

# Hubert Burda Media

Jan Schenk - The Weather Channel

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## “Want to join me?”



As part of our interview series "Want to join me?" I accompany Jan on his way to the office, which is about 40 kilometres from his front door

A strong wind blows the autumn leaves along the empty streets. The sun has not yet risen, and the first commuters stumble drowsily to the train station. It is just before 6 am in Freising near Munich as Jan Schenk, Head of The Weather Channel Germany, hurtles down the road on his bicycle. He wears an orange raincoat and a broad smile and is unacceptably chipper for this early hour. Good morning!

As part of our “Want to join me?” interview series, I accompany Jan on his route to work, around 40 kilometres from his home. “The weather is particularly mild today. The foehn wind has turned it warmer overnight. It’s very unusual,” he muses as we squeeze onto the packed bus.

I ask him how he came to work in meteorology. “I was an officer with the armed forces and trained as an aeronautical meteorologist,” he says. Jan compiled weather forecasts for flight routes and spent two months in Afghanistan back in 2010. “When the winds were strong in the foothills of the Hindu Kush, the pilots had to rely on my forecasts.” This was particularly important for fighter aircraft which, should there be an emergency, would not be able to land just anywhere.

**“It’s about trust”**

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*“My job is about trust. You can never predict the weather with 100% accuracy, but as a meteorologist you have to make a decision. Experience is very important. My former boss once said that we are the only ones who have to predict the future; everyone else just fills in PowerPoint slides.”*

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Jan and his colleagues are following in a long tradition of oracles who have been offering predictions since time immemorial. The difference is that Jan's prophecies are based on tangible scientific data that, as we travel to the office, sweep across maps on his phone in the form of colourful whirling stripes. Next stop: the airport! We board the train in a crowd of people.

### **“Today is going to be a good day”**

He suddenly stops talking, looking out of the window in excitement. The sun is slowly appearing on the horizon. He points to some small, round clouds. “Look, these clouds were formed by wave-like air currents. If you imagine waves in the sky, these clouds would sit on top.” He demonstrates the waves with sweeping arms, transforming the train window into a weather report. His enthusiasm has attracted the attention of the weary commuter standing next to us, who now listens with interest. Jan's passion for weather is contagious.

He finds fog particularly fascinating: “It's completely unpredictable! Fog depends on so many tiny factors – whether the grass in a field has been mowed, whether there are leaves on a tree, whether there's a small stream running nearby.” He gazes out of the window, then the train disappears into a tunnel.

### **Vivid and tangible**

“Weather is an emotional subject,” says Jan. At *The Weather Channel*, they try to make it as vivid and tangible as possible. Videos and 3D images are playing an ever greater role. “Most of our clients aren't actually interested in the weather itself. They want to know whether they need an umbrella, whether they can sunbathe by the River Isar after work, or whether they should put on a warm jumper. We provide them with this information, and we are currently working on a few innovations – but I can't say anything about those just yet.”

We have reached St.-Martin-Strasse in Munich and walk the empty streets to Jan's workplace. He always arrives before his team. He starts up his computer and looks at the weather data: “Look! There are gale-force winds on the Zugspitze. It's snowed in the French Alps and – unbelievable! It's 27 degrees in Bulgaria, still summer.”

By the time I ask for a final prediction, Jan is immersed in his work. “What will winter be like and will it snow this Christmas?” He answers with a determined look that leaves no room for doubt: “No, we won't have a white Christmas this year and winter won't start in earnest until January.”

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