



Delivering software solutions since 1998

*69 Esher Road,
East Molesey,
Surrey.
KT8 0AQ
United Kingdom*

*Telephone: 01932 225349
Fax: 020 8399 4923*

*Web: <http://www.3Ds.co.uk>
E-mail: Contact@3Ds.co.uk*



Introduction

3Ds (UK) Limited is a privately owned UK-based consultancy and software house, specialising in the Microsoft development platform. Established in 1998, we provide consulting & support services to our clients, along with training & development resources - both for legacy systems and the latest technology solutions.

Whether your systems utilise older architectures or the latest Windows development tools, or you wish to link the two worlds together, our consultants & development team maintain the highest standards to deliver the results you want, on time and to budget.

3Ds also develops and supports a full range of monitoring solutions for the Windows environment. The Sentry-go[®] Monitoring System provides our customers with affordable, automated monitoring systems that are quick & easy to use and provide support teams, IT & company management with the information they need access to.

Sentry-go is used and trusted by customers worldwide including the United Kingdom, Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and the Far East.

3Ds (UK) Limited is registered in Wales, United Kingdom, company reg. no. 03598401.



Our Services

3Ds offers a full range of technical & programming services. Specialising predominantly in Windows-based client/server, database and web-based solutions, these include ...

- Consulting
- Software development & project management
- Technical support & troubleshooting
- Technical reviews & system investigations
- Custom monitoring solutions
- Utility & script maintenance & development
- Training

Each task is tailored to your specific needs from the smallest Microsoft Office macro to complete IT projects & solutions.

Contact us today to find out more!



Consulting

Whether you require a single day to discuss or investigate a specific technical issue, ongoing development support, or longer term assistance with your broader company & IT strategy, our experience can help you through each stage of a system's development lifecycle.

From design and development through to ultimate delivery and deployment, we can provide either on-site or off-site consulting to suit your needs.



Software Development

Our development team have many years of experience in designing, developing and delivering solutions, from small utilities & scripts that can help automate otherwise long winded manual tasks, through to full-scale multi-tier systems.

For example, we can ...

- Design, build or implement a new system to your requirements
- Integrate a new system into your existing infrastructure
- Recommend & implement improvements by upgrading your environment or systems
- Enhance an existing system
- Automate tasks to make your job easier
- Port or upgrade an older system to take advantage of the latest technologies & advances

Whether you want a command-line tool, a simple macro or script, a Windows-based GUI or web-based interface with database & external system integration, we can help with your project, either on or off-site.

By combining the latest technologies with your existing environment, our developers can also integrate new solutions and updates with the current systems you already run, thus helping to maintain the IT investment you already have. Solutions include client, server, private (in-house) or public facing systems and can be custom written or integrated with tools such as Microsoft SharePoint, InfoPath & Microsoft Office.



Technical Support

Support is an integral part of any IT system & our Technical Support team is there to help you when you need them most. For example if you ...

- Have a software problem
- Have an environmental conflict that needs resolving
- Suspect a bug in an application
- Have a poorly performing system that you wish to improve
- Have a VBA macro you wish to troubleshoot or enhance (e.g. Excel macros, Word macros, integration with Microsoft Outlook or Exchange)
- Want to review an existing system before making changes or improvements

Our support team is available to give advice, perform investigation and provide recommendations & solutions to software problems you may encounter. We can achieve this in a number of ways to suit your individual needs. Using our own Sentry-go monitoring solutions we can also help automate the monitoring process, saving you money time and money, yet safe in the knowledge your systems are working without issue.

- **One-off Solutions** If you have a specific problem that you or your helpdesk are trying to resolve, then we may be able to help. Our support team has many years of experience with the Windows environment as well as the underlying technologies and programming languages that run on it.
- **Ongoing Support** If you don't have a dedicated support group but want the peace of mind if technical problems do arise with your desktop and/or server machines, then contact us today.
- **Out-of-hours Cover** Computer systems don't just run between 9am and 5pm, they often need to operate 24 hours a day, maybe to provide batch "overnight" processing or to support a web site accessed world-wide and across different time-zones.

3Ds provides cover to clients outside of the normal office hours in order to provide support to your end-users & customers even when most helpdesks are shut.



Code & Quality Reviews

Application reviews & audits give you an independent assessment of a system, both from a design and technical perspective. This can be very effective during both development process when accepting software under a support agreement or whilst investigating recurring application or performance problems.



Training

Training is an essential part of the development process and our bespoke courses, tailored specifically for your company's environment will give developers the information they need to design, develop, deliver and support systems now and in the future.

Upon completion, the training can, if required be backed up by consultancy for ongoing support in the first few months thus allowing teams or individuals build on the skills they've learnt.

Examples of our bespoke courses include ...

- Developing VBA macros with Microsoft Excel (Training for trainers)
- Technical Support for Windows Professionals
- ODBC & TCP/IP Technical Support
- Windows - Beyond Visual Basic
- Web Seminar for DBAs
- Understanding COM, MTS & COM+



Technologies

We're constantly reviewing the technologies we use to ensure we keep up to date with the latest ideas & versions, as well as realising our client's existing investment in older environments.

Development Environments

Tools used to develop & host your applications

Microsoft .NET Framework	ASP & ASP.NET
Visual Basic .NET (& v6.0)	ADO & ADO.NET
Visual C++ .NET (& v6.0)	ODBC & OLE/DB
Microsoft Foundation Classes (MFC)	SharePoint Server & InfoPath
C	Microsoft Office technologies & forms
C#	Windows Sockets (WINSOCK)
SQL & Stored Procedures	TCP/IP
HTML & DHTML	The Windows API
XML & XSLT	

The correct choice of development environment & the technologies that will be used are key to the successful design & implementation of any system. Going over the top makes the system hard to maintain and may be totally inappropriate & expensive for what's needed. However, writing something quick and simple may work for one user, but may not scale when things take off.

There are a wide range of tools & environments, many of which overlap. It's easy to go straight for the newest but it's also worth considering the detail - things like ...

- What will the solution have to do ?
- Which environments are best for what I am trying to achieve ?
- Who is my customer & what's the best solution for them ?
- What skills do I have available to develop and/or support the new system ?
- What systems already exist and will they need to interact with the new solution?
- What are the specific complexities the team will face ?
- What environments do I currently support and how will the new system fit in ?

For example, the latest version of Microsoft's .NET development platform allows languages such as VB and C++ to be mixed within projects, thus leveraging the best from the features available in each. C# also allows you to take advantage of newer techniques available in .NET and is ideal for the different types of development available within the framework. Microsoft .NET also provides easier integration between technologies & environments such as the web, Windows & services with Visual Studio. The "C" programming language maybe old, but much of Windows, DLLs & drivers still use it. With direct access to the Windows API, C remains the language of choice for many solutions and is extremely powerful.

Some other considerations ...

- Web developments are popular and can have huge advantages in both deployment and the overall user experience. But they can be slow, especially for simple data entry type solutions or where speed of access is essential. Even though the data may be the same, a seller doesn't always need, or want, the same interface as a buyer!
- Off the shelf packages are quick & may be a cheaper solution in the short term. However, they may not do exactly what you need and getting them to do it may actually make things more confusing and more expensive than a tailored solution.

How can 3Ds help ? Our consultants can discuss each of these options and help you determine the best approach to take. Our development team can help either deliver, or assist your own developers in designing & building the new solution.

Scripted Technologies

Allowing logic on your client & server

Visual Basic for Applications (VBA)

Microsoft Office integration

(e.g. Word & Excel macros)

Client or Server-side scripting

VBScript

Javascript

Perl

Php

If written & designed properly, scripting can be a quick & neat solution for some tasks - especially for automating what would otherwise be a manual process. It's also the method of choice for implementing client side - and sometimes server-side logic into your web sites & applications where users don't wish to run ActiveX or embedded logic on their desktop. Adding small amounts of logic to documents can also help make the underlying data much more intelligent - e.g. to perform validation within a shared document or form.

However, take this too far and you soon have what ought to be a packaged system wrapped up in an Excel spreadsheet! Before you know it, your business is reliant on Excel macros, something you don't want now and on day one you may not have considered.

How can 3Ds help ? Our consultants can advise on the use of scripting technologies, the choices available and how to use them. We can also develop scripted solutions, re-model old ones, or review scripts as part of a larger design.

Database Technologies

Securely store your data

Microsoft SQL Server
Microsoft Access
CA-Ingres
SQL & Stored Procedures

A database is more than just somewhere to store data – it's often the heart of the system! If access to the data is slow, or the database itself isn't performing well, any system connecting to it, no matter what the environment you're using will perform badly.

An optimised, well designed and tuned database on the other hand, can make all the difference, as can well thought through SQL access strategies.

How can 3Ds help ? We have many years experience in database systems and the technologies that access them, from design & stored procedures to ADO and front end access.

Server Technologies & Environments

Solutions to run on or against server-based technologies

Microsoft SQL Server
Internet Information Services (IIS)
Microsoft Exchange
MS-DTC, COM/COM+
SharePoint Server & InfoPath
Microsoft Office technologies & Forms

Make use of the technology available, but try to keep things simple when you can. For example, COM+ or distributed transactions are great when you need them, but an added cost when you don't. It's important to understand the relative strengths and weaknesses of the technologies you're using so you can "play to the strengths and avoid the weaknesses" as much in the design as in the code.

Sometimes off the shelf or built-in solutions work well and are a perfect fit; sometimes though the requirements are far more easily met by developing a bespoke solution, even if at first this seems a more daunting task.

How can 3Ds help ? Our consultants & development team can help leverage the best from the technologies you're using and recommend changes where appropriate. From single user applications to fully scalable systems with distributed transactions & multi-user access, they are here to help.

Application Types

Using the most appropriate type of solution for the job

GUI-based systems
Web-based systems & applications
DLLs
Windows Services
COM/COM+ components
.NET components
Command-line utilities
Automated solutions
(e.g. monitoring solutions)

Although at first this seems obvious, you might be surprised at how often this ought to be considered more fully. In order to get the best out of the environment, your logic needs to run in the right place and this often means breaking it down into smaller pieces in order to position it correctly.

Sometimes the answer is obvious, but sometimes it isn't. Like an engine, if you get this right, your system has a much better chance of running like a well oiled machine. Get it wrong, and you may have an engine, but it may spend more time in the garage being patched than you'd like!

How can 3Ds help ? Our consultants have a good understanding of the core IT technologies and principals. By initially taking a higher level view and stepping back from the problem, they can work with your own team & customers alike to design the solution that's right. Whether it's a simple script, single Windows GUI or a fully blown service-based solution with multi-layered web front ends, you'll reap the rewards by getting this step correct.



Contacting Us

If you would like further information on any of the services or solutions we offer, speak to a consultant or discuss your development, monitoring or support requirements, however large or small, we'd be happy to talk to you.

- E-mail Contact@3Ds.co.uk

We aim to respond to all e-mail enquiries within one working day

- Post 3Ds (UK) Limited,
69, Esher Road,
East Molesey,
Surrey.
KT8 0AQ
United Kingdom.
- Telephone (+44) (0) 1932 225349
- Fax (+44) (0) 208 399 4923



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