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Demystifying the Microsoft Regional Director

By Jonathan Goodyear

In the March 2006 issue of *asp.netPRO*, I answered the question of just [what is a Microsoft Most Valuable Professional \(MVP\) anyway?](#), as well as provided insight on how to become one yourself. This month I am going to share some details about another hat I wear — that of Microsoft Regional Director (<http://msdn.microsoft.com/isv/rd/>).

The comment I get most often when I introduce myself to someone as a Microsoft Regional Director (RD) is that they didn't know I was a Microsoft employee. Of course, that assumption is false. RDs are not employed by Microsoft. In fact, we are not compensated for our role as RDs (that's not completely true ... more on that in a bit). The role of an RD is to act as an unbiased third-party evangelist of Microsoft products and services and to work with software developers to ensure successful project engagements. We act as the glue between Microsoft and the developer community.

There are approximately 50 RDs in the United States, and approximately 130 worldwide. The word "Region" in the title doesn't equate to any particular boundary, though. Rather, it is based on the population density of Microsoft customers and developers. For instance, there is an RD just for Silicon Valley alone, while some RDs cover several states. I happen to be one of two RDs for the state of Florida. You shouldn't think of RDs as bound to their assigned region, though, as we do travel a lot.

Microsoft has their own Developer Evangelists (DE) with whom RDs work closely. A Microsoft DE, Alex Lowe, has written a pretty good explanation of his job function in his blog (<http://blogs.msdn.com/alowe/archive/2004/02/07/69495.aspx>). An important distinction between RDs and DEs is that DEs can be influenced to ride the party line. RDs, on the other hand, can (and often do) voice strong opinions in opposition to things Microsoft is doing that the RDs feel don't fall in line with the interests of Microsoft developers, end users, and customers. RDs have many



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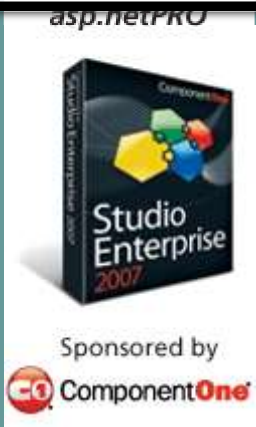
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RDs present at large conferences like TechEd, PDC, VSLive, and ASP.NET Connections. They also frequent smaller venues, like user group meetings and Code Camps. They even visit individual companies like yours to provide free guidance on Microsoft technologies.

Back to the issue of compensation. Although there is no cash compensation for being an RD, the position does come with numerous benefits. Some of these include MSDN subscriptions, free admission to conferences, and access to insiders and insider information. Essentially, Microsoft gives RDs the tools and access they need to help its customers make intelligent technology decisions. Several RDs (myself included) own consulting companies, so we also provide longer-term paid consulting services to some customers we visit that have such a need. RD visits are not sales pitches, though, which is a point I cannot over-emphasize.

So, how do you become an RD? There's really no simple equation. The title isn't strictly merit-based like that of MVP, and Microsoft doesn't often create new RD positions. The term of an RD is two years, but there is no limit to the number of terms a particular RD can serve. An important point of note is that while MVPs are not obligated to do anything, RDs carry a great deal of responsibility. Microsoft expects RDs to connect with their customers and developers on a regular basis. This large responsibility can cause turnover; but this is a good thing, because it adds fresh insight, ideas, and motivation to the entire program. Microsoft has also been known to hire some RDs who are able to fill a particular internal need they have. When a new RD is needed, Microsoft turns to nominations (both internal and external to the program).

I hope this column has helped educate you on the role of the Microsoft Regional Director. I also hope you will reach out to your local RD and ask them to come speak at your company, your user group, or your Code Camp. That's why we're here, and we really do enjoy meeting each of you, getting you excited about Microsoft technology, and helping to guide you in the right direction. We also want to hear what you like and don't like about Microsoft products and services. We have the ability to take that feedback directly to the people at Microsoft who can help answer your questions, resolve your issues, or exact necessary changes — they are just as anxious as we are to make you happy.

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