Hubert Burda Media

Ulf Heyden - BurdaForward

"Want to join me?"

"For me, the airport is a playground for attention-grabbing advertising. Very few places have such a perfect target audience with time to spare," says Ulf Heyden © *HBM*

A woman with a huge red suitcase fights her way through the mass of people greeting each other and saying goodbye. In the midst of it all, Ulf Heyden, Executive Director New Business at *BurdaForward*, analyses a banner hanging from the ceiling. It's 9.00 am at Munich airport.

As part of our "Want to join me?" interview series, I met Ulf in the arrivals hall and accompanied him into the city. The airport is filled with banners, car hire companies and restaurants vying for travellers' attention. A poster offers half a litre of beer for €2.75.

Ulf pays far more attention to these campaigns than other people. After all, advertising is his job – more specifically, his job is to ensure that his customers' adverts reach their target audience on Hubert Burda Media's online portals. He has just returned from the Native Advertising Days in Berlin, a forum for discussing the future of digital advertising. He started his day by rating the sleep app on his Apple Watch. The Pokemons he has just caught on his mobile have been named after his three children. "I use the Pokemon Go app for digital procrastination when commuting and travelling", he admits, proudly showing me the latest creatures on his phone. "I'm fascinated by the app's approach to gamification, how Ninantic encourages people to use it every day!"

"For me, the airport is a playground for attention-grabbing advertising. Very few places have such a perfect target audience with time to spare. Companies make a real effort here with elaborate installations," he says, pointing to a poster for a car hire company. The poster shows a giraffe with the slogan "High rents leave a lump in my throat". Munich residents in particular will appreciate this double meaning – living here is very expensive.

While the adverts Ulf works with in his job may not be hanging in the airport, they are everywhere – on the phones of the travellers moving through the building with their heads down and their eyes on their smartphones.

New technologies need rules

"But advertising is annoying," I think. Before I can get the words out, Ulf says: "Advertising mustn't be annoying. Our native advertising places adverts in a context with content that interests the reader. Advertising should add value and act like another piece of good news. Of course it must be clearly labelled and there must be clear rules." Ulf sometimes thinks the internet needs more rules. "GDPR was vital." While he may not agree with all the GDPR regulations, he sees it as a very good thing that the Wild West of the internet is being curbed. New technologies need rules.

"What was the last thing you bought yourself after seeing it on some site or other?" I ask. He laughs quickly: "A while ago I slipped a disc. On a social network, I saw an ad for a T-shirt that corrects your posture. I didn't know such a thing existed, and it actually works. It shows that personalised advertising tailored to the user works extremely well. On our *BurdaForward* portals, we want to show relevant adverts while respecting our users' privacy. We're working on that at the moment."

We are now in Ulf's car, heading into the city. "I'll drop you off in Bogenhausen and carry on to *BurdaForward* on St.-Martin-Strasse. It's on the way," he says, putting his foot down. He's a frequent traveller, often flying from one city to the next and commuting around 50 minutes to work each day. "I listen to 20 hours of podcasts each week – mainly about Bitcoin and blockchain, which I find fascinating." Ulf runs the "BlockchainForward" working group at *BurdaForward*.

The journey has only just begun

Before Ulf drops me off and heads to his office, I ask him one last question: "What will your job be like in 10 years?" "Many of the things I do today will certainly be automated by that point. However, I'd like to continue developing digital structures and models that can be used to earn money. I remember programming on my Sinclair ZX-81 in the early 80s. That computer had 1 KB of memory. That wouldn't even fill an email these days. But the digital world is still in its infancy." The door closes and his car disappears into the traffic.

Ulf's journey has only just begun.

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by **Saki Athanassios Danoglidis**
Senior Editor - Corporate Communications
Athanassios.Danoglidis@burda.com

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