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Mixing it up: From army officer to DJ

Following a stint in the Army, James Garside is now product manager for apps and platforms at London nightclub and record label Ministry of Sound

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Sound idea: former Army officer James Garside now works for Ministry of Sound

By Paul Bray

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Having studied music at the University of East Anglia (specialising in the violin), James Garside spent five years as an Army officer in the Royal Anglian Regiment, rising to the rank of captain.

He then took an MA in Music Business Management at the University of Westminster, and joined Ministry of Sound in 2012. Last year he oversaw the launch of his new radio app.

"Recorded music is technology these days and I went into music technology knowing that I wanted to have an effect on the music industry. Recorded music is owned by the tech giants, including Apple, Google and Spotify, and it's fascinating to watch innovative technologies arrive and then predict the effect they'll have.

"Mobile is the place to be if you want to get noticed. I was lucky to start my internship at Ministry of Sound in mobile. I soon found that everyone here wanted to understand it, so I got a high degree of visibility and saw every facet of the business. Now I get a lot of face time with our senior management.

"Innovation gives me an adrenaline rush. I love being the first to do something, in a nice app, and watch people download and use it. Last autumn Apple selected Ministry of Sound's radio app as one of the best new apps and featured it on its app store. We've had hundreds of thousands of downloads since then.

"The speed at which you can innovate is incredible. We can introduce a change live on Monday, monitor who downloads it on Tuesday and how they use it on Wednesday, adjust it on Thursday, and by Friday it's live again. The most responsive project in the whole company, the app is able to reach a new audience for Ministry of Sound fans, so the pressure is definitely on.

"Mobile users take the path of least resistance. We carefully monitor how people use our app, and we've found they don't dig deep and explore new features as much as we expected. We made a small change, giving them a simple, one-touch tile to play music, and found it dramatically increased usage.

"I love having my own radio show. I mix the Chilled House Sessions show on Ministry of Sound Radio from 10pm to 12pm every Thursday. I use SoundCloud a lot and follow music blogs, and friends share links to new music. In a week, I'll play about 10 new tracks, as well as some classics and personal favourites. I have tens of thousands of listeners, so it's a big responsibility.

"My passion is also my profession – in other words, I don't distinguish between work and pleasure. Our office is next door to the Ministry of Sound nightclub and I can wander straight in on a Saturday night. I DJ with my mates from the office every now and then: we get a room in the club and run it all night, which is cool.

"Playing the violin is great training for being a DJ. It helped me to develop my perfect pitch, which means I can blend songs more musically and in key. To manage a dance music app, you have to know the music well, so my training really helps.

"Experience as an army officer is useful in a technical profession. You learn how to take the lead, be resilient and self-reliant, but you also learn to work hard and be diligent.

"Everything I do now requires conscientiousness and meticulously going through a product, knowing that if I miss something it will affect the user's experience.

"If you want to break into the music industry, my advice is: work hard and make yourself indispensable. I consciously set out to do that as an intern and it paid off. If you're always willing to go the extra mile and take on the menial, number-crunching jobs, it will get you noticed."

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Key dates

- MARCH 15:** Closing date for all STEM Awards entries
- MARCH 20:** Each category sponsor will shortlist five entries and invite them to present their idea in person
- APRIL 9:** Selected candidates to pitch their ideas to category sponsors
- APRIL 22:** Submission of final entries by category winners
- LATE APRIL:** Presentation at Babcock's London HQ
- JUNE:** STEM Awards 2015 ceremony in London (date and venue to be confirmed)

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