

Our Shopping Experience Reimagined – Part 2

[00:00:12]

BRADLEY HOWARD (BH): Hello and welcome back to the Tech Reimagined podcast, where we're reimagining the way that we shop, with Thomas Beetschen global tech director of Media Digital Consumer Experiences at Mondelez International. And Jeremey Mayes, my colleague who is VP of Strategy Acceleration at Endava.

Today, we'll get to know each of our guests a little better and look back over their careers to understand how they got to where they are today. Let's start with you Thomas, can you tell us more about your career background?

[00:00:38]

THOMAS BEETSCHEN (TB): Sure Bradley, it has been very much within kind of consumer package goods for most of my career. I started in supply chain running supply chain operations early in my career for Samsung, for instance, in the UK. I then, worked with Kellogg's in the UK as well, but in the European set up where that was the time where I kind of switched towards some of the technology parts, of kind of traditional IT and beginning up implementation.

But also, some of the very, very early e-business work, and then for the past 14 years I've been working with Mondelez, Mondelez is a company that owns a lot of the brands that people know, whether it's Cadbury, Oreo, Tang, Milka, etc. And there I have the pleasure of actually looking at ways of using technology to improve a key part of the business.

So, whether it's around, again, supply chain when I started, I went to kind of help to some of the business to bid some factories and understand we automate this. I then had the pleasure to work with Bradley, actually, on the London Olympic project, and how a brand like Cadbury can be involved in that. I've worked with sales on digitising sales across the globe for Mondelez, and now I'm working with the marketing and media team to best use the new technology advancements to the way we do marketing and advertising.

[00:02:07]

(BH): Thank you very much, and Jeremey?

[00:02:09]

JEREMEY MAYES (JM): Thanks Bradley, I actually grew up in the town in New York State where IBM started, and so that experience was an interesting one I think, when I was a young kid, most people, I think, most adults who worked in that town seemed to have worked at IBM. So, we had computers everywhere, which, you know, this is in, I'm talking about I was born in 1976 so, you know, I grew up in the 80s and maybe 90s, and that wasn't as common as it is today.

And because of that, I think I was lucky enough to go to a high school that had computers everywhere, and we, amazingly enough, had a computer graphics class that taught 3D Studio in the 90s, which is kind of insane. And once I engaged with that, I just kind of fell in love with the idea of just digital graphics and design, and things like that.

And ended up going to school for that in New York City, worked in video games actually for the first 15 years or so of my career, which was quite fascinating. And about almost 10 years ago now, decided to make a pretty radical career shift and get more into user experience, design, you know, digital products and experiences beyond the gaming world essentially.

So that brought me to Endava and, you know, at Endava I get to work with a lot of very different clients across very different verticals, which is fascinating because the challenges are always new, and it's just been sort of a fascinating ride ever since.

[00:03:36]

(BH): And do you still keep an eye on the computer games industry?

[00:03:40]

(JM): I do, I can never fully leave it, because I'm a game fan, but more, less about playing for hours on end, more because I'm very interested in new game mechanics, and just the innovative new ways that you can engage people in the art of play and fun, which I think is really kind of interesting use case. And as somebody who has a passion for game design, I actually have a hobby that I actually use my 3D printer for, to be honest, and that is building new, and prototyping new kinds of game experiences and testing them out, and maybe one day turning that into something real.

[00:04:18]

(BH): And Thomas, what did you want to be when you were younger?

[00:04:21]

(TB): So, the interesting piece is, and I'll tell you in a sec, but that's still my dream job, OK. So, I wanted to be, and I still want to be a Lego inventor. Fundamentally, looking at a lot of different, you know, components and finding very, very innovative ways to assemble together to something that wasn't done before, it's what I wanted to do, I was doing it when I was five, six, seven, I remember taking photos of the models and sending them to Lego and, by the way, they still haven't had a reply. So, the CRM system is not that great there but, really, really ... that's what I wanted to do, and I think what I've ended up doing is, is try to replicate this in the corporate world. So, what I do is I look at components and those components are a piece of technology, the talent and then all of those things that are available in the computer in the corporate world.

And try to bring them together to invent something new. But it's still my dream job, so Lego if you're listening, I'm on Wgiveusajob.Beetschen, at any time I am listening.

[00:05:34]

(BH): And Jeremy, how are you going to follow that one, what did you want to be when you were younger?

[00:05:40]

(JM): I don't know if I can follow that one, I actually, when I was fairly young wanted to be a pilot of all things. And I, you know, went so far as to take some lessons and things like that, and joined in the US sort of a pre-ROTC type programme in high school, where I was learning a bit about being a pilot and sort of was like a preparation to go into the air force in the United States.

And to be honest, I realised that after being part of that for a couple of years, the idea of waking up at the crack of dawn and having somebody scream at you every day for six months, a year, or whatever, just was not really for me. And that was around the same time that I got interested in 3D modelling and animation.

[00:06:25]

(BH): And Thomas, have you had mentors along your career path?

[00:06:28]

(TB): I don't think I had official mentors that are kind of like in the way of that official capacity. But what I have done is kind of surround myself with very intelligent people, and I think in the day to day of those interactions, you know, they do act as mentors and, you know, you have been one of them Bradley, you know, when we were working together.

So, for me, this is about being close to people who can give you advice right there, right now, because they see you in action and they can say, hey that was great, or hey, just no more of that please. And I think that's really useful. One of the kinds of advice that has stuck with me though, and it wasn't said exactly like that, but that's the way I understood it is, just whatever you do look after number one, and number one is you.

And it's not in a mean way at all, it's actually in a very, very important way, if you can be centred on what you like, and what you're good at, and then you can make sure that the things around you are centred around this, then what that makes you, it makes you the best you can be, and I think that helps everybody around you.

But nobody's job is really to look after you, that's your own job and therefore you need to make it the first things that you do, that's probably the main things that have stuck with me.

[00:07:38]

(BH): That's very nice, and thank you for the compliment before, and yes, we did work together for quite a long time, and I still quote some of the things that you said 10 years ago now, so, yeah, thank you very much. And Jeremy, have you had mentors, any bits of advice that stuck with you along the way?

[00:07:56]

(JM): I'm not sure I would technically call them mentors, but I would start with my parents, who were always supportive in anything that I wanted to pursue, especially when I started to, you know, I think at one point in high school I also wanted to be a lawyer, and I did a 180 and said, you know, actually I've decided that I really want to follow my passion, and my passion was leading me to art school, which I'm sure a lot of parents might have paused, right.

But they've always been very supportive in any kind of creative endeavour that I've always kind of strived to do. And I would also like to mention early in my career I was fortunate enough to work with some of the sort of old legendary game programmers, game designers, who worked on Atari games, and those guys were really fascinating to work with, but even more fascinating to talk to, and understand the landscape in the 70s and 80s that they were in when they were part of just a really interesting cultural phenomenon, and I would definitely consider those guys a bit more on the mentor side.

[00:09:03]

(BH): Thomas, except for obviously when we worked together, but what were the key standout moments that you had in your career?

[00:09:09]

(TB): That was definitely one Bradley, I'm still trying to recover from this, so really enjoyed it.

(BH): That's mutual as well.

[00:09:17]

(TB): I think, for me, there was something and I'm really, really glad it happened really, really early in my career. I was literally in my first job, out of university in French, and university in French is a bit of a long journey, so I wasn't extremely young but first job, and I was working with a company at the time kind of building logistics networks and distribution centres. And I got into a project that was a European project, where we needed to kind of think about, and make, I did it to make recommendations about, you know, what we should do in different markets.

And I kind of I did that, I said OK in the UK I think what we need to do is close this site and open this site and do this merger. And at the same time, I was actually trying to find a way to do something which is very, very specific to France, which was the national service, it was compulsory at the time for young men, and there was a way to do that and working abroad for a company and for the embassy.

And I was trying to combine the two, so I kind of like did that kind of great, great, kind of recommendation, a little bit like, a little bit on the dreamy side. Went and presented it and they went, yeah, you're going. And literally, a month after that I was finding myself in the UK, in the very site that I said I think we need to close that, trying to help the MD driving that closure.

And at that time, I realised that if you're going to make some recommendation you've got to be ready to follow them through, and then make them happen, because quite often that's the case. And I actually learned an awful lot, and it happened extremely well. And one of the things I'm still very proud of is actually every single person that was on that site, I kind of helped them find another job by looking at their CVs and helping them with interviews and all of those things.

But the kind of the sheer lack of oxygen that I found during those four months having thinking, what the hell did you think of, and now you've got to make it happen. It forces me now to make sure that every recommendation I come up with, I'm ready to make them happen because I know that's the most likely outcome.

[00:11:14]

(BH): What a lovey story, and Jeremy?

[00:11:16]

(JM): Probably two things that I can think of that are maybe the standout moments. The first is back when I was working in games, I was fortunate enough to work with Microsoft on their Windows 8 launch games. And there was a point where I realised that the games we were building would be played by 100s of millions of people, and they'd be installed in over a billion machines, and that was quite humbling.

I would say the other shift in my career is, the shift in my career that I'd mentioned earlier, like I said about 10 years ago, when I changed from games into a fairly different field of digital products and experiences, was a pretty radical shift and, you know, and the shift was enough and I think that it helped me take a lot of what I learnt in one field and apply it in another, and I feel like I could shift back again and apply an entirely new set of learnings back to the game industry.

So, when I think about it, I actually had a professor at university who tended to do this when he wasn't teaching, just, he talked at length at one time about his career, and he had worked in so many different areas, so many different industry experiences that it just was inspiring, because he had this wealth of knowledge that a few people have, and made me think that, you know, more of us should consider something like that.

[00:12:37]

(BH): And finally, what do you both think has changed between when you started your career, and the work that you're doing today, Thomas first?

[00:12:45]

(TB): For me, what's the most striking piece is just time of execution and distances have just gone away. I remember, so here's an anecdote, when I finished in universities, you know, we were looking at kind of like what was the computer programme that would then evolve into ERPs, and we would spend three days typing the code for it to kind of work in the parameters it would run for five days, and we would get a pile of paper after that, that we would make decisions on.

And this now takes about half a second. So, the compression of the execution time, and the distances as well with being virtual, I work in a global job and I talk to people across every single continent every single day, and that was just not possible before. So, that opens up fantastic opportunities. Yet at the same time, there's still 24 hours in my day, and therefore, the problem I find is that shortening of the execution time has just consumed my thinking time.

And I'm finding it really, really hard to protect myself from the immediacy from the next email to say, OK, well actually thinking takes time, my brain takes time, the complex problem takes time to be dealt with. And I was before, in the early part of my career, protected by the kind of the inertia of everything else, and I was easily finding those thinking times, I'm finding it extremely difficult to find them now.

And as a result, I think the quality of some of my thinking is going down and that's a worry for me.

[00:14:13]

(BH): I think we all agree with you on that one. Jeremy?

[00:14:17]

(JM): Yeah, I was just going to say, I can't agree more on the thinking time piece, you know, I think that as a business in the services industry, we tend to think about, well how long is it going to take you to do this deliverable, and that deliverable, and this deliverable. And nobody ever puts down a lot of data that says, you know, I need 15 hours to think about this. And I think that that is something that's getting lost, and it shouldn't be lost.

What I'd add to that answer is just the relentless pace of technology. I entered the job market in 1998, when the internet was a baby, and mobile phones were a joke, you know. I think I mentioned Ray Kurzweil earlier, he talked about the amount of computing power that was onboard the Apollo missions was dwarfed by, you know, a million or a billion times, or something like that by your cell phone in the 2000s, right, like it's just an unrelenting pace that is really radically changing human experience and I think that somebody who is an armchair futurist, let's say, I really look forward to what technologies like augmented reality, artificial intelligence, etc. How they're going to change the world in the next five, 10, 15 years, I think it's going to be really fascinating.

[00:15:36]

(BH): Well, thank you both for sharing such valuable insight and advice with us. We hope that you will join us again when we reimagine another topic that impacts our every day lives, thanks to the intersection between people and technology.