

MICHAEL FORSTER

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SUMMARY

Technical liaison and solutions engineer with 15+ years on first-of-their-kind programs across connected vehicles, geospatial platforms, and enterprise B2B SaaS. The person companies embed when the program is too important to hand to someone who needs a ramp: resident engineering, multi-vendor triage, and customer trust from the facility floor to the C-suite. Currently building AI-assisted field data pipelines and private distributed inference infrastructure. Strongest where the technical relationship and the customer relationship are the same job.

EXPERIENCE

Founder / Research and Design Engineer

06/2023 – Present

Rijkrs Park LLC · Missoula, MT

- Founding engineer of a biological research and production venture focused on mycology- and plant-based nutritional alternatives; own everything from research design through production systems.
- Built AI-assisted field data pipelines and geospatial telemetry workflows; designed and operate a private, sovereignty-first inference cluster on distributed Apple Silicon (Exo, RDMA) for on-premise ML workloads.
- Provide B2B technical consulting in research, systems analysis, and technical support to academic institutions and enterprise clients.

Resident Engineer

02/2022 – 09/2023

TomTom Automotive · embedded with Stellantis (UConnect) · North America, LATAM, EU

- TomTom's representative inside the Stellantis UConnect program, coordinating with Harman and Aptiv on critical traffic services and lane-level (2–3 cm) data feeding map-driven autonomous driving.
- Built a code review tool with an Italy-based counterpart to trace each defect to the team actually responsible; ran first-pass triage on every bug assigned to TomTom from drive tests tied to sprint releases.
- Cut core development discovery workload by 70% and pushed misattributed defects back with evidence, with the customer relationship intact.
- Coordinated cross-functional teams and external vendors across three continents inside a SAFe Agile framework.

Principal Test Engineer

12/2020 – 02/2022

TomTom Automotive · North America, LATAM

- Owned system reliability for remote edge devices through automated testing and resource management; validated TomTom's Traffic Service API informing decisions across road networks in 70+ countries.
- Directed technical triage on edge-case deployment challenges; authored test scripts that neutralized critical bugs before production release.

Expert Sales Engineer

03/2017 – 12/2020

TomTom Automotive · North America, EU, LATAM

- Carried TomTom's first major North America automotive deal (Nissan via Bosch as Tier 1) from pre-sales through delivery, absorbing the Product Owner function when the program needed continuity.
- Architected technical proofs of concept translating geospatial and telemetry data into business intelligence; led the technical side of RFP responses and proactive system health checks for Tesla, Volvo, and Nissan.
- Secured and oversaw multi-million dollar SaaS initiatives from initial concept through final delivery.

Senior Technical Account Manager

06/2015 – 03/2017

TomTom International BV · North America, EU

- Directed technical account management and continuous SDLC support for major enterprise deployments of navigation and spatial software.
- Partnered with global hardware suppliers to expand offerings into advanced SaaS, high-definition mapping, and TomTom's Traffic Service API.

Regional Technical Manager

01/2014 – 05/2015

EagleView (formerly Pictometry) · North America, Midwest Region

- Primary technical architect integrating aerial imagery and geospatial intelligence with enterprise SaaS analytics platforms.
- Secured \$4.3M in contracts, 26% year-over-year growth, by demonstrating complex visual intelligence solutions to government and enterprise sectors.
- Led JavaScript-based API integrations for client web and desktop applications; delivered spatial analysis and remote sensing for utility and infrastructure corridor mapping.

Transportation Systems Analyst

09/2009 – 02/2014

Center for Automotive Research (CAR) · Ann Arbor, MI

- Collaborated with UMTRI on the Safety Pilot Model Deployment, the first large-scale real-world DSRC deployment (2,800+ vehicles, 25+ roadside units across Ann Arbor); translated field data into deployment guidance for MDOT and USDOT.
- Embedded technical liaison at Toyota's Ann Arbor technical center multiple days per week for over a year, serving as the program's technical face to the customer.
- Research contributed to three CAR publications on connected-vehicle technology (2012–2014); co-authored Bridge Condition Assessment Using Remote Sensing (BCAURS).

Geographic Information Systems Analyst

05/2008 – 09/2009

University of Michigan · Ann Arbor, MI

- Engineered a web-based geospatial asset tracking platform monitoring distributed physical assets across university properties.
- Standardized municipal, utility, and environmental datasets for analysis; provided training and hardware/software support for spatial analysis workstations and GPS tracking devices.

Graduate Student Instructor

01/2007 – 04/2008

Eastern Michigan University · Ann Arbor, MI

- Directed technical troubleshooting for lab networks; primary technical liaison between academic staff and IT support.

Check-in Service Manager

04/2003 – 04/2007

FedEx Ground · Ann Arbor, MI

- Ran evening sort operations with a 30+ person team while completing an electrical engineering degree full-time, including full manual sort recovery under facility power loss.
- Used proprietary logistics and routing software to optimize outbound sorting; conducted internal audits and directed on-site technical support for software systems and operational hardware.

EDUCATION

M.Sc., Geographic Information Systems

2006 – 2008

Eastern Michigan University · Ypsilanti, MI · remote sensing focus, GISP certified

B.S., Electrical Engineering & Computer Science

2002 – 2006

Eastern Michigan University · Ypsilanti, MI

Microcomputer System Support

1999 – 2002

Washtenaw Community College · Ann Arbor, MI

CERTIFICATIONS

GISP · Cisco CCNA · AWS Cloud Practitioner · In progress: CCNP, AWS Solutions Architect, MikroTik MTCNA