

Go West China's Internet giants are reaching for the world

DOMO

Ringier

In-house journal
June 2018



The assassination of
journalist Ján Kuciak

Too Close to the Truth

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The June issue of DOMO as e-magazine



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Štiavnik, a village near the Czech border, this is where Ján Kuciak grew up – and this is where his family carried him to his grave in early March. Since 2015, he had worked as a member of the investigative team of *aktuality.sk*, a publication of Ringier Axel Springer Slovakia.

SHOTS TO THE HEART OF EUROPE

Ján Kuciak wanted to uncover the ties between government and the Mafia. But then the investigative journalist was murdered. A report from a country that has not made as much progress as it likes to think.

By Vinzenz Greiner



Photo: AFP

A man in his mid-forties sporting a buzz cut pulls out a keyring. He holds it up high in his right hand and looks around, letting his gaze drift above the thousands of heads that have come to the Slovak National Uprising Square on this Friday evening. There are about 60,000 people in the packed elongated square in the Slovak capital of Bratislava. Among them are students who got a day off from university to attend the rally «for a decent Slovakia». And there are older people, who already came here to protest when Slovakia was not yet an independent, let alone a decent state, but an authoritarian one. Family men are holding up signs with slogans like «resign!», «thugs», «liars».

The man shakes his keyring. Gradually, more and more people raise their keys up in the warm spring air, rattling them. Hundreds of them, thousands of them - like back in 1989, when protesters were telling the pro-Russian Czechoslovakian government to «go home», sounding the death knell of the socialist state.

Today, people are marching against the government of Prime Minister Robert Fico and against corruption, and for a face printed on banners and pasted on cardboard.

This is the image that got it all going. It is a photograph that first popped up in Facebook feeds and Twitter timelines on Monday, February 26th. It shows a young man, or rather an aging boy. He gazes at the camera listlessly, if not a bit unnerved. Underneath his lower lip there is a distinct mole, his eyes behind the rectangular glasses are narrow and scant stubble is scattered across his upper lip.

The image is black and white. Beneath it are words like «assassination» and «murdered». The photograph shows the 27-year-old Slovak Ján Kuciak, who, on that Monday in February, was found shot dead in his house. There, the police also found his 27-year-old fiancée, Martina Kušnírová. She, too, had been shot dead. The couple had already picked the dress and the car for their wedding on May 5th.

The police believe the crime is linked to Ján Kuciak's work. An investigative journalist, he had repeatedly written about corruption for the online platform «aktuality.sk», which is part of the Joint Venture Ringier Axel Springer. Kuciak had not just stepped on one person's toes, his foot was permanently parked on them.



«Before this, quite a few people had known that Ján was a good journalist. With this story, his career would have taken off.»

We know that journalists live dangerously from what has happened in countries like Turkey, Russia or Syria and Mafia-infested places like Italy or Malta. There, not even four months before Kuciak, blogger Daphne Caruana Galizia was killed by a car bomb. But murdering journalists in Slovakia, a country that appeared to be doing quite well compared to its neighbors, increasingly autocratic Hungary and reactionary Poland under the PIS party? In a country which, in 2016, the year of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, wrote that democracy should be encouraged and promoted in countries bordering on the EU?

Barely two months after Kuciak's assassination, the Prime Minister and two officials of the government's inner circle have resigned, as has the Culture Minister. The Interior Minister has packed his bags, and his successor has already stepped down. The Chief of Police has handed in his resignation. An Italian with Mafia connections is in detention in Eastern Slovakia pending extradition. The European commission has demanded an explanation from the government regarding illegally paid agricultural subsidies.

What happened?

Flashback. On September 5th, 2017, Kuciak's telephone rings. The caller is Marian Kocner, a businessman threatening to drag him and his family through the mire. And he would

Kuciak's first big investigation was about corruption in the country's big hospitals. They had paid excessive prices for CAT scanners. His next story looked into the shady association of politics and business. Marian Kocner, an entrepreneur, disapproved. He threatened Kuciak.

make sure Kuciak would never write again. That is how Kuciak describes the call weeks later on his Facebook page.

Kocner's name keeps coming up in Kuciak's texts and notes, as does the name of Interior Minister Robert Kalinak, Robert Fico's protégé. Kalinak is suspected of shielding real-estate developer Ladislav Basternak, who is on trial for tax fraud on the order of several millions. Prime Minister Fico lives in one of Basternak's buildings. At this same location, Kocner made various real-estate deals. A corrupt mess of politics and economy. Kuciak was trying to disentangle the various strands, but his biggest story was yet to be published. Kuciak would not live to see it happen.

It is the evening of February 21st, 2018. At 7 p.m., Kuciak's train arrives at the town of Galanta, about 30 miles east of Bratislava, where he works. His fiancée, Kušnírová, picks him up in a car.

They drive to the little village of Veľká Mača, where they are in the process of renovating a small house. Kuciak, according to the joint investigations of «Blick» and the team of «aktuality.sk», goes down to the cellar to charge the battery of his VW station wagon, which gave up the ghost on the previous day. Kušnírová goes into the sitting room. There is tea and coffee on the table. At 7.45 p.m. Kuciak texts a friend, at 7.50 p.m. Kušnírová sends a message to Kuciak's sister. Those are their last signs of life.

Kuciak is shot dead in the cellar, two bullets to the heart. Kušnírová dies from a head shot, from the front. An execution. Empty cartridges and bullets at the scene indicate a mob hit, some people believe. Kuciak's big story certainly supports that assumption.

February 28th. Two days after Kuciak's lifeless body was found, a conference call links Zurich, Belgrade, Berlin and Bratislava. Editors-in-chief from Axel Springer, Ringier and Ringier Axel Springer (RASCH) media discuss how to move forward. An international newsroom is to be established in Bratislava, where reporters from the three publishing houses are to continue Kuciak's investigations. A digital book of condolences is posted online.

Furthermore, the publishing houses, in a concerted effort, release Kuciak's last investigations, collected and edited by his shocked

colleagues. «To show that his work was not in vain,» «Blick» editor-in-chief Christian Dorer writes in an e-mail after the conference call.

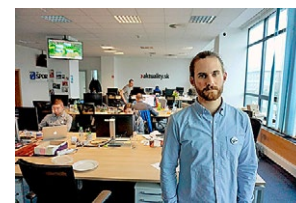
The publication packs quite a punch. A Slovakian journalist will later say: «Before this, quite a few people had known that Ján was a good journalist. With this story, his career would have taken off.» The story's headline: «Italian Mafia in Slovakia - Its tentacles are reaching out into politics.»

In this story, Kuciak shows how the Italian mafia is defrauding the Slovakian state of sales-tax revenue through convoluted real-estate sales, and how it is illegally siphoning off EU agricultural subsidies.

In addition, Kuciak proves that Antonino Vadalà, an Italian living in Slovakia, not only has ties to the Mafia but is also in touch with the governing Smer-SD party on a regular basis. He founded a company with Mária Trošková and had business dealings with Smer-SD politician Viliam Jasan. At the time that Kuciak's investigative article is published, Trošková is Prime Minister Fico's assistant and Jasan chairs the government's Security Council.

A Mafioso with connections to the government and possibly access to sensitive information regarding national security? What a scoop!

When RASCH publishes a press release on Kuciak's last investigations, there is an interesting development. Thirty minutes later, all the enterprise's websites in Slovakia shut down for several hours. A technical glitch? Impossible. Some people ask



Back in Bratislava

DOMO author Vinzenc Greiner worked in Eastern Slovakia as an EU volunteer and went on to study in Bratislava for a semester. He never imagined he would find himself back there investigating the murder of a fellow journalist.



themselves: Did Robert Fico want to prevent publication? This remains unclear. The Prime Minister's attitude, however, could not be any clearer.

He starts out by presenting a million Euro in stacks of cash as a reward for information leading to the killer. But when protesters and members of the opposition demand the resignation of Fico's closest allies, Interior Minister Robert Kalinak and Chief of Police Tibor Gašpar, the head of state goes into attack mode. He says the opposition is abusing the Kuciak case to «get people to take to the streets». This would lead to «destabilization of this society and to the disintegration of statehood.»

This proves two things: Firstly, Fico knows that appealing to the Slovak sense of security is almost always a safe bet. Slovak society, characterized by collectivism, is quite sensitive to threats, imagined or real. Fico had been leading successful election campaigns denouncing Islam and refugees, despite being a social democrat. He has already teamed up in two coalitions with the radical right-wing and Euro-skeptic National Party.

Previously, Fico has harped for some time on the conflict with Slovakia's big neighbor, Hungary. The scenario: The Hungarian minority in Southern Slovakia would join their motherland, restoring a rule to Hungary over Slovakian territory that it

Showtime: Shortly after the news of Kuciak's assassination spread, Prime Minister Robert Fico (center) offers one million Euros for leads. Next to Fico are his closest allies, Chief of Police Tibor Gašpar (left) and Interior Minister Robert Kalinak (right). Fico and Kalinak are no longer in office. Gašpar resigned by the end of May.

last held during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

A few days later, when President Andrej Kiska suggests reorganizing the government or holding new elections in order to re-establish faith in the nation, Fico plays the Hungarian card. He claims the president is conspiring with American-Hungarian investor George Soros.

Secondly, Fico's statement shows that he is living in a world of his own. If reality does not suit him, he resorts to the type of defense he learned as a boy playing forward on the soccer field - he attacks. Journalists have had to put up with this repeatedly. At a press conference in 2016, Fico told the attending journalists: «Some of you are dirty anti-Slovak prostitutes.» He then got up and left, instead of explaining himself regarding allegations whistleblower Zuzana Hlávková had made.

At the time, in 2016, Hlávková was working at the Foreign Ministry. She noticed that events related to Slovakia's EU Council Presidency were suddenly way over budget. Was money being siphoned off? Hlávková went public.

Meanwhile, Miroslav Lajčák is still the sitting Foreign Minister, while Hlávková is sitting in a cheap restaurant on Obchodná street, Bratislava's shopping district, one week after the photograph in Kuciak's memory was circulated on social media. A woman in her late twenties »

JOURNALIST MURDERED



with a narrow face, she has a drink in front of her that some people in Slovakia jokingly call «Slovak Libre», referring to the American classic. It is rum and Kofola, the one-time socialist alternative to «imperialistic» Coca-Cola in Czechoslovakia.

After Kuciak's assassination, commentators talk about a backslide to the 1990s. On one hand, this refers to the killing of former minister Ján Ducky in 1999, on the other, to the government of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar who was not keen on democracy. Hlávková gloomily comments: «It feels as though the little progress we have made over the years is being rolled back.» She takes a sip.

Outside, people are trudging through the cold, past the spruced-up storefronts of Obchodna street. Behind the colorful small houses, the stores and the tram-line garbage is rotting away on the brittle ground. Old concrete walls are crumbling in grey backyards.

This is symbolic of the country. Since socialism ended in 1990, and Slovakia became a sovereign state three years later, a lot has happened here, a lot of it only on the surface.

Cliques of oligarchs and dubious entrepreneurs reach far into the government and the administration. Often, the men now sitting in a judge's chair or at the desk of a prosecutor or a chief of police held similar

positions decades ago. A politician of the libertarian opposition party SAS calls them «the people of the old system».

They stick together. «The big corruption cases remain unsolved,» says Gabriel Sipos from the anti-corruption organization Transparency International. The reason for this is that most high-ranking police officers owe their jobs to political leaders. «When it comes to sensitive cases, they would have to investigate the politicians' friends.» TI ranks Slovakia as number 54 out of 180 countries in terms of awareness of corruption.

«The Slovakian state is a Potemkin village!»

Peter Bardy, Editor-in-chief of aktuality.sk

Is Slovakia built on feet of clay? Even the president of this young nation seems to think so. «There is something bad underneath the surface, something bad in the foundation of our nation,» Andrej Kiska said one-and-a-half weeks after the mur-

der. This opinion is shared by the editor-in-chief of aktuality.sk, Peter Bardy, who says: «The Slovakian state is a Potemkin village.»

It is Tuesday, March 6th. Bardy is sitting in a conference room in his editorial offices. There are photographs on the wall featuring politicians, entrepreneurs and Mafiosi. Lines made with markers connect them - the network Kuciak was digging up.

Bardy has beefed up his English within a week. Practice makes perfect: Even the New York Times dropped by for an interview. One phrase he keeps repeating is «Thank you!» He also says it to the journalists in the international newsroom. They are Marcin Wyrwal from the Polish RASCH platform «Onet», Tim Röhn from «Welt» and myself from «Blick». Later, we will be joined by reporters from the German tabloid «Bild».

The foreign journalists are sup-

posedly here to help flesh out the notes Kuciak left behind and turn them into stories. But the notes are too complicated even for Kuciak's colleagues, his evidence is stored somewhere on his computer. Bardy says: «You are helping us by reporting in your countries on what is happening here.»

And a lot is happening. A young district attorney files charges against the Interior Minister, the head of the National Crime Agency and the chief of police. Suspicion of «sabotage». In Slovakia, that includes activities against the constitutional order. Then, documents turn up proving Italy had warned the Slovak authorities years ago about mafia activity in Slovakia. The Interior Minister, however, claimed to have no knowledge of any such thing.

Besides daily reporting, the investigative team conducts interviews, goes through some of Kuciak's notes and tries to reconstruct the timeline of events.

From the hotel to the editorial office, pizza at the desk, and then back to the hotel room to finish typing the text on the bed. Discussions with editors, conversations with people in the street. These are rife with conspiracy theories. Is the Italian Mafia responsible for Kuciak's death? Or was it Albanian-Macedonian criminals? What about the oligarchs? Was Kuciak tortured?

Meanwhile, one absurd piece of news comes after another. Fico alleges that the «#allforjan» buttons are the product of a large-sale foreign enterprise. The chief of the national corruption unit did overstep his range of duty - by appearing at the scene of the crime. The chief of police had steadfastly maintained the opposite. And the juicy bit is: both men have ties to the same oligarch. The lie was uncovered by a TV station that is actually a competitor of aktuality.sk. But most of the media have closed ranks. Their motto is: All for Ján. Solidarity instead of scoops.

The citizens try sarcasm. «Fortunately, the new season of «Game of Thrones» will only begin next year. I can't keep up with two shows at the same time,» is one man's comment about the lies and wild accusations. Protesters hold up a poster portraying Interior Minister Kalinak as a drug lord from the Netflix series «Narcos».

That 60,000 people would take to the streets on March 9th to protest against «the arrogance of power» and «for a decent Slovakia» astonished even the rally's organizer, Karolína Farská. A week earlier, there had been half as many.

On the eve of the rally, she talks about her motivation. «It's about freedom of the press,» says Farská, who really should be studying for her high-school diploma exams the next

Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, Martina Kušnírová (right) were to be married on May 5th. They had already picked the car and the dress for their wedding. But then they were shot dead in their little house on February 21st. Protesters are paying tribute to the young Slovak couple.

week. «I don't want my family and my friends to have to live in a state that has ties to the Mafia.»

Does she think the protesters at the rally will be rattling their keys like they did in 1989? Farská's look is doubtful. She knows that Slovaks like to rant against politicians over a beer - and leave it at that.

But just as the weather changes from winter to spring within a week, the Slovaks appear to wake up from their lethargy. Why this time?

One possible answer lies about a two-hour drive from Bratislava - Štiavnik, a village near the Czech border. This is where Kuciak grew up. Crooked wooden huts nestling between gentle hills and fields. Little grey houses, a few pink ones, a yellow church. The family keeps hockey trophies on the shelf, pictures of Jesus on the wall, chickens in the yard. The coffee is brewed straight in the cup. Simple. Slovakian.

The father, Jozef, talks about his son, Ján. «When I would ask him on the phone what he was currently working on, he would say: «It's classified.» At the time, I thought this was his particular brand of humor.» The sad, soft-spoken man only asks that the police «do their job.»

Ján Kuciak, the investigative journalist in the nation's capital, came from a modest background. When Kuciak was shot dead, it was a man of the people they murdered. 🌐

Photos: AFP, Keystone



High-flying plans. Onstage at the «Forum des 100», Alexandre Droulers, Uber's general manager for new mobility in western Europe, announces airborne taxis.

Photo: Keystone

Riding Events to Success

The «Forum des 100» (Forum of the 100), organized by «Le Temps», is one of the most important events in Romandy. But that's not all: Horizon, Forward and other smaller events staged by this daily generate added revenue and expand its readership. A model with a bright future.

Text Alain Jeannet (Head of Events at Ringier Axel Springer Suisse Romande)

We expected resistance or even that some people would break with us entirely. After all, this 14th edition of the «Forum des 100» is no longer free; we are charging admission. So, we cannot be sure how our regulars will react; they are used to attending this event, which brings together 800 decision makers at the University of Lausanne every year, without paying a nickel. Now they have to fork out between 250 and 450 dollars.

Our fears turn out to be unwarranted. On May 24th, which is dedicated to the topic of mobility, the hall is packed to the rafters. A sure sign that the «Forum des 100» has established itself as a fixture. It is also evidence that events have turned into a real growth driver for «Le Temps» and the other Romandy titles of Ringier Axel Springer, as well as a possibility of reaching out to more readers. The events now constitute something of a third mainstay of journalism: web, print ... and live!

Ever since the Forum was first created by «L'Hebdo» in 2005, this event has set out to tackle the major economic and social issues by bringing opinion leaders from the worlds of business, politics, academia and art in Romandy to the same table. When «L'Hebdo» was shut down in 2017, «Le Temps» adopted the event - and relaunched it with new vigor. From now on, it can rely on a daily newspaper run by Stéphane Benoit-Godet and an ambitious digital strategy that is the brainchild of the Head of Digital in charge, Gaël Hurlimann.

In the highly competitive daily marketplace, print titles enjoy an invaluable advantage: They can supplement any event, before and after the day it takes place, with editorial content as well as a unique array of advertising and communications opportunities, thereby putting «flesh on the bones». That is why we like to call this sort of thing «events with high journalistic added value».

Last year, the «Forum des 100» discussed healthcare 4.0 and the skyrocketing costs it entails. The thematic arc of this year's edition is no less high-flown: How will digitalization revolutionize the way we travel? Will mobility increase? Or will home offices and teleworking make us more sedentary? In order to launch a debate by casting their minds ten, fifteen or twenty years into the future, several «disruptors» open the event. One of them is Uber's



Federal Councilor Doris Leuthard spontaneously debating with the audience - a highlight of this year's event.

The events now constitute something of a third mainstay of journalism: web, print ... and live!

Alexandre Droulers, who appears convinced that airborne taxis will soon be upon us.

Near lunchtime we welcome Swiss Federal Councilor Doris Leuthard, Head of the Department of Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications. She arrives in her black Tesla, proving that she is ahead of the curve. She engages in a lively discussion with an enthusiastic audience, talking about the state of the Swiss railway network in 2025, the

electronic future of mobility and Switzerland's pioneering role in the area of drones. The Federal Councilor ends on a note of pride by dubbing Switzerland a «smart nation».

What is the recipe for a successful Forum? The first crucial ingredient is the choice of the topic. The next is the selection of speakers. In past years, the Forum managed to welcome such stars of the speaking circuit as former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Germany's former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne, former French Prime Minister François Fillon or Italian writer Roberto Saviano as well as a Federal Councilor and at least a dozen members of the Swiss State Council on a regular basis. Speakers also tended to include a number of highly talented and inspiring personalities who were perhaps less famous

but proved all the more surprising. Other successful ingredients: making sure everyone sticks to their allotted speaking times, and the traditional networking lunch accompanied by excellent wines from the Valais region. And, of course, the tight ship run by the four-person organizing dream team from marketing and business development.

One more thing: Were it not for generous financial support there would not be an event in the first place! The times when all you had to do was maintain the circulation and the name recognition of your newspaper are long gone. Events have become an integral part of publishing activities, subject to harsh criteria of profitability. The «Forum des 100» can bank on some ten loyal sponsors, including Swiss International Air-

lines, the Banque Cantonale Vaudoise (BCV), the Loterie romande, the Vaudoise Insurance Company, Tissot, the clinic La Source, Genève Aéroport, Honda ... and the strategic partner of the 2018 edition: the Swiss Federal Railways SBB. And lest we forget: the University of Lausanne, the economic and social research institute M.I.S Trend and Radio Télévision Suisse RTS.

Among the many publications associated with the «Forum des 100», one stands out: the special magazine published annually since 2005 listing one hundred personalities «who mold the character of Romandy». This list is also what gives the event its name. By now, the list numbers 1,400 names from all walks of life, and these personalities have effectively become ambassadors for the newspaper. The 100 selected for the »

«Forum des 100»

The «Forum des 100» has been taking place year by year since 2005, bringing together personalities from the worlds of business, politics, academia and art in Romandy to discuss economic and social issues. Famous speakers of past years include: the late founder of Swatch, Nicolas Hayek (pictured with designer Yves Béhar), former Nestlé chairman Peter Brabeck, writer Roberto Saviano (pictured with Federal Councilor Simonetta Sommaruga) and former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer.





year 2018 include numerous entrepreneurs, executives, academics and politicians actively engaged with the issue of mobility. However, the list also features the Geneva rapper Dan-itsa, three-Michelin-star chef Franck Giovannini, and Nobel-Prize-winning scientist Jacques Dubochet.

The «Forum des 100» is the best-known event but there are a number of others - more and more of them, in fact. Horizon, created in 2016, invites some 300 graduates of the highly reputed business school IMD at the beginning of the year to debate the economic outlook for the ensuing 12 months.

Another event, Forward, organized by «Le Temps», «PME Magazine» and the Federal Institute of Technology EPFL, is a forum for innovation in SMEs aimed at supporting enterprises from all fields in dealing with the practical challenges presented by digitization. Last April 19th, 950 visitors attended (and paid admission for) the first edition of this conference at EPFL's spectacular Swiss-Tech Convention Center in Lausanne.

Among the half-dozen events scheduled for 2018, two will be organized in close collaboration with



foreign media. For the Health Care Summit, «Le Temps» will join forces with the website «Politico». The second event of this type, the Forum on Philanthropy, is the result of a joint venture with the French daily «Le Monde». This, too, has proven a profitable model.

So much for the bigger events requiring long-term planning and substantial funding. However, journalists at «Le Temps» have come up with additional events, which are

rather more light-footed and suitable for opening the readership up to a new audience (read Cédric Garrofé's story on page 15). The editorial staff have also taken the opportunity of the newspaper's 20th anniversary to try out a new form of live journalism that has been practiced for some time in Anglo-Saxon countries and France but which has only been taking baby steps in Switzerland. A great success!

It is almost paradoxical: Thanks to social networks, communication



has never been easier or more fluent, moreover in a media environment that knows no boundaries. And yet, readers have never been more interested in meeting at an event in real life and engaging in debates there. The future promises to be bright - for anyone who can satisfy that demand. 🌐

Top left: Stéphane Benoit-Godet, editor-in-chief of «Le Temps» is one of the moderators at the Forum.

Top right: Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard (at right) with Ringier CEO Marc Walder, Nouria Hernandez, Rector of the University of Lausanne, Daniel Pillard, Head of RASCH Suisse Romande and Gaël Hurlimann, Head of Digital at Le Temps.

Bottom left: Ponz Pandikuthira (at left), Vice President, Product Planning, Nissan Europe, discussing intelligent mobility with Alain Jeannet, organizer of the «Forum des 100».

Bottom right: Virginie Raison, expert on geopolitics and foresight studies.

Photos: Eddy Mottaz, Keystone

The right mix for tomorrow

Philosophy classes for kids, classical concerts and collective tree-hugging; Le Temps is taking various approaches to promote reader loyalty and generate revenue.

Cédric Garrofé, journalist and Head of Social Media and Blogs at Le Temps

For the past year, we have been organizing news-room events for up to 100 people. We first decided to do this following a discussion with college students. What we learned that day was: Nobody is keen on subscribing. But if you offer a dynamic service with real added value, people are quite prepared to pay for the privilege.

Our offers range from a zero-waste event to cycling trips and philosophy classes for kids. Or we decide to discover the therapeutic values of the forest and go tree-hugging!

These events must serve at least one of three purposes: To promote reader loyalty (as is the case with the classical concerts for our traditional readership), appeal to a new readership or to renew reader loyalty (for example by inviting start-ups that produce video games) or to generate revenue (which is mostly the case when we can engage sponsors to fund events).

We also follow three rules: We stay true to our editorial course. We make use of all the digital and print channels at our disposal. And, we want to enjoy the activities! Because when we have fun, so do our guests.

At the events themselves, we employ what we call 360-degree vision. We use every channel at our disposal: When we organize a concert, we do a profile of the artist in the paper beforehand. And the



concert itself will of course be streamed live on Facebook.

Our newsletter is very popular with our audience. Launched just four months ago, it already has 1,000 subscribers. The demand for our offer keeps increasing, which allows us to move forward with its monetization. 🌐

Ringier’s best photos of the last quarter

Powerful images and their stories: a biblical drought in South Africa, icy cold in Norway and abject poverty in Afghanistan.

BOLERO MEN
KIPLING PHILIPPS
HELEN POMBO

Photographer
Editor

«A Steppenwolf’s trip to the desert» was the caption of a fashion spread in the magazine **Bolero Men**. Editor Samuel Müller says: «If you want to present men’s fashion you need to make a show of it. It’s not enough simply to display the clothes.» That is why the crew traveled to South Africa and visited the Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve. Local working conditions, however, turned out to be harder than they had anticipated. «The reserve offered spectacular opportunities for great images. But the roads leading into it were extremely rough and we did not have a four-wheel drive,» says Müller. Moreover, the extreme drought forced the crew to stock up on plenty of water. «And if you don’t hurry up in the morning you find yourself in front of empty shelves at the supermarket.» Why is this man sitting in the tree? «That was the photographer’s idea. It takes a cool and adventurous groove to get male readers excited – and a bit of humor,» says Müller. «However, the tree was so parched the branches almost broke.

BLIC
ALEKSANDAR DIMITRIJEVIC
MLADEN SURJANCA

Photographer
Editor

Strictly speaking, photographer Aleksandar Dimitrijevic was on a break between two sports events he was covering for **Blic**, when he decided to pay an indoor swimming pool nearby a visit. Water sports are Dimitrijevic’s great passion. At the swimming pool, an international high-diving competition was taking place. Juniors from Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia were competing in Belgrade. Dimitrijevic’s plan was to capture the excitement and the tension before a jump. «I love sports photography, because you get an enormous range of emotions, unlike most other fields.» The photographer’s plan works out beautifully. He not only captures a female athlete’s backflip but also her competitors’ jitters. «They were shivering, probably not so much because they were afraid of the jumping girl’s achievement but simply because they were cold,» muses Aleksandar Dimitrijevic.

SCHWEIZER ILLUSTRIERTE
GERI BORN
NICOLE SPIESS

Photographer
Editor

Two years ago, legendary Swiss clown Dimitri passed away. His widow, Gunda, and their children now manage his impressive estate, which includes an academy, a theater, a restaurant and a museum, among other things. Dimitri’s studio with his huge collection of masks from all over the world remains untouched to this day. Says **Schweizer Illustrierte** photographer Geri Born: «My picture with the masks was supposed to be a tribute to Dimitri’s family.» Although some of Dimitri’s children are professional performers, it was not easy for Geri Born to catch a moment when all of the protagonists were looking into the camera with an interesting expression. He resorts to a ploy: «I tend to concentrate on the ones who have trouble. If I can get a good shot of them, chances are the whole photograph will turn out well.»

LIBERTATEA
DRAGOS SASU
VLAD CHIREA

Photographer
Editor

Since 2001, Romania has been sending troops to support the massive military Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. For two weeks, photographer Dragos Sasu and journalist Ionuț Iordăchescu, on assignment for **Libertatea**, accompanied their country’s troops. «Whenever we reached a settlement in our armored vehicles, we were met by a big group of children, running after us barefoot, begging for food. The children mostly looked desperate to me,» says Dragos Sasu. This country in the Hindu Kush mountains has been at war for almost four decades. «Afghanistan is probably one of the worst countries to grow up in. Many children lose their lives. Those that survive mostly live in poverty,» the photographer maintains. When the armored convoys leave the villages, the children throw rocks at the vehicles. «You might regard this as a cheerful ritual for the children. But it no doubt also shows how far apart our worlds are.»

L’ILLUSTRÉ
DIDIER MARTENET
JULIE BODY

Photographer
Editor

An 800-mile road trip through Norway is not particularly exciting as such, unless you choose to drive the distance in an electric car. That’s when the adventure begins! The self-experiment of photographer Didier Martenet and editor Robert Habel for **L’Illustré** is a journalistic gem. Their trip takes five days. Both men are full of praise for the driving qualities of the car, a VW e-Golf. However, almost every stretch of the drive is tinged with the (real) worry that the battery will soon be empty – or that the charging station will be out of order or that there wouldn’t be one to begin with. That’s why Martenet and Habel often had to drive through the country in full winter gear at temperatures around 1.5 F°. L’Illustré art director Julie Body: «We did this shoot Gonzo-style, otherwise we could only have shown a car, a few cables and a few charging stations.» The result is a well-crafted and amusing photo novel!

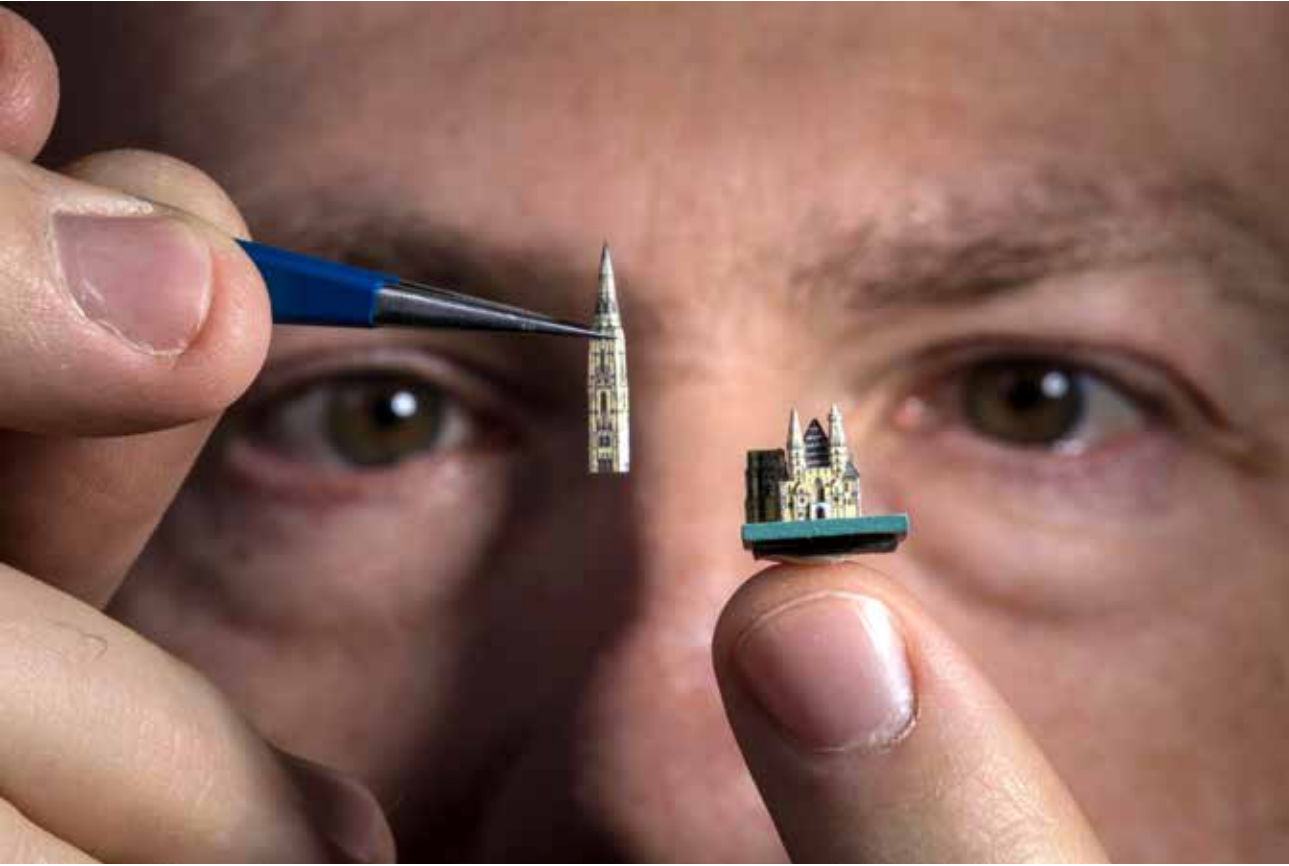
SCHWEIZER ILLUSTRIERTE
KURT REICHENBACH
NICOLE SPIESS

Photographer
Editor

«Mister Micro» is Thomas Grüniger’s nickname on the model-making scene. With good reason: Those who build models in as little space as he does are few. He turns huge cathedrals into tiny churches, enormous ships into teeny boats and proud fortresses into mini-castles – highly detailed worlds made from cardboard on the smallest scale. That is why Grüniger works with surgical and dental tools. On assignment for **Schweizer Illustrierte**, photographer Kurt Reichenbach visited Thomas Grüniger at his rooftop apartment in Thalwil near Zurich. «Grüniger’s models are so delicate you hardly dare to breathe in their vicinity lest they might fly away.» The commercial paperboard model of St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna was too big in Grüniger’s eyes, so he downsized it on his computer to make the church fit onto a fingertip. Reichenbach demonstrates an equal passion for detail, skillfully capturing the fabulously dainty creation.

In this feature, DOMO regularly presents the best photographs published by Ringier titles in the past quarter. You will find more excellent pictures from the past quarter on our Facebook page DomoRingier.







Alibaba founder Jack Ma (above) makes an appearance dressed as Michael Jackson at a company party. When it comes to business, his corporate philosophy is that the customer always comes first.

Made in China – Go West

We used to wrinkle our noses at anything «Made in China». Today, Chinese Internet titans like Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu number among the world's most valuable companies. Steeled by their huge domestic market, they are about to give Apple and its peers a run for their money. Text René Haenig

The Middle Kingdom is going for gold. While Western tech giants like Facebook, Apple or Tesla are struggling with headline-making scandals about misuse of data, faulty software updates or recall and production problems, Far-Eastern

Internet titans like Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu are quietly catching up to their competitors or even overtaking them. As of this year, two Chinese conglomerates number among the Top Ten of the world's most highly valued companies.

The four top positions are still held by Apple, Google's parent company Alphabet, Microsoft and Amazon. As of the end of last year, however, fifth place is held by Tencent, the first Chinese company to be valued at more than 500 billion

Photos: Getty Images, Tony Laif

dollars and to knock Facebook off the pedestal of the fifth-biggest company in the world. Alibaba, in eighth place, is hot on its heels.

Founded in 1998, the Internet enterprise Tencent Holdings stands, among other things, for messaging services, online games, media and social networks. One of the most famous products of this company, based in the southeastern Chinese city of Shenzhen, is WeChat, China's most popular chat service. Alibaba, on the other hand, is considered China's answer to Amazon. In 2017, this e-commerce giant reached a market capitalization of 443,81 billion dollars.

Back in 2014, Tencent was already poised to become a global power player. That year, Tencent co-founder and CEO Ma Huateng, who facetiously calls himself «Pony Ma», came close to buying WhatsApp. The Chinese entrepreneur had all but sealed the deal when the talks had to be postponed due to Ma's having to undergo back surgery. In the meantime, Mark Zuckerberg got wind of Ma's takeover plans, panicked and offered to double the Tencent's offer price, thereby warding off the threat from the Middle Kingdom.

Undaunted by Zuckerberg's monkey wrench, Ma Huateng opted to acquire twelve percent of Snapchat, buy into Elon Musk's electric-car company Tesla and recently persuaded the world's biggest music-streaming service, Spotify, to agree to so-called cross-shareholding. In simple terms, this means that Tencent invests in Spotify by buying stocks, and conversely, the Swedish start-up will acquire stock in the Tencent subsidiary Tencent Music Entertainment Group.

A start-up founded in 1998, Tencent, which first made headlines with its instant messenger OICQ, is no simple copycat ripping off Silicon Valley web trends but the essence of China's Internet bundled into a single company. In fact, Tencent now owns WeChat, Asia's most popular messaging service, which numbers around one billion users per day, and Wallet, China's most widely used mobile pay service – as well as some of the most successful gaming products in the world.

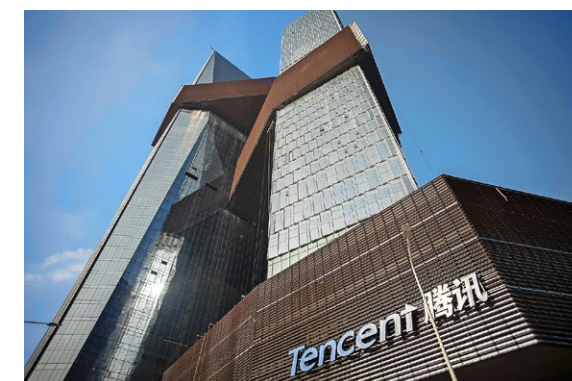
WeChat is more versatile than WhatsApp: Apart from short messages, its users not only send audio messages, pictures and videos but money, too. The introduction of

WeChat's pay service five years ago made millions of Chinese turn to this app for all of their online activities. Whether it is shopping, gifting money to friends, children and grandchildren or booking a doctor's appointment – WeChat is their companion in all walks of life – at least in China. In the West, people are (still) concerned that the Chinese authorities will read anything shared via WeChat. All the same: It is a matter of time before WeChat overtakes its American rival WhatsApp, as China has a lot of catch-up potential: 750 million Chinese regularly go online, i. e. around 50 percent of the population. In the USA, 290 million people use the Internet, which corresponds to roughly 90 percent of the population, as in most Western countries.

Alibaba, founded in 1999 in Hangzhou, 120 miles southwest of Shanghai, by former English teacher Jack Ma, operates the e-commerce platform Alibaba.com and the online auction house Taobao. When this eBay-like platform started out eight years ago, a paltry 27 retailers participated and turnover reached the laughable amount of 8,3 million dollars. Now, 140,000 retailers are advertising their products on Alibaba's platform, and reaping revenues to the tune of 25,2 billion dollars. The foreign market has also discovered the platform from the Middle Kingdom: 60,000 out of the 140,000 participating retailers are not Chinese.

«Jack Ma can't write a single line of code by himself, but his success is no fluke,» says Xiaoqun Clever, Ringier's Chief Technology and Data Officer. «He always thinks for the long term and keeps reflecting on his actions.» Short-term goals are of no concern to him, says Clever. As with a giant jigsaw puzzle, he patiently adds one piece after another. «That is why he invests so much in ▶

The Tencent Haibin Building in Shenzhen. The company has 45,000 employees. Last year, Tencent made a profit of more than 10 billion dollars. It doubles its turnover on an almost annual basis.



Jack Ma The crazy rock star

He likes to make a scene, either whimsical or downright weird: Jack Ma, 53, founder of the Internet giant Alibaba, is quite likely to turn up at a company party dressed as Michael Jackson and riding a Harley-Davidson, to the frenetic applause of 40,000 employees. Or he will don a long white wig complete with a mohawk and croon the soundtrack to Disney's «The Lion King» into the microphone.

For years, the small statured, slight Chinese man of the dubious haircut and awkward mien worked as a not very successful English teacher in his hometown of Hangzhou. His parents were traditional musicians and storytellers.

His Internet career – or so the legend goes – began with a thriller in 1995. He travelled to California as an interpreter to collect a debt for a Chinese company. Instead of pulling out cash, however, the debtor drew a gun and took Ma hostage, holding him captive in his Malibu mansion. Ma used all his powers of persuasion, promising his kidnapper to found an Internet company with him in China, even though, at the time, he had no clue about what computers could do. It was friends in Seattle where he eventually escaped to who showed him: When Jack Ma entered the words «beer» and «China» into the Internet search engine Yahoo and failed to score a single hit, he realized that this new version of the Internet might open up enormous business opportunities in his country.

In 1999, he founded the enterprise Alibaba, with his wife, Zhang Ying, 16 partners and 60,000 dollars in seed capital. Two decades later, Jack Ma, whose net worth is estimated at 42 billion dollars, is the second richest man in China; he made the cover of «Forbes» magazine, and in 2013, the «Financial Times» even elected him their «Person of the Year». The story of Jack Ma is a fabulous rags-to-riches tale of a loser who has become a billionaire philanthropist idolized in his country.

corporate culture. His company has its own university and organizes huge wedding parties for staff members, at which Ma himself speaks.»

While events like «Black Friday» and «Cyber Monday» are designed to maximize sales in the USA and - lately - in Europe, Alibaba uses the «Singles' Day» to increase turnover. On November 11 of last year alone, Alibaba handled up to 325,000 orders per second in the Cloud. One fifth of all shopping transactions were done by customers in the first 15 minutes of the day in order to profit from the various discounts right off the bat. The mobile pay service Alipay, which belongs to Alibaba's subsidiary Ant Financial, also passed its trial by fire that day. On November 11, 2017, the system executed a total of 1.48 billion payments. During the particularly highly frequented minutes just after midnight, Alipay handled 256,000 payments per second. «Their computing capacity is enormous, even Google or Apple couldn't match that,» says Xiaoqun Clever. «Visa can handle a maximum of 56,000 transactions per second, PayPal merely 155!»

The average Chinese customer spends up to half an hour a day on Alibaba's app, often visiting the site in order to find inspiration rather than coming with specific ideas in mind. Chinese consumers consider shopping online as entertainment; they want to have fun and discover new trends. Alibaba, however, offers more than online-shopping experiences: In the harbor metropolis of Guangzhou, the Chinese entrepreneurs have joined forces with Ford to create the first car vending machine: A futuristic-looking multi-story building allows potential car buyers to rotate the selection of automobiles before their eyes. When the model they want appears, they can get their dream car from the machine and are granted a three-day test drive. The transaction is accomplished via Tmall App.

Tencent, meanwhile, has also become the highest-grossing game company - not only in Asia. Investments are strictly limited to the booming mobile games market. In 2015, the Chinese paid 126 million dollars for a stake in the US game developer Glu Mobile in order to bolster this company's already strong position in the cellphone games market. The developer is best known for its mobile game «Kim

Kardashian: Hollywood», one of the most successful games in Apple's App Store. In-app purchases to enhance the gaming experience have earned Glu over 100 million dollars in revenue. Glu Mobile is not the only major game developer Tencent has a stake in. The Chinese giant's portfolio also includes Activision Blizzard, creators of «Call of Duty», «Diablo» and «World of Warcraft», Epic Games, who came up with «Gears of War», «Unreal» and «Infinity Blade», and «League of Legends» developer Riot Games. With a turnover of seven billion dollars, Tencent has left longtime market leaders Electronic Arts («FIFA»), Microsoft and Sony in the dust. On their global shopping spree, the Chinese also stopped off in Switzerland, where they grabbed up the mid-size Neuchatel company Miniclip. Just how large Tencent's stake in the Swiss game developer is has not been disclosed.

Earlier this year, it was reported that the Danish toy titan Lego was also working on an alliance with Tencent. The Nordic family business and the Eastern Internet giant jointly want to develop online games and a social network for Chinese children. Even before the producer of plastic bricks entered the fray, Mattel (Barbie, Masters of the Universe figures) had already put out feelers in China - and forged a partnership with Alibaba, among others.

The fact that the giants from the Middle Kingdom are developing faster and more successfully is partly due to the way they handle their users' data. The biggest difference between Alibaba and its occidental counterpart Amazon probably concerns the exploitation of their data.

The Americans use this information primarily as a basis for determining the prices at which they buy products from dealers, and Amazon puts these statistics at the disposal of those companies so they can assess whether they are still competitive with respect to their rivals. The Chinese take a different approach. They put all the data on their 500 million active customers per month at the disposal of their retailers. And Alibaba knows a lot about their consumers. «Amazon is a marketplace,» explains Xiaoqun Clever. «Alibaba is not only that but an auction house, a financial service provider, a pay service and an entertainment company. That is why

In China, people organize their lives (almost) entirely via cellphone. The government urges the mobile communications companies to provide fast connections throughout the country. (top)

May 10th is so-called Ali Day. The numerous events on this date include a group wedding of employees attended by Alibaba founder Jack Ma himself, who makes a point of congratulating the couples in person. (center)

Battling the flood of parcels after the «Singles' Day» on November 11th. Originally conceived as a day dedicated to single men and women, «Singles' Day» has become the biggest on-line-shopping day in the world. (bottom)



Photos: Getty Images, laif

Alibaba can collect data from various spheres of their customers' lives.» Another reason is that the Chinese market is still growing at a breathtaking pace. Within the next 15 years, according to certain estimates, the Chinese middle class will be three times as big as that of the USA.

So, when Jack Ma says that Alibaba is not an e-commerce retailer but a data company, one thing becomes clear: In terms of Big Data, the Western world is trailing behind China. Tencent et al. are focusing on a specific generation: the millennials born after 1995. They are hard to get hold of in the real world as they almost exclusively navigate the depths of the Internet. At Tencent, however, Ma Huateng's WeChat reaches one seventh of the world's population. His pay service WeChat Pay works in Europe and the USA - at least for Chinese tourists. Western users' skepticism about the app is based on the fact that the Chinese government censors unwelcome statements on it, and on the fear that Ma Huateng, who served in the National People's Congress, could pass data on to the authorities. He will have to think of something, because one thing is certain: Tencent's boss is looking to go west.

The third and final member of Asia's Big Three is Baidu. This company's search engine makes it China's answer to the US giant Google. Unlike their counterparts in the West, China's adolescents did not grow up with a laptop computer. The economic upturn allowed them to skip the PC era and directly become mobile-only users of devices like the smartphone. The search engine operator numbers more than 700 million users and is growing rapidly. Like Google, Baidu keeps expanding into new areas of business: food delivery services, online pay services and automobiles. The Chinese Internet titan even wants to develop its own self-driving car. Baidu also holds a stake in Uber China. With Tencent being Uber's biggest competitor in that market.

Made in China - the Middle Kingdom is making it abundantly clear that it is only a matter of time before enterprises like Tencent, Alibaba or Baidu, who started out copying Western technology, not only number among the Top Ten of the most valuable companies in the world but move up to the very top of that list. Go west! 🌐



Pony Ma The shy dreamer

As a child, he pictured himself as a future astronomer. Huateng Ma, 46, who facetiously calls himself «Pony Ma» (a playful diminutive of «Ma», which means «horse») eventually became a star himself, thanks to his Internet company Tencent.

He is considered the king of chats; his WeChat, which numbers close to a billion users, is China's most widely used messaging app. Young people use it not only to chat but for booking taxis (Tencent is Uber's biggest rival in China), shopping, ordering food, bill paying or gaming.

Apple founder Steve Jobs is Pony Ma's great hero, even if he personally prefers to wear a tie. Born in Shantou, he spent his childhood on Hainan, an island off the South coast. Later, his family moved to Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, where his father found a job as a port manager. Pony Ma studied computer science at the local university.

Joining forces with fellow students, he developed Tencent OICQ, an instant-messaging service. When the US company AOL sued because of the similarity of the name with its recently acquired service ICQ, Pony Ma quickly renamed his service QQ. Ma chose a pudgy dancing penguin as the mascot for his service.

Pony Ma is said to be a loyal to the Communist Party, modest and extremely disciplined. When he participated in a team-building exercise involving a hike through the Gobi Desert and two members wanted to turn back, he gave them such a roasting that they meekly trudged on. And yet, he is said to be popular and caring. He recently transferred two billion dollars' worth of Tencent shares to his charitable fund, which supports healthcare, education and the environment. «Forbes» estimates his net worth at 49 billion dollars. Pony Ma is married to Wang Danting, has a daughter and lives in Hong Kong.

Crocodile attack

When it comes to trading online advice, he is the go-to guy: Economist Gerrit Heinemann is generally regarded as the leading researcher for e-commerce. He says: «Chinese Internet giants like Tencent and Alibaba are revving up and now they're setting their sights on the international market.»

Interview René Haenig Photo Maurice Haas

Mr. Heinemann, have you ever done any shopping online in the Middle Kingdom?
Yes, sure!
And what is the biggest difference that stuck in your mind?

Their maxim really is «mobile only»! The Chinese make close to 100 percent of all online purchases via smartphone. **Here in Europe, we are primarily familiar with Amazon as one of the first really big online retailers. How does it compare to its Chinese counterpart Alibaba?**

Both are so-called ecosystems capable of acting independently of other companies – and they are indefatigable data collectors as well. Both are leaders in their respective home markets, and the two of them have basically divided up the global online market amongst themselves – with no other retailer standing a chance of keeping up.

Why are Chinese retailers like Alibaba and Tencent growing at such a rapid pace?
The Web obsession of 800 million Chinese Internet users is certainly one reason. Furthermore, there are hardly any platforms for conventional retail commerce in China. Last but not least, this is a priority item in the Chinese government's ten-year-plan.

The Chinese started out copying Western models; now they seem to be outdoing them.
That's what international Internet experts say. WeChat and Tencent in particular are really getting started. People talk about Chinese leapfrogging.

What do they mean by «leapfrogging»?
Chinese Leapfrogging refers to the leaps and bounds by which the Chinese are growing in terms of Internet commerce. **In what respect are the Chinese revving up?**
Tencent and WeChat are now doing everything they can to commercialize and

monetize social media.

What are these companies doing better than their Western competitors?

The full support of the Chinese government obviously allows them to move much faster – particularly with its almost protectionist attitude – and on top of that, they have Chinese production backing them up. Foreign companies may only take up activities in China by engaging in joint ventures with Chinese companies. Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple are all complaining about obstruction. Why else would none of these US companies achieve significant turnover in China?

What has kept these titans from spreading out to Europe so far?

Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba, once said: We are the crocodile in the river – referring to China – and if there is enough to eat in the river we don't need to go out into the ocean where the dangerous sharks are. By sharks he meant the GAFAs: Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon. Now, however, it looks as though there isn't enough food left in the river alone, so the crocodile will attack the sharks.

How relevant is the issue of data protection to the Chinese?

It is no issue at all. The government even meddles in consumer behavior based on the data. It has access to all the customers' data and looks closely at what people are buying, what they are doing – and the government will also step in to prohibit certain things.

Do data expertise and good developers trump good salespeople and selling points?
Yes, probably. At least they are of equal importance.

Is online shopping only a generational issue here, or does that go for the Middle Kingdom, too?

It no longer is, not even here! Eighty-seven

percent of adults above the age of 14 regularly use the Internet, and 70 percent regularly shop online. The German E-Commerce and Distance Selling Trade Association recently published a statement saying the biggest online growth segment in Germany concerns people older than 60.

In the USA, the consequences of structural change have become apparent. The «Retail Apocalypse», the collapse of brick-and-mortar retail stores, has begun. What about Germany?

We tend to lag behind developments in the US retail industry by about three or four years – it's bound to happen here, you can bet on it.

Will we find desolated pedestrian zones in cities within a few years?

Even now, there are small to mid-size towns with vacancy rates of more than 40 percent. The smaller the town, the harder it'll be. Big cities will have less of a problem.

Is this a negative development?

Every town doesn't have to be a shopping destination and cling to that. Better to have a pretty bedroom community without vacant shops than an ugly shopping town with lots of vacancies.

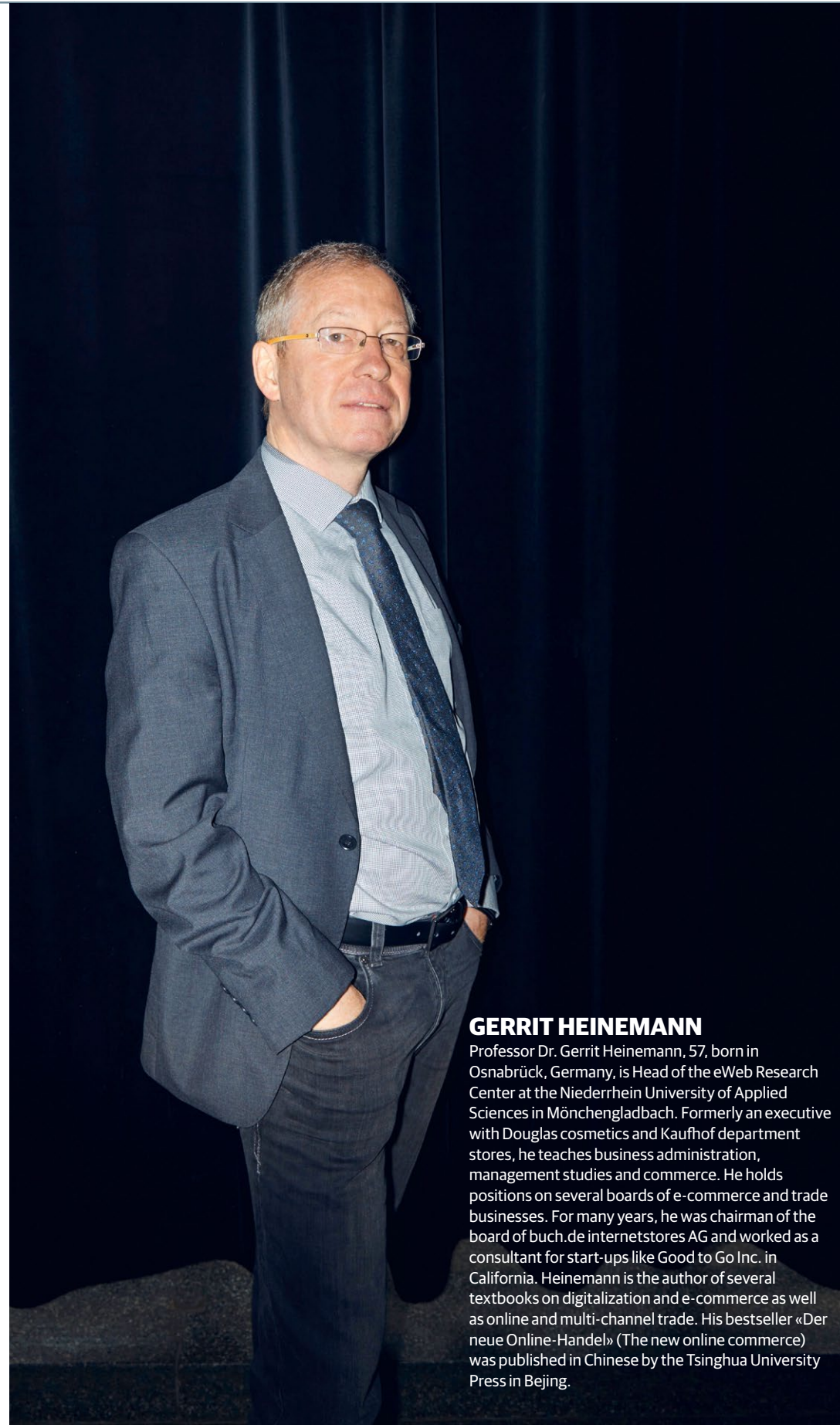
All of this does raise the question: Is this what the customer wants?

Customers vote with their feet. That goes for this situation, too.

Influenced by the big platforms' arithmetic?
Customers are sufficiently emancipated to know what they're doing and what the consequences are. They are not being coerced, but they do like to be seduced to buy stuff on the big platforms. That is the sweet poison of getting spoiled.

What do you mean by that?

Take Amazon Commerce, for example. It is for the sake of sheer convenience that



GERRIT HEINEMANN

Professor Dr. Gerrit Heinemann, 57, born in Osnabrück, Germany, is Head of the eWeb Research Center at the Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences in Mönchengladbach. Formerly an executive with Douglas cosmetics and Kaufhof department stores, he teaches business administration, management studies and commerce. He holds positions on several boards of e-commerce and trade businesses. For many years, he was chairman of the board of buch.de internetstores AG and worked as a consultant for start-ups like Good to Go Inc. in California. Heinemann is the author of several textbooks on digitalization and e-commerce as well as online and multi-channel trade. His bestseller «Der neue Online-Handel» (The new online commerce) was published in Chinese by the Tsinghua University Press in Beijing.

customers buy everything at once on this platform instead of going to a real store. **Do customers get the same kick out of digital shopping as they would from a successful bargain hunt?**

Wish.com customers – all of whom are probably millennials – get an even bigger kick out of it, if anything. To them, shopping on the platform is pure fun. **Studies show that customers actually spend more time clicking around shopping online than they would on a planned visit to the shop around the corner. Why is it so successful despite that fact?**

For that very reason. The time spent at an online store is inverse to the volume of sales. Experience has shown that the longer a customer stays in the shop, the more they'll buy.

Is it only a matter of time and technology before digital shopping is indistinguishable from real shopping?

I am sure there will always be a difference, but in other ways than those we know today.

What are you suggesting?

Stationary stores are being reinvented – by the online retailers, in fact, according to online criteria. The best examples already available are Amazon Go and Amazon Bookstore.

What is the underlying principle?

Take, for example, the use of the Amazon customer account, including the pay service, in the store, and add the presentation of the merchandise in the store according to online-usability aspects such as the best-rated product, in-store customer tracking and self-checkout.

Media companies like Axel Springer in Germany or Ringier in Switzerland have diversified and now operate online marketplaces among other things as well as engage in e-commerce.

The fact that 80 percent of Axel Springer's revenue is digitally derived speaks for itself.

How can platforms like AutoScout or JobScout in Switzerland and Germany stand up to the big online retailers?

Quite simply by being better in their particular fields. That means, offering the largest selection in their own segments, more than Amazon. They should also offer greater expertise and better service. And, not least, they need to provide equally good functionality.

Facebook is launching Marketplace, Google wants to conquer the jobs market. What is the strategy behind these moves?

German soccer star Franz Beckenbauer used to say: «Let's wait and see and we'll find out.» It's all about data, data and data – and monetizing it. 🌐

Hits on the high seas

Blick and Energy invite you to a cruise – and bring music stars onstage. At Le Temps, the journalists themselves perform live. At the Digital Media Conference in Warsaw, pundits are pondering the future. That future is already here in the Ringier Annual Report – in the form of augmented reality.



20 years of Le Temps

The Romandy newspaper «Le Temps» is celebrating its 20th anniversary with a whole series of events. In March, one of the highlights went down at the Théâtre Pitoëff in Geneva, with 450 guests and a unique live event: In the improvisational show entitled «LIVE Magazine», journalists from Le Temps, authors and artists met onstage, telling stories from their daily lives in the editorial offices, unscripted but all the more authentic. Throughout 2018, various activities will continue, reflecting the daily's history. Le Temps has evolved into a dynamic and innovative media laboratory.

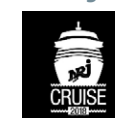


Annual Report with augmented reality

The Ringier Annual Report 2017 is exceptional in that the report section sports graphic features that activate augmented reality elements when scanned by the «Ringier AR» app. The app may be downloaded for free at the Apple or Google-Play store. The annual report was designed by Estonian artist Katja Novitskova. To create this work of art, she searched the Internet for all kinds of pictures, feeding them into an algorithm machine. The result is an incredible collection of curious images.



Party on the high seas



Not one, but two Ringier companies are about to set sail: In June 2018, the Energy Cruise will take guests on a Mediterranean cruise for five days. The destinations are Genoa, Barcelona, Mallorca and Ibiza. Swiss DJs Remady & Manu-L., Max Giesinger and DJ Antoine, among others, will provide party entertainment aboard the Energy ship. Waves or no waves – there'll be a whole lotta rockin' on the «Costa Victoria» in October 2019. «Blick» is inviting guests to the musical cruise «Stars at Sea».

On-board music will range from pop to Austrian folk-rock. The cruise through the Adriatic Sea will last seven days, performers will include Swiss pop star Florian Ast, Swiss yodeler Miss Helvetia and Die Jungen Zillertaler from Austria, among others.

Think about - #DIGITALMEDIA

Heads were aglow at the Warsaw «Sokolnicki FORT Arts Center» on April 24th and 25th. This was not only due to the sunshine scorching the attendees through the glass roof, but also because the Axel Springer, Ringier and Ringier Axel Springer conference «Think About #Digitalmedia» presented about twenty speeches and workshops dealing with today's big questions: What are the possibilities created by Artificial Intelligence? Which jobs will it destroy? How can digital journalism free itself from dependence on advertising? How can the group co-operate with respect to videos and investigative journalism? Roughly 250 journalists, as well as digital and IT experts discussed these issues jointly pondering new answers, even at dinner – and sometimes came up with new questions.



My day with the Royals

Sometimes it pays to take on unpleasant jobs. That is why, at the wedding of Princess Madeleine of Sweden, our author did not just find his feet but got a glimpse of a pair of blue-blooded calves in running gear – as well as the bridegroom in underpants.

Text: René Haenig

There are days in the life of a journalist that one would like to check off and forget asap. June 3rd, 2013, was such a day. It was a Monday. I was supposed to fly to Stockholm in four days. That weekend, Swedish Princess Madeleine was to marry Christopher O'Neill. Another commoner had won a blue-blooded girl's heart. No poor farmer's boy he, or even Swedish, but a British-American banker. Schweizer Illustrierte is planning to do an eight-page spread on the fairytale wedding. Fine, except for one thing: I don't have a good story.

ANY story!

Rather halfheartedly I scan the hundreds of names adorning the guest list published on the Swedish Court's website – royals from neighboring countries, politicians, business leaders and other VIPs. I recognize some of the names and google others. One name intrigues me: Notz. It sounds Swiss.

My hunting instinct awakens. I do some online research, make a few phone calls and keep digging. My initial gut feeling has not betrayed me: The name belongs to a Swiss guy. However, the electronic phone book lists several entries for this name.

I do what I usually do in cases like this. I cold-call them all, hoping to get the right person on the phone at some point. Fortune smiles: My third try gets me the father of the person I'm looking for on the line. He confirms that his son Cedric is invited to the Swedish Royal Wedding of the year.

He asks me to call back in an hour, when his son should be back. My adrenaline level rises. A Swiss guest at the wedding of the year! It was to get even better.

The best man is Swiss

Half an hour later, my cellphone rings. A Swiss cellphone number I'm unfamiliar with. At the other end, the wedding guest I was looking for addresses me in English. Yes, he is invited, he confirms. The bridegroom of the princess and he are old friends. He is to be best man at the wedding. He and Chris have known each other since childhood, they studied together at Boston University, go on vacation together – most recently to Barbados, along with Princess Madeleine. My brain goes into overdrive. Something niggles at me. Best man? I ask again whether Christopher O'Neill really appointed him to be best man. «Yes,» he confirms.

Three days later, we meet at Geneva airport. «My» best man is on his way to Sweden, and he agrees to give me exclusive information on the Saturday of the wedding. We arrange to meet on Saturday morning at the Grand Hôtel Stockholm.

The five-star hotel not only accommodates the best man. The bridegroom himself takes up an entire suite, as do the Norwegian Crown Prince and Princess. Late on Saturday morning, the police block the entrance to the hotel. Fortunately, I have been sitting in the lobby for hours, wearing an elegant suit

and tie with a matching pocket square. Clothes make the man. A man in decent attire, at least, doesn't draw attention to himself amongst the guests of a classy hotel. When my informant summons me and I step into the elevator, a slightly sweaty runner is already inside. He gives me a friendly nod. I nod in his direction, hardly believing my eyes. Isn't that ...? It is Haakon of Norway, the Crown Prince. Bare legs in running shoes. Nobody will believe me, I think, as the elevator doors open and the Royal rushes out.

My informant has had a short night. He tells me that on the previous evening he and the bridegroom sat up for a long time after the official dinner, enjoying quite a few drinks. When his cell phone rings, the name «Chris» appears on the display. The bridegroom. He wants his best man to help him get ready for the wedding ceremony. «He beseeched me to make sure that everything is in the right place once he's dressed.»

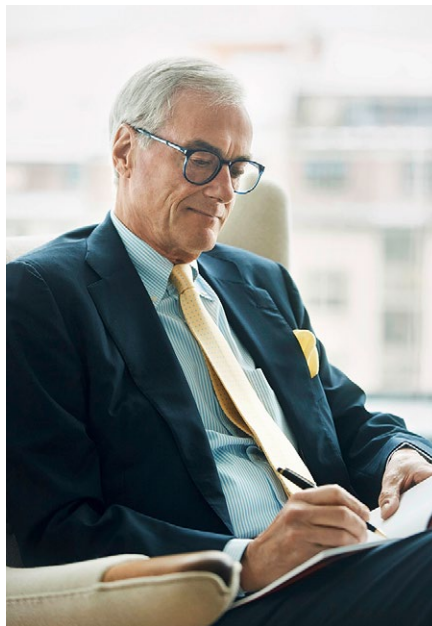
When «my» best man dashes into his friend's suite, I catch a glimpse of the bridegroom Christopher O'Neill. He is standing there in his shirt and boxer shorts. It is just like in the fairytale «The Emperor's New Clothes». But only just: O'Neill is neither an emperor nor is he stark naked. Even so, when does a mere mortal get to see royal calves? I was granted a glimpse of two pairs. Still, I would have preferred to see Madeleine's. ☺

Photo: Keystone

(Badly)Made in USA

This must be the latest hay turning machine from Detroit.» The quip from the young farmer sitting on the trailer of a tractor stopped at a red light in Lucerne was directed at my father's car idling behind him. The 62 Series Cadillac I was sitting in was certainly a really remarkable sight. Not only did its heavy chrome bumpers and futuristic tail fins eclipse every other car in terms of design; it also boasted cutting-edge technology such as a radio with a channel finder, a completely automatic A/C system and a smooth automatic transmission. All of which came at a price: This car made in USA cost about eight times as much as a VW Beetle and was substantially pricier than the most luxurious Mercedes Benz.

This childhood memory came to my mind over and over again on my recent trip to Silicon Valley - first at the car park at San Francisco Airport, which was in such a derelict state that it would have been torn down in Zurich back in the 1980s. But I was reminded again shortly thereafter, when I found myself sitting cramped in a narrow Lincoln, an American luxury car, thinking wistfully of our company BMW. And again at dinner, when a leading Uber executive wanted to present their latest applications but was unable to get online at the Nobu Restaurant to demonstrate the progress of his app. I myself was



Michael Ringier, editor

rarely able to get more than 3G reception on my iPhone during the three days I spent there. The five-star hotel at least offered serviceable WiFi, but the service at the restaurant left something to be desired. Each day at breakfast they ran out of what I was about to order. They served the toast when my scrambled eggs had already gone cold and completely forgot about the fruit platter. «Make breakfast great again» will be a long time coming at the Stanford Park Hotel.

There you are, moving within a 25-mile radius where, over the last ten years, the most innovative and fast-

est-growing companies in the western world have shot up to become global market leaders at a horrendous pace - and the entire environment and infrastructure is still changing at an American snail's pace. «Hakuna Matata» is a song in the Walt Disney film «The Lion King». «Never look back to the past and do not care about the future» is the song's theme. «It's our problem-free philosophy,» is what Pumbaa, the warthog, Timon, the meerkat, and Simba, the lion cub, sing. The movie was made in Hollywood in the mid-nineties, not far from Silicon Valley.

A close friend and very early investor in Facebook, Bitcoin and various other techie bestsellers has yet another reason for being highly skeptical of the valley of digital dreams: «For years now, I haven't been going to Silicon Valley to see the new big thing. The FAANG companies (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, Google) are like vacuum cleaners absorbing the best people from the universities. Start-ups are stuck with the second string.»

So, next time I want to go exploring, I will not just save myself ten hours of flying time, I will also pack my swimming trunks, because Tel Aviv is not only one of the world's most innovative hot spots, it is also much closer and, moreover, it's by the sea.

Michael Ringier

Photo: Maurice Haas



Pyi Nyein Maung, 29, Head of Production at Duwun.com.mm in Rangoon, Myanmar.



There is a reception at the British Embassy in celebration of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's wedding - and I'm invited! We toast the bridal couple, congratulating them on their Royal wedding.



When I arrive at the office, I become a busy bee. I start by planning a new show on our online portal Duwun.com.mm. Each Tuesday, I also set up a weekly time sheet, always with a concrete target. Each week should have a vision and accomplish a task.



Shooting music videos is my great passion, hip-hop dance videos in particular. Today, we are in an underground car park shooting a promo video for the online campaign «Dream for Korea». The winners in the four categories Food, Fashion, K-Pop and Acting are determined by vote. The lucky ones win a trip to Korea!



In our team of thirteen people, we analyze our production processes. There are always mistakes to eliminate, things to improve. We also discuss how to make the best use of the digital data we collect.



I join a conference call via Viber. We are designing a logo for our immensely popular street survey «Ko Pout Kwel». My graphic designer and I discuss every little detail so everything will turn out perfectly in the end.



We work very hard during the week, so weekends are all the more important for chilling out and enjoying life. My friends and I hang out, having fun, gossiping or discussing the latest fads and trends.

An inquisitive late bloomer

André Frensch wound up at Ringier because he liked the idea of a day off from high school. 30 years ago, he started out as a photolithographer, and he was always eager to learn. Today he is co-editor-in-chief of Schweizer LandLiebe magazine.

Photos: Geri Born/Private

He is one of the brains behind one of Ringier's currently most successful periodicals, the country-life magazine Schweizer LandLiebe: André Frensch, 51. He was already involved in LandLiebe's development stage, tinkering with the content and the design. A trained photolithographer, longtime art director of Schweizer Illustrierte and creative director at SonntagsBlick and SonntagsBlick magazine, he has an eye and a knack for finding beautiful images.

«I consider myself a craftsman,» Frensch modestly maintains. A restrained manner paired with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge got him to where he is now. He never planned out his career, but «when I'm interested in something, I give it all I've got.»

Many things have aroused his interest, even though the first thing he cared about was a day off from high school. As a student, he was permitted to visit a few companies. One of them was a publisher of art books, where, instead of facing seemingly unsolvable mathematical problems, he found himself gazing at easels with pictures by Swiss artist Max Bill. «That looked cool. I thought: That's what I want to do.» The apprenticeship in photolithography took four years. It soon dawned on him that digitalization would affect this profession in major ways. When Ringier's Zofingen plant was looking for system operators, he applied, starting his new job on January 1st, 1988. In turn for his training he committed to staying with the company for at least two years. «I thought I'll do that and then I'll leave,» Frensch recalls.

Meanwhile, he has been working at Ringier for 30 years. «Learning by doing» has become his motto. «I absorb everything around me like a sponge.» His first position in journalism was with the former business weekly Cash in 1996. He later went on to Schweizer Illustrierte and to SonntagsBlick, where he was appointed creative director, responsible for the tabloid's look. André is well known for keeping his nose to the grindstone.

In some respects, he is a late bloomer, as he is happy to admit. He only became a co-editor-in-chief at the age of 48; he took up golf at 37, married at 44 and only just «got around» to becoming a first-time father in January 2017 at the age of 49. By the way: André and his wife Lucia are a match made by Ringier CEO Marc Walder - and he is godfather to the couple's son, George. **RH**



André Frensch in front of the «LandLiebe» house in Herrliberg, Zurich. When the successful magazine's first edition went into print in early April 2011, its co-editor-in-chief (left) was of course present at the printing plant in Zofingen. The father of a young child, he has hardly had any time for golfing, but «I fully intend to take it up again.»



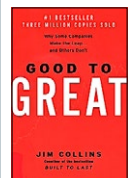
Editor's Choice

by Marc Walder

Ringier CEO Marc Walder tells you which books he has read and why they fascinate him.

Jim Collins

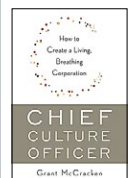
GOOD TO GREAT



For many years, US author Jim Collins and a renowned team of researchers performed a study of the factors that cause some good enterprises to become great while others develop in ways that are (below) average. He and his team came up with a total of seven principles of success ranging from appointing the right people to a culture of discipline and technological factors. The golden rule is that technology is never a starting point but rather a catalyst for development. Collins illustrates his theories with specific and comprehensible examples from real life. His book is a solid contribution to understanding long-term business success.

Grant McCracken

CHIEF CULTURE OFFICER



How does a company recognize long-term trends? In his book, Canadian Grant McCracken calls for creating the position of «Chief Culture Officer», a job meant for someone concerning themselves with (pop) culture. They would not only need to follow current trends like Instagram or Snapchat but also spot long-term social developments - such as the growing demand for healthy food. This «cool hunter» or «guru», as McCracken calls this individual, must also develop strategies for reacting to new market developments and changes in customer behavior. In his book, the author explains convincingly how essential it is for a company's survival to keep a close eye on the environment outside the firm and its industry.



Marry

Marry.vn is Vietnam's largest wedding website with the biggest online community of brides and directory of wedding vendors.

Marrybaby

MarryBaby.vn is the No.1 Parenting channel which targets first moms in Vietnam

Marryliving

MarryLiving.vn is the first personalized website which targets moms had kids from 6-12 in Vietnam; also includes BepGiaDinh.com - The leading cooking channel for kitchenistas.

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