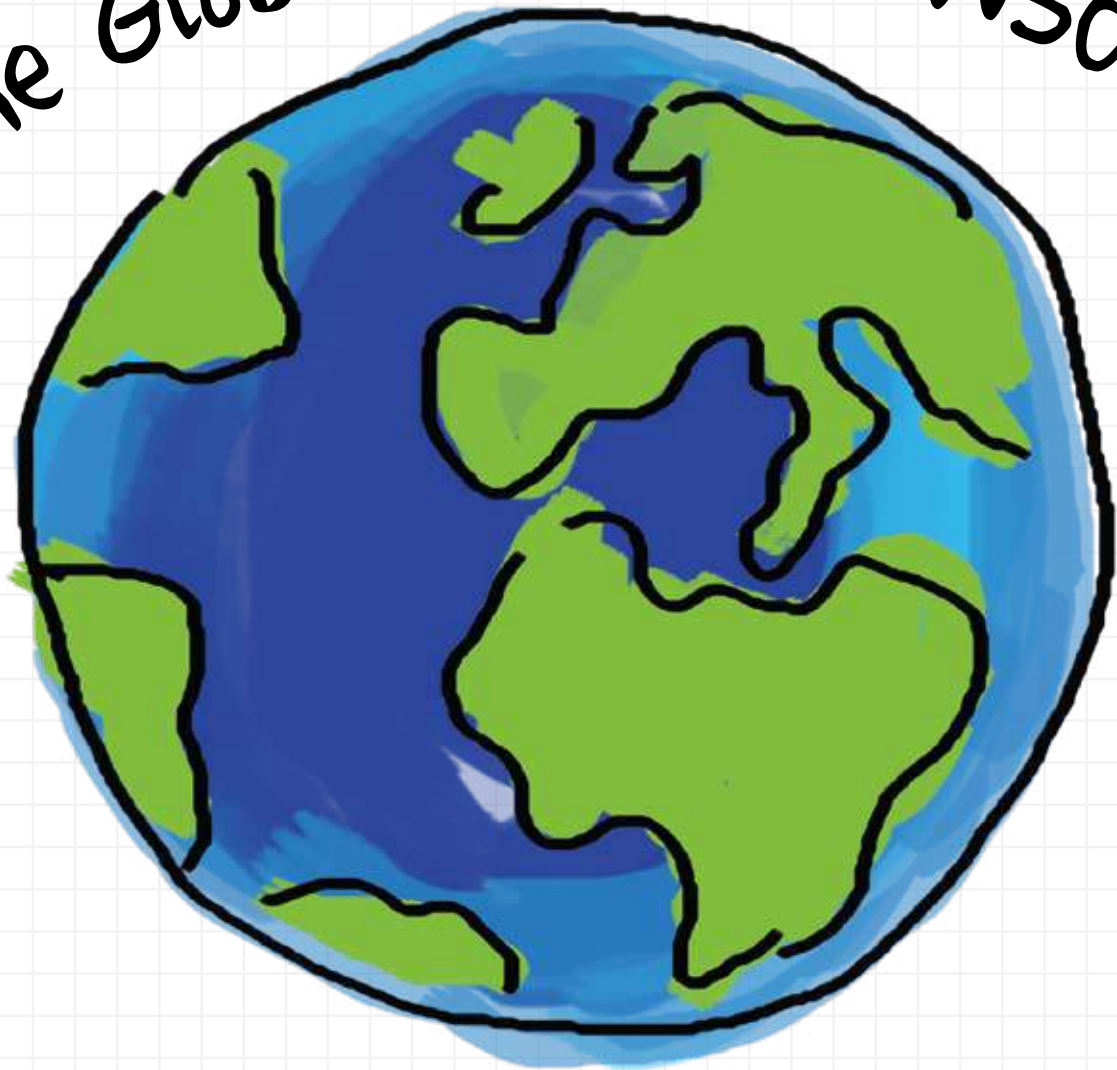
Web services technology is (10 minute spiel by Sanjiva). Would you like to join?

Yes!!



I believe WSO2 is not yet another IT company in Sri Lanka. Thanks to WSO2 Sri Lanka has become one of the major contributors to open source in the world, and number one in the Asia (beating even India or China to it). Sri Lanka has become the number one in the Google summer of code for two consecutive years

The Global Impact of WSO2



Eran Chinthaka –is another one of the WSO2 vanguard is now in grad school in the USA. He speaks of his experiences as part of the 35 hour hackathons and first release. He says “I think it’s a rare opportunity for a developer to write code and get his code to be used all around the world, while getting paid as well.”

While contributing to Apache Web services project, in LSF, Sanjiva invited him to join WSO2 in August 2005.

After joining he worked to improve Apache Axis2, Axiom and WS-Commons projects and release 1.0 in May 2006. He also started working on WSAS (then named Tungsten in keeping with the founders’ penchant for the periodic table). “I can still remember the hackathon we had for 35 hours to release first WSAS version” he muses with fond nostalgia.



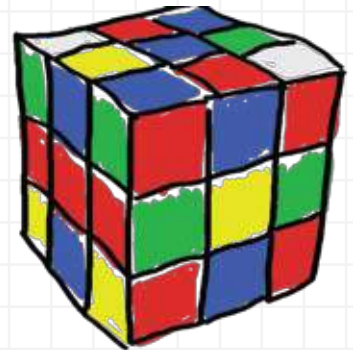
WSO2 Family Values

Eran says “WSO2 had the best and friendliest environment to work. Starting from Dr. Sanjiva everyone, irrespective of their position and abilities, worked like one family to release open source software to be used by users all around the world. Also I will never forget the WSO2 fun activities.

Having been part of WSO2 family and looking at the success of WSO2, especially originated from a small country like Sri Lanka and still being able to excel with open source business model is something I can be proud of. I wish all the success for the company and hoping to see a lot more free and open source products from some of the best software engineers in the world.

WSO2

Appealing to brilliant young minds



WSO2 has what it takes to keep the young and restless IT intelligentsia constantly engaged and challenged. Case in point – Akfham.

“Before joining WSO2, I had worked at 4 different companies within the span of two and a half years! The unique friendly and relaxed culture, the technological challenges and pioneering work at this great company

keeps me motivated. Over the past 5 years, I have learnt something new almost everyday. Home to the brightest minds in the software industry, working with them has always been a pleasure. Coming to work is something I look forward to, and Monday mornings are the happiest times.”

Working as a meritocracy



WSO2 takes pride in the fact that it is a meritocracy with no minimal patience for red tape related entanglements. This is evident in the swift journey employees make from zero to hero.

Afkham says that he was relatively unknown in the industry when he joined as a Senior Software Engineer in 2005. Within a short time, I gained Apache committership, Project Management Committee membership, and then Apache Membership. In the span of five years he has from a Senior Software Engineer to a Senior Software Architect and Senior Manager. He says “one thing is for sure, at WSO2, talent and hard work will always be recognized and rewarded. I was encouraged by Dr. Sanjiva to pursue my higher studies, and last year I completed my Masters degree in Computer Science, and was also awarded the Gold medal for the MSc Graduated with the highest GPA. Now I’m looking forward to my PhD.”

Life as an intern in a meritocracy

Senaka Fernando,
Assistant Technical Lead



My career at WSO2 began as an Intern of the C team, in September 2007. During my internship, I wrote WSO2 WSF/C++ 1.0, and also gained a committership for the Apache Web Services project. After completing my bachelors' degree, I rejoined as a Software Engineer in April 2009, and am currently an Associate Technical Lead. Within the first year of employment, I was able to contribute to two major product releases and also earned a membership at the Apache Software Foundation. WSO2 has helped me steer my career and enhance my knowledge while enjoying a several other benefits as an employee. The ability to tailor my work-schedule based on various deadlines is one such advantage.

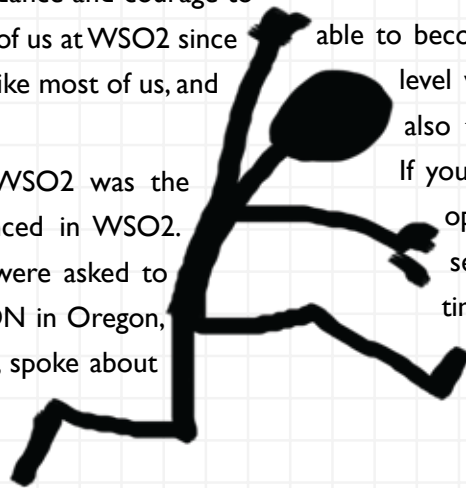
During the past 1 1/2 years that I have spent at WSO2 as an employee, I have visited two customer sites, for Quick Start Programs. I was really proud about the feedback that we got, and also the way our customers compared us against giants such as IBM, Oracle and Microsoft. Our ability to deliver cutting edge technology along with world-class support, being a fairly small team, is one of our greatest achievements. And, I'm proud to a part of such an amazing team.

EXPOSURE and experience

Ruwan Linton, a Software Architect, joined WSO2 just after his graduation from the University of Moratuwa. He says “I had all the nuts and bolts with me and I knew that I could build a ship with those using the material that I had, but what I didn’t know was exactly how to build it. WSO2 provided me the right guidance and courage to build the ship. It is good for most of us at WSO2 since the company itself is very young, like most of us, and is growing fast.”

Ruwan’s first trip to US from WSO2 was the most exciting thing he experienced in WSO2. Here is his story. A few of us were asked to go for a conference called OSCON in Oregon, Portland. We spent a week there, spoke about

the work we do and what we could offer the conference participants. Most importantly we had a lot of free time and explored most Oregon City. Since then I have presented at conferences and customer engagements around the globe including Amsterdam, New York and Mexico City. I am thrilled about my achievements in WSO2. I was able to become a Software Architect from the ground level within 3.5 years of my life at WSO2. I am also the Product Manager for the WSO2 ESB. If you are a person who enjoys a challenge the opportunities at WSO2 are limitless. I don’t see those opportunities reducing over the time since the vision of WSO2 ensures that there’s enough to go around and into the future as well”.



The First Customers - Virtually

The first major customers of the company were never met with face to face. The work of WSO2 spoke for itself and customers reached out for services and support. One of the first customers - Jamba - sold mobile phone ring tones on the web. The client was met with only about 6 months after and this too by chance. They chose WSO2 for being best of breed. Today WSO2 has onboard an impressive portfolio of global customers.

Customer logos and map of global customers to be inserted here

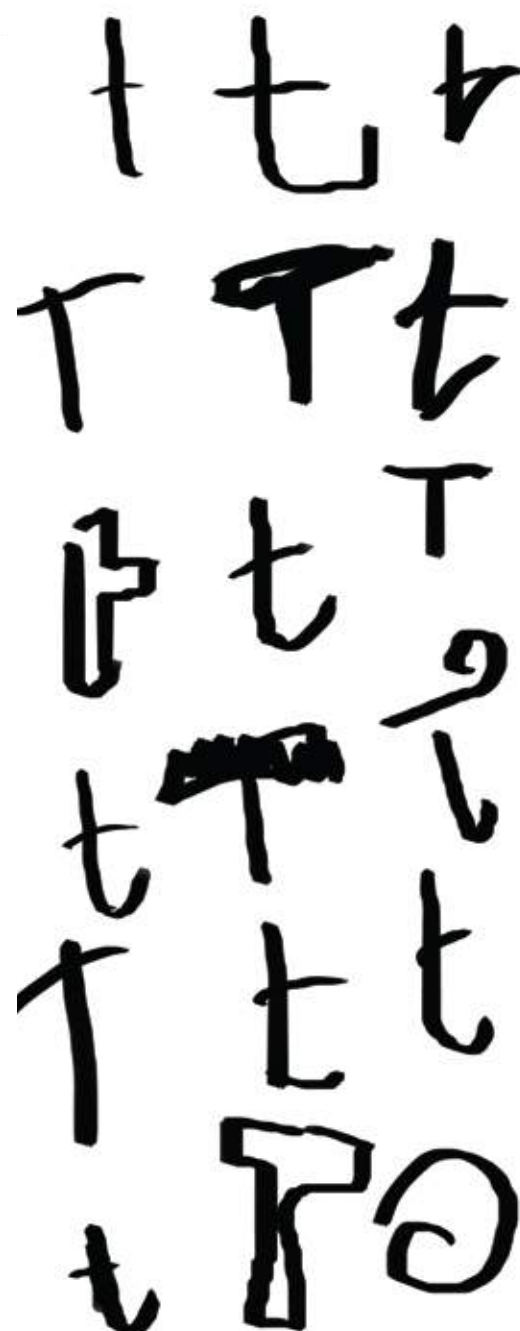
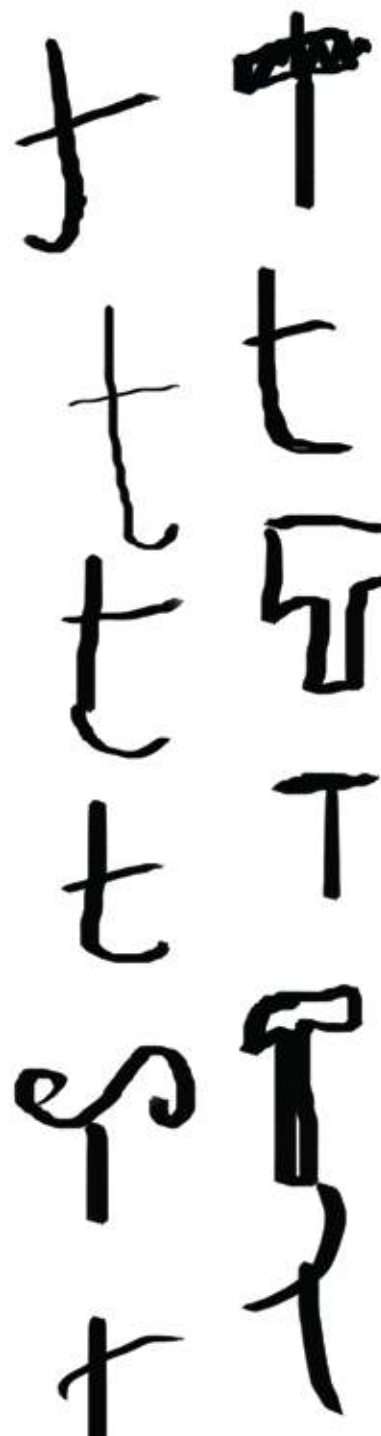


The Products

As the work progressed, creativity was on the increase, open source software flew fast around the office and the affinity to the periodic table continued. True to their geeky roots the products created were christened Tungsten, Titanium The intangible products were rendered tangible with the elements.

Moving beyond the elements and gaining steam

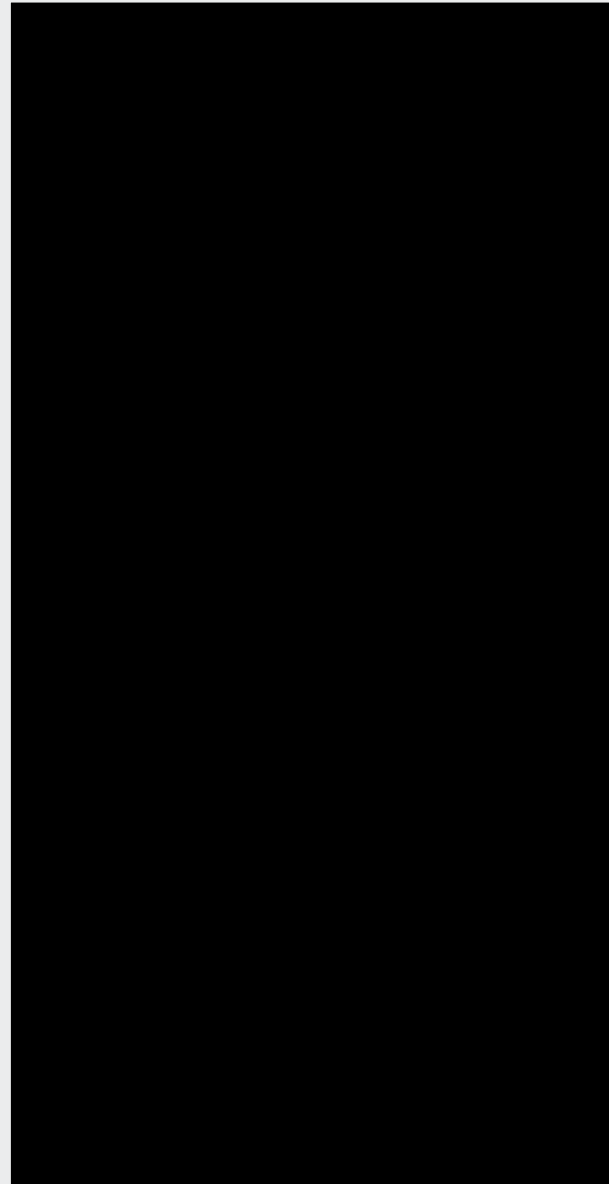
With an increased product portfolio WSO2 was establishing itself as a force to be reckoned with. Despite the teams penchant for elements beginning with a "T" it was time to grow up and name products with an eye on the market and also industry trends.



Ruwan explains

Today we are a middleware company with a complete middleware stack, but when I started with WSO2 we had only 2 products, “Tungsten” (now know as WSAS) and “Titanium” (now ESB). Titanium was renamed to ESB even before its first release. I worked with the Titanium team that spent several days including the nights to assure the quality of the release going out. Mind you, the ESB team did not spent a single night (in office) for any releases!.

Most of the people have been working on the core axis2 while 2 of us in the team including me had been asked to work on the so called “Titanium”. I thought this is not as hard as axis2 and the core stuff, but it turned out to be axis2, the core modules plus many more. I had a hard time implementing most of the core stuff of ESB, while grabbing each and every piece of core axis2, well I think I had to learn axis2 more deeper than a typical axis2 developer since the core of ESB (Apache Synapse) is using the every corner of axis2. Needless to say it was really tough at the beginning, but when you get to it, it started flowing nicely and I grabbed everything I wanted to know to complete the ESB 1.0 release. In the process I got nominated as an Apache committer and after few months I have been nominated as a PMC member for Synapse. Now I am contributing to various Apache projects and being in 2 PMCs.





Of carbon footprints and reaching for the cloud(s)

While the company does like to think of itself as environmentally friendly with a minimal carbon footprint and also constantly aspires to reach for the clouds and even get up there on 'Cloud 9', talk of Carbon and Cloud (yes the singular) take on a whole new meaning with WSO2.



Lets get Ruwan to explain further (product logo design is more contentious an issue than product design itself!)

Now WSO2 has at least 15 different products, based on the revolutionary “WSO2 Carbon” framework, plus a set of products based on the WSF-C and its scripting language counter parts. Because of the Carbon framework, the most difficult task in building a new product is the selection of the theme color (right now we have product theme colors which require careful inspection to distinguish one from the other with the human eye! Well all the colors are derived from 3 basic colors, right? After designing the logo for the product the rest of it is just writing a maven script to build the distribution. One other somewhat difficult task is to agree on a name for the new product.

logos

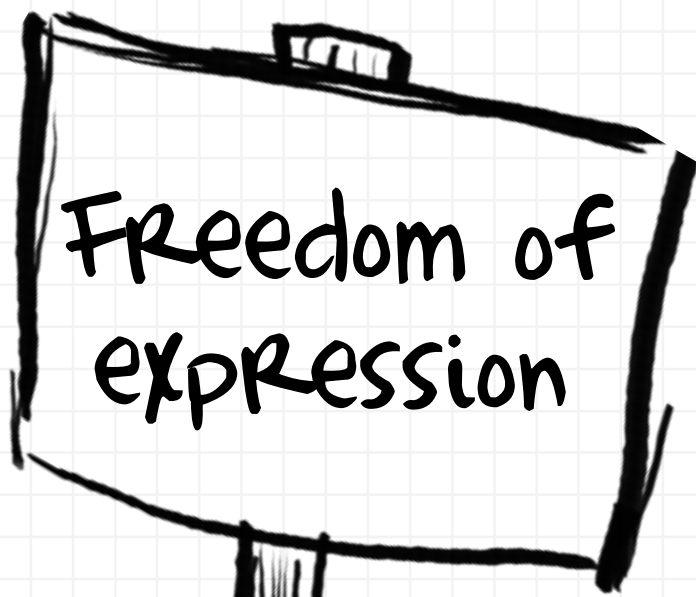
The creative
force



Pauls thoughts on the WSO2 team

I have never had a team like that of WSO2. The commitment, raw intelligence, effort and contribution has been absolutely amazing. It is a productive environment far superior to that even of IBM. We use an open source model and believe in a meritocracy. The mantra is that “people who have the skill and ability to do the job should be the ones doing it”. In large companies people who do the work don't make the decisions. With an Apache model you don't ask for permission you just do the work. You do something, get on with it and if people don't like it you discuss it. This is a powerful idea. Politics vs. doing work. WSO2 has successful product managers of a global product who are just 24 years of age and this attitude to work encourages people.

Paul emphasizes that WSO2 is not just the vision of two men. But is a product and brand that has been developed taking on board the ideas of other visionary thinkers in the business who have contributed to and expanded the vision and reality of what WSO2 has become.



The people of WSO2 are encouraged at all times to express their thoughts and ideas. From cool and collected discussions to heated debate the freedom of expression is a right to be exercised at all times. Infused with passion this is the story of Chintana Wilamuna a self proclaimed albeit retired 'free software zealot' who now does FOSS WSO2 style.

Chintana Wilamuna Associate Technical Lead

If I remember, this took place in early 2003. Given my short memory span that might be inaccurate but I'll not miss the mark much, give or take a couple of months ;-). I was a first year undergraduate and was one of those free software zealots. Even a minor diversion from clauses of the GPL or the GNU philosophy was enough for me to get all fired up. I was very active on Lanka Linux User Group mailing lists and was maintaining their web site. In a time where Linux was not that popular in Sri Lanka, I see someone is trying to get more people involved with free software. It was Sanjiva and he has started Lanka Software Foundation (LSF). And I volunteered to maintain LSF web site. I was having an email conversation with Sanjiva and a couple

of other people from LSF and one of them sends me the initial site structure. Site_Info.DOC. A Microsoft Word document! This resulted in me bashing Sanjiva and the LSF for using proprietary technology to produce free software. Needless to say, this was not a typical conversation that you have with your CEO. A year or so later when I put down my overzealous free software advocate hat and finally saw the light, I apologized for my naïve reaction. Couple of years later, in 2006 I joined WSO2 and it's been a remarkable ride ever since. Solving business problems with cutting edge technology has been an amazing experience for me. Working hard and playing hard is a wonderful aspect of the culture WSO2 has built up over the years. As a result although I never really liked Guitar Hero much I've become reasonably good at it!

Creativity unleashed

The creative process at WSO2 is unique. The work space is one that permits freedom of thought and movement. Each team member is responsible to her/himself and the team. The team is kept energized and refreshed with outings and activities that allow them to have a fresh and different perspective on the work they do. To be passionate about the work you do, you have to be passionate about life. At WSO2 you cannot help but live it up and live life to the fullest. You are your own master.



Let the Games Begin playing cricket in the corridors



The new recruits in the small office were masters of efficiency and resourcefulness. Not only did they create software and release it to the world from their little space, they maximized the use of space by also using the corridors to play cricket. Although there was some talk of complaints from neighbours the intensity of focus during play was at fever pitch and any grumblings were lost in the day to day operational sounds of the office.

old TT Days



The play hard repertoire also included some Table Tennis. Damitha Kumarage who is a Technical Lead in the company travels down memory lane to the

The play hard repertoire also included some Table Tennis. Damitha Kumarage who is a Technical Lead in the company travels down memory lane to the 'old TT days at the Merchant Tower'.

Despite space restrictions a TT table was accommodated - evidence of the resourcefulness of the new company.

Damitha explains - "we used to go and play in TT room, especially while on a "Maven build". C guys had no excuse since their build system was super fast. Still they played (with no excuse of course). You may be amazed to hear that our Sanka (Sanka Samaranaike - famous for being synchronized with

a parallel world and slow to respond in this world (was an old employee of WSO2) has the longest record of playing TT continuously- from 9am to 5pm No body even came close to that limit. Thing is that he continuously had

partners (in crime) to play the game with, during that time. A company involved in Google search business or something shared a wall with the TT room. When we played it was natural that the ball hit against the wall, occasionally with a large bang. They complained about the disturbing noises; complaints which got lost somewhere in space. There is a sense of de ja vous when we play basket ball in the current office



O))

Life work balance

Ruchith is another one of those 'early recruits' who carved out his career at WSO2. Today he is a senior software architect.

He joined WSO2 to breakaway from the typical 'software engineer' job. He says that at WSO2 "you create the next technology where you push your imagination and creativity to limits that you didn't know were possible. But the best thing about WSO 2 is the awesome culture. There's an excellent balance of work and play." He quotes one of his colleagues: "we code when we are stressed out from with all the other things we do at WSO2".



Fuelling
passions



Tharindu Mathew –

WSO2 was famous in our campus [University of Moratuwa] for the tag line “Work at home, have fun at office!” In countless campus dramas, WSO2 was depicted as the place with the guys with ping pong rackets in their laptop bags.

I had my first encounter as an intern with the company with this picture in my mind. I’ve always preferred to be in a place that does things differently and WSO2 truly fulfilled that objective. This was in 2007. At that time I had hardly touched OSS, and ‘bash’ had violent connotations to me. I was of course truly looking forward to some serious ping pong.

I’ve just not been an intern, but had the chance to be a part of this great company for over a year now. As an intern, not only did I learn quite a lot about OSS, bash (now I know it’s the terminal) and played some serious

ping, I was also able to write a product called WSF-Spring from scratch and actually released a 1.0 version (<http://wso2.org/projects/wsf/spring>). Yes, that means I went from designing to release during my internship. And all this was possible because of the great culture in the company that is truly open and agile.

I put these thoughts down in San Francisco, CA while working with some of the biggest corporate and government names in the US. They’ve witnessed a small company (at least by US standards) in Sri Lanka that outright beats the giant SOA platforms and they’ve trusted our products to head their SOA efforts. For me, WSO2 has not been just a job, it has been an experience, where I’ve seen dedicated individuals taking on giant corporations and beating them at their own game and more. We do have fun when we do just that.





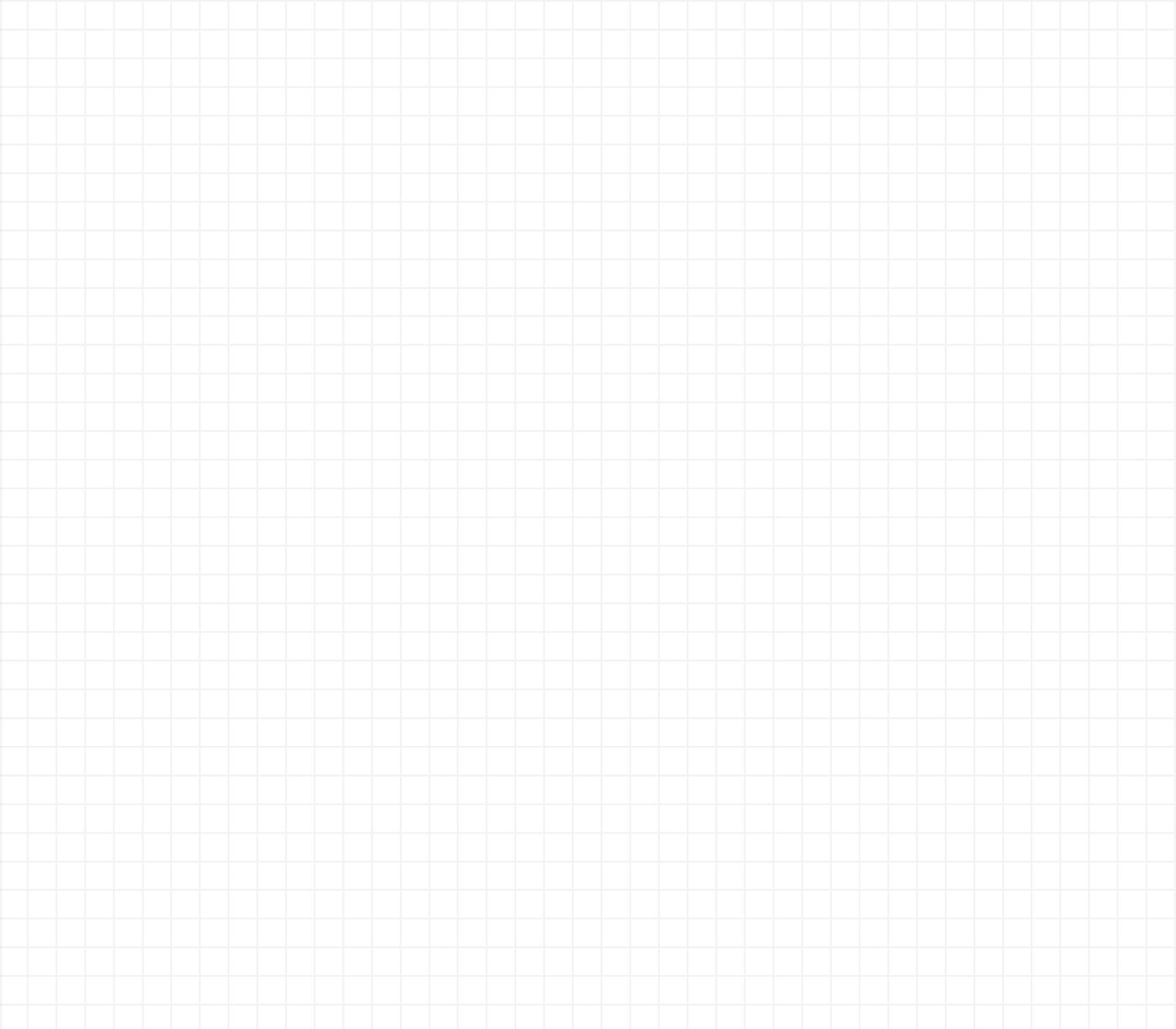
A collection of colorful, abstract shapes and streamers in the top right corner, including a large cyan and black swirl, a purple shape, a red circle, a green circle, and a yellow and orange starburst.

Coming of age

Congratulations WSO2 turns 5.



Pictures of the event



SkYROcketing beyond the clouds the vision for the future

Paul believes that in the next phase the focus will be on the importance of web architecture. He believes that the “underlying architecture of the web is important and that compositional applications will be core to the architecture of the web.” Bigger applications which are more distributed and interconnected than today will come to the fore and the web will be used to obtain enterprise applications, deployed directly from the web. The whole development process from start to finish is going to be web based and cloud based.

Paul uses the example of lettuce - chopped up and sold in sealed bags at supermarkets. “Lettuce is the easiest thing to drop into a salad requiring minimal effort, however the ‘Lettuce in bags’ business has been very successful. Why? Make things easier to do even if it is already pretty simple. Make it even easier and you have the business.

Making things easier and easier is the vision for the future. Integrate the development with web and cloud. Currently the focus is ‘run time’ and in future it will be ‘design time’. In five years the cloud will pervade every aspect of the development process.”

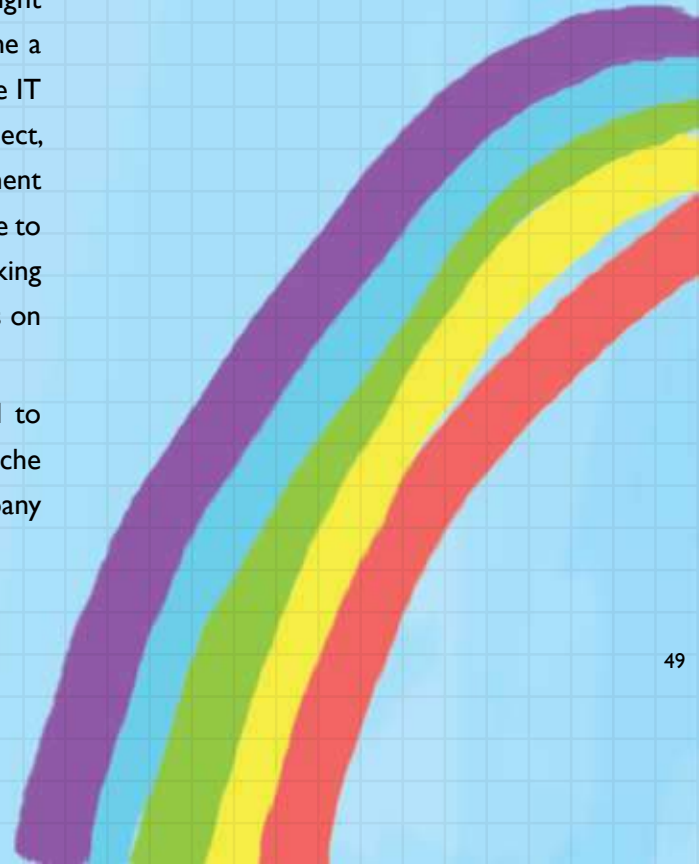
Having weathered the storm of the recession the company is has its sights set on a renewed US presence. Sanjiva believes the time is right as WSO2 has proved that it is more than merely a start up. It is a force to be reckoned with. This time round however Jonathan adds that the policy is ‘hire first and find the office space thereafter’! He also believes that Sanjiva is the most persistent person he knows and therefore he will make the US expansion a positive for the company. Sanjiva, Paul and Jonathan are of the view that the future needs to be shaped by learning from past experiences – both positive and negative - and moving forward.

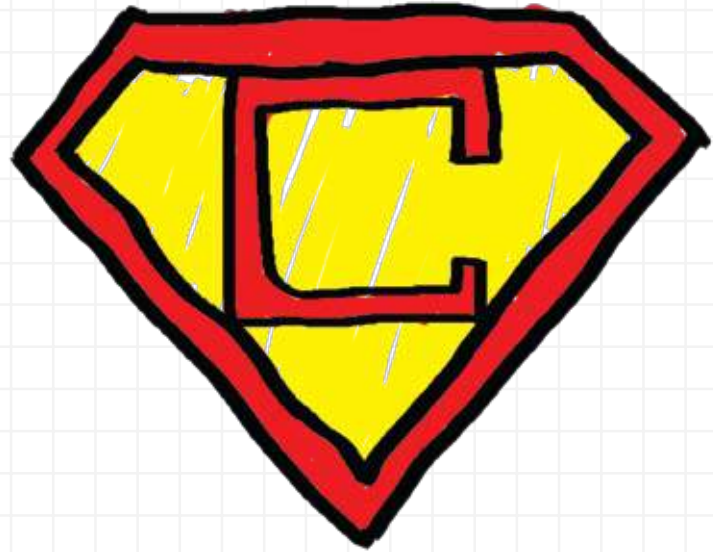
The founders and team share equally in the past, present and future of WSO2. Here, in the words of Samisa (one of the first employees), is the essence of a constantly evolving company on the brink of its next set of global challenges and achievements.

DREAMS COME TRUE

A news paper advertisement by a company named Serendib Software caught my eye, and I applied, because the company description appealed to me a lot. It was about work with open source projects. Having worked in the IT industry for two years, and most of that time on Apache Axis C++ project, I was obsessed with open source. I was overjoyed to see this advertisement as it sounded like a dream come true. I got a call from Sanjiva in response to my application. I was even more excited to know that I would be working with someone who not only knows of open source, but actually works on open source.

When I joined in September 2005, the company name had changed to WSO2. I also realized that there were open source 'giants' from Apache Web services projects behind WSO2. To work in such illustrious company was truly a dream come true.





The C Team

My initial task was to develop Axis2 engine in C. We spent a lot of time rationalizing why it should be in C and not in C++. Sanjiva's vision was to be able to embed the engine within anything written in C. Like with PHP engine, MySQL engine and the like.

The Java implementation of Axis2 was already underway. However, we wanted to have the same identical implementation of Axis2 in C. It was a challenging task to keep up with the Java implementation, as the changes were rapid, too often drastic. It was like a moving target. The best documentation was the Java code itself. However, we were lucky, that the very folks who wrote the Java code was right there sitting next to us in the office. Nandika, Damitha and myself managed to get something working, thanks to all the help from the Java folks.

The help rendered was such that, sometimes I implemented whole specs, without even reading the spec. For example, when I was implementing WS-Addressing, I just spoke to Chinthaka, and looked into his Java code, and did not bother to read the spec.

We got more people into C team, as time passed, and we started on getting the engine embedded into engines. One of our first efforts was to get it to work with PHP engine, and that remains one of the most successful efforts to date.

Beyond Technology

It is not only technology that I learned in the initial years of WSO2, but people and managerial skills. Advice from both Sanjiva and Jivaka played a major role in that. Some of the key points that I still remember include:

You got to trust that others will **deliver** what they are assigned to deliver.

You have got to **act responsibly**, when you are deemed to be a senior person by others.

You cannot be the sole super star and build a **strong team**. Let others also play their super star roles.

The leader should be **willing** to do the boring work, rather than letting others do the boring bits all the time.

Delegation is the key to **empowering** people. Empowering is the key to **motivate** people.

You do not ask for respect, **you earn it**.

Leadership Responsibility

I was surprised when Sanjiva and Jivaka spoke to me in March 2008, to say I had been promoted to Director, Engineering. As always, the rationale, according to Sanjiva, was meritocracy. A breeze of happiness and comfort flew through my chest when he said that they were impressed with how I managed the C team and delivered high quality multiple releases. When he said that the board has approved my appointment as director, I felt “boy, this got to be more serious than it sounds!” I was happy to accept it, but at the same time, I felt a slight burden in my

heart. How am I going to live up to the expectations? It was the steepest challenge that I ever faced in my career. During the first few months I struggled internally trying to figure out how to go about playing this new role. As most of the other things in WSO2, I had to discover my own path and invent what I had to do. It was an exciting new adventure. I have got to admit, that it was not easy. However, I was fortunate that the effort on WSO2 Carbon was initiated at the same time.

Engineering Marvel

I had the great opportunity of working with everyone in the team, get my feet wet, and play multiple roles and bond with everyone. WSO2 Carbon is a software engineering marvel, not only because of the superior architectural design and implementation, but also because of the limited time within which we delivered it with such quality. Being

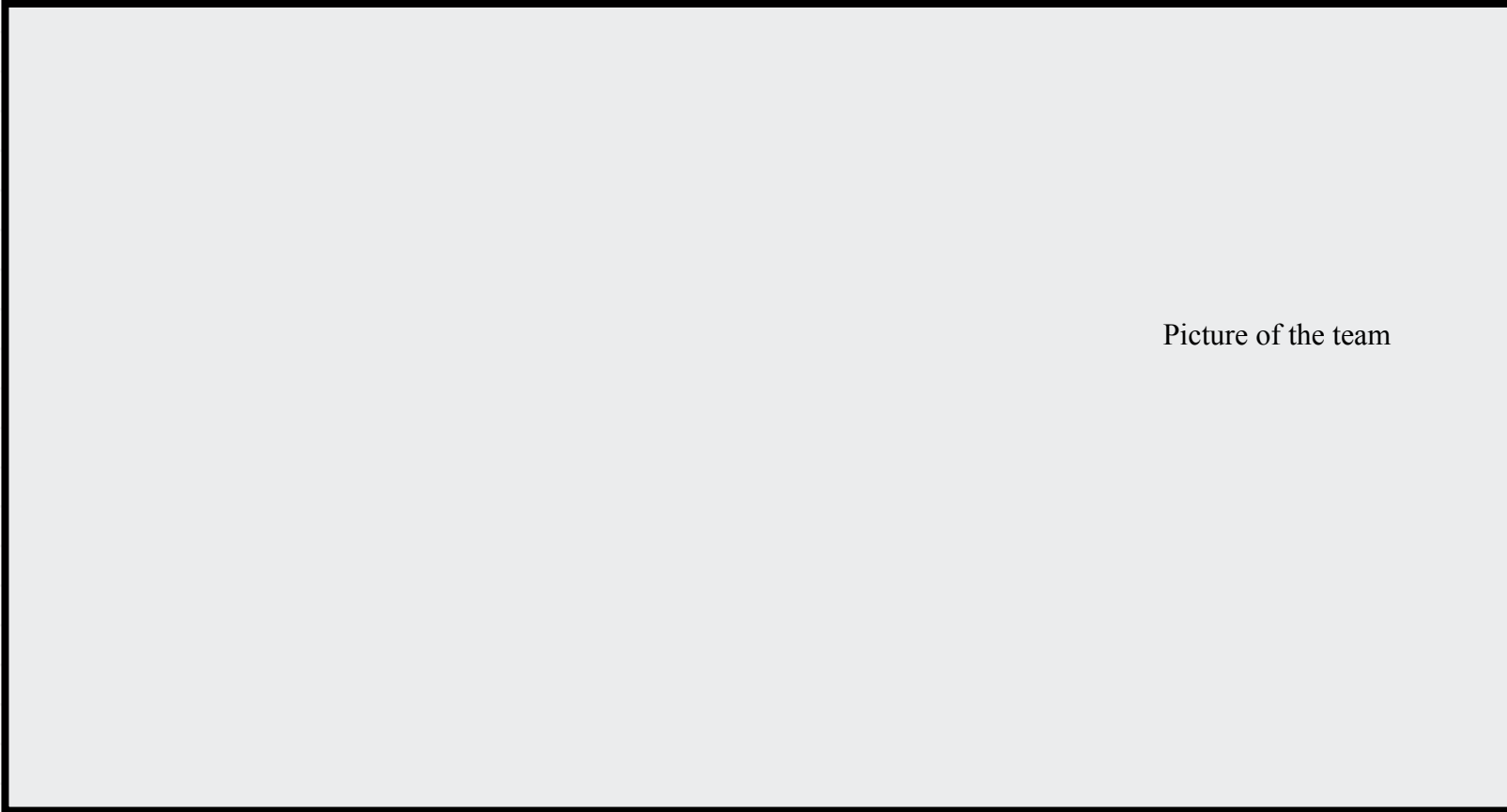
a part of that team is the greatest software engineering experience I have had to date. I remember Azeez mentioning at one point, while this effort on Carbon was going on, that everything seemed “professional”. Indeed, what we have built is evidence. I cherish being part of that whole exercise.

People Skills

More than technical skills, it is people skills that I developed, over the past three years. I am grateful to WSO2 as it entrusted me with the leadership role, and I got the opportunity to develop myself into a better leader. While it is a luxury to play a leadership role in one of the smartest teams in the world, it is also one of the toughest jobs. The exciting part is that life is always full of challenges. You always have an opportunity to invent something new; one of the two key reasons that motivates me to go to work every morning.

The Team

The other key reason that makes WSO2 special for me is the team. When I say the team, it is both the people as well as the way the team operates. I always feel that there is something to learn from the rest of my team. Obviously working with the likes of Sanjiva, Paul and Jonathan, who have worked for leading companies for years on many exciting projects, on leading WS specifications and open source projects, there is a sea of knowledge around you. But you can also learn from many individuals in the WSO2 team, who are experts in various domains, and often, some of the best in their respective domains. If you want expert opinion on clustering, security, reliable messaging, SOA, EIP, eventing, governance, or cloud computing, to name but a few, they all are just few steps away at WSO2. Everyone is willing to share their knowledge and collaborate with each other; thanks to the Apache way of doing things. We have individuals with the best know-how, but we do not have "pig heads".



Picture of the team

A Team that Works

Sometimes, it is thought that, if one works hard that individual is bound to prosper. But in an organization, in a team, if the rest of the folks are missing, while you are willing to work late nights to get the work done, it does not work out well. People tell me that I work hard, and that I am always there when things are happening. But the reality is that I work hard and even work late, I see things happen, because there were others there, willing to work hard, till things the job got done. WSO2 Stratos is the most recent example, where the team worked day and night, to get it up and running to meet the timeline we defined to go public with our PaaS offering.

When I want help whatever time of day, I have never found it impossible to find someone at WSO2. It is that spirit that brought us so far, and it is that spirit that will take WSO2 to new heights in the times to come. It is this niche team that keeps me going.

