

## The game turns serious

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# Whether it is entertainment or edutainment - the company "gamebook.io" from Halle (Saale) offers both.

"gamebook.io" has developed technology with the same name which allows digital stories to be told in several strands. The software from the company from Saxony-Anhalt could also be used in the world of science and business in the future, and therefore play a key role in the industrial revolution 4.0.

It all started with a book. The adventure game book, in fact. Popular from the 1970s through to the 1990s, adventure game books allowed their readers to embark on their own story, with the readers enjoying different adventures at the throw of the dice. In the digital age, this form of storytelling now takes place on computers. For many years, the respective products were only available in English, but since 2010, they have also been available in German. It was then that the company Experimental Games AG was founded in Berlin, a business which is now based in Halle (Saale) in Central Germany and has the same name as its product: "Gamebook".

## Excellent specialists

Here, in the south of Saxony-Anhalt, ten highly-qualified experts are hard at work: graphic designers as well as quality control and -assurance staff. The advantages of the location are plain to see: Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design trains the visual artists and designers, while the faculty of mathematics at Martin Luther University provides the budding young quality assurance experts. "Excellent people," says Nico Nowarra, chief business development officer and company spokesman.

Freelance authors, games designers and artists, meanwhile, provide the stories and the pictures. The heart of the development, however, is the software that provides the product environment and the pipeline for the digital stories. "Storytelling is a growing market," explains Nico Nowarra. Between 2017 and 2018 alone, worldwide sales in the sector increased from 200 to 400 million dollars. When considered as a whole, the turnover in the games industry is on a par with that of the film industry.

The target group for the story-oriented game-play is currently 14 to 19-year-old girls, with topics primarily devoted to love and "coming of age" - in the app "My Love: Make Your Choice", for example. Nico Nowarra also tells us that horror and fantasy stories for adults are in preparation, however. Successes have already been achieved: in March of this year, a game produced jointly with a Spanish publisher, a romantic comedy story, went to number one in the App-store charts in America.

Creating its own stories also forms part of the business model of Gamebook. Another thing currently being planned is a freely-accessible platform on the internet that enables home users to tell their own stories. "In this area, our technology also provides the basis; the Gamebook studios are where the implementation takes place. Before our technology, it took a lot of technical knowledge to be able to tell digital stories - we have simplified that," says Nico Nowarra.

## Training software for physicians

Providing businesses with "Gamebook" technology so that they can design their own products is the company's second key area of business, and marks the transition from pure entertainment to edutainment. After all, the software also enables the conveying of knowledge - on both a rapid and entertaining basis. "We have developed training software for prospective doctors for a company in Halle, for example," highlights Nico Nowarra. A virtual patient describes his symptoms, while with the use of questions - whether voice-controlled or in writing - the physician can exclude differential diagnoses on the basis of various paths, choose the examination procedures and plan the treatment. An evaluation of the training finally takes place, in which it is highlighted as to where the physician may have "taken a wrong turning".

A research project in which "Gamebook" is involved and in which artificial intelligence also plays a major role is currently being developed together with the HTW (University of Applied Sciences) in Berlin. The software is designed to support the computer-assisted training of hearing-impaired people with cochlear implants by assessing their general condition, determining the requirements and comparing the performance of the exercises already completed.

In another research project with the German Association for Media Independence, the technology from Gamebook is currently being used to determine the point at which the consumption of media by children and adolescents leads to dependency. "Right now, we are producing a story that analyses user behaviour. It provides access for youngsters and for their parents - without the annoying 'finger wagging'," explains Nico Nowarra.

## Well-equipped for 4.0

Something else that could turn out to be very valuable in the future is a project that "Gamebook" has contributed to initiating which has the objective of determining the skills of older, frequently highly-skilled employees in businesses whose particular area of expertise is no longer required and for whom new areas of expertise need to be identified. "We are creating," explains Nico Nowarra, "a virtual space in which we can determine people's expertise." This onboarding could be a great source of support for the industrial revolution 4.0.

Technology is also likely to play a greater role in the tourism sector in the future, as well as - just as examples - in the care sector. Support staff or short-term workers could be prepared for their tasks with the appropriate training stories and given training in advisory discussions, and the onboarding would be completed quickly and rapidly, explains Nico Nowarra. Only a small amount of specialist knowledge would have to be imparted, however: "For us, social interaction always takes centre stage!"

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