



Startup@ISH digital: what digital professionals can expect from ISH

Frankfurt am Main, 19 March 2021. Start-ups are bringing dynamism to the world of building technology. Around 30 start-ups will be showcasing their innovations at ISH digital. Since 2019 Messe Frankfurt, working jointly with the VdZ (German Association for Energy Efficiency in Building Services Technology), has been offering a special programme for recent company founders. The focus of the start-ups participating runs from ideas on climate protection, to innovative products involving water, air and heating technology, to solutions through digitalisation.

In this interview, Friedrich Arnold (Drivr) and Martin Urbanek (openHandwerk) consider what young start-ups hope to find by taking part in the fair and how the collaboration between companies and start-ups can be further improved. The questions are asked by Stefanie Breggott of the VdZ.

Mr. Arnold, start-ups are seen within the building-technology industry as innovation drivers. What makes your product special?

Friedrich Arnold: Drivr is an IoT back-end, a sort of central nervous system, in which all data generated by machines and influenced by individuals are channelled together. Our aim at Drivr is to build the most development-friendly IoT in the world. Building-technology companies which use our IoT back-end make the work of their own software developers very much easier. That is important for our customers, because their digital projects cannot succeed without software developers. They want to make the work as pleasant as possible for the few developers which they have in their team. And that's where Drivr comes in.

The shortage of qualified staff also played a vital part in the creation of openHandwerk, didn't it?

Martin Urbanek: We founded openHandwerk because we were a building-trade business with too many orders and too few staff. At the same time there were many recurrent processes. To digitalise these, to automate them, and thereby also to simplify communication for the trade workmen – that was the idea. The task is to create a digital infrastructure in the businesses concerned, for it is only in that way that I can receive the signals and data which e.g. my colleagues send from Drivr. The trade needs the digital workflow.

openHandwerk is a cloud software for workers in the building trades which makes the processes in trade businesses more efficient through digital applications. We rely on software-service solutions which bring together all stages of work, from order management, to resource planning, to digital documentation of the construction site. openHandwerk has various interfaces to link these worlds together and thus to manage building-trade operations efficiently without data breaks.

Mr. Urbanek got the idea of founding his company jointly with a trade-business in the building industry. How did you get your idea, Mr. Arnold?

Arnold: It started through a collaboration with a large housing association and in concrete terms the question of how the various heating systems in the association's properties could be digitalised without using x number of different IoT solutions. We wanted to find out whether a solution was possible independent of the manufacturer. From this initial project grew the idea of Drivr. In the final analysis, customers such as the housing association I have mentioned want the manufacturers of heating systems to supply them with an application interface (API) which channels directly into their facility-management software. This type of API was not yet widespread two years ago, and that is exactly what Drivr makes possible.

By attending ISH you will have an opportunity to showcase your products to a wider audience. How important is it for your start-ups to gain international connections?

Urbanek: Through openHandwerk we are represented for the present in the German-speaking countries but also already have our first customers from Spain. As of the fourth quarter, we plan to be set up at a wider international level.

Arnold: Drivr, too, has an international orientation, but we launched in collaboration with a German heating manufacturer. At the moment we are additionally realising projects with companies in the Netherlands. At present we have a European footprint, but we would like to be working world-wide.

ISH digital comes at the ideal time for both products. Have you already been at this leading international trade fair, or is this your first time?

Urbanek: We were already there live as a start-up in 2019. Our software solution has grown from its functionality to now. Meanwhile the firms which are working with us are likewise becoming bigger and bigger. At ISH digital we shall be able to showcase our development, and the opportunities which our software offers, to interested sanitary, heating and ventilation businesses. Apart from which, it is important to us as a start-up to gain new contacts with manufacturers and dealers. For when manufacturers and dealers integrate into our process, we shall be more efficient.

Arnold: At Drivr we are celebrating our launch at ISH. I myself was at the last ISH with my fellow founders. That was a fantastic inspiration. We took a look at all the heating companies and had a good many meetings. It was very motivating for us to see how very dynamic the industry is. We had the feeling that the time was exactly right for our start-up idea. So then we concentrated so closely on the building-technology sector. The right timing is vital for start-ups.

This year, because of the pandemic, the fair is taking place digitally. Speaking as experts, what do you want for the digital world from this digital ISH?

Urbanek: For the digitalisation of the industry the coronavirus crisis is an accelerant. Of course an open fair is more exciting, to see people and to exchange ideas. As start-ups, however, we are used to presenting and selling our software digitally. So for us ISH digital is an exciting format. And I can imagine that it is digitally simpler to contact manufacturers and dealers than to pilot them over to my exhibition stand in the start-up hall. Let's get surprised.

Arnold: The great advantage of a digital fair lies in its better measurability. We shall be able better to trace who comes to us, with whom an exchange of information takes place, and where this leads to. Digitally, interested parties will be able to look quickly at our profile and have their attention drawn to the start-up programme. In contrast to a fair *in situ*, the digital fair will not be dominated by the large stands. That plays particularly into the hands of smaller businesses and start-ups with exciting products. And the CO₂ footprint in a digital fair format is considerably smaller.

Let us stay with the topic of sustainability. How important are sustainability, climate protection and CO₂ reduction in your business models? And are there start-ups which are no longer part of that thinking?

Urbanek: If I were to say we built our software to be sustainable and resource-saving, that would not be true. But of course: by becoming paperless, by having no more empty trips to construction sites, by becoming more efficient as a business, that also counts positively towards aspects of climate and the environment.

Arnold: The Sustainable Development Goals are very important to us as a team, which has a strong intrinsic motivation. Of course we want to do something good through our IoT back-end. Our success as a start-up will be measured not only by how much equipment we have linked together in ten years' time, but also by how many software developers we will have enabled to use DRIVR and thus to save resources. For by saving data better and using computer capacity more efficiently, CO₂ emissions will be lowered. We are proud that we can improve companies' CO₂ footprint through Drivr. For example, our customer may be considering how, by using DRIVR from remote control, the level of a heating system's effectiveness can be optimised. During ISH we would like to meet with equipment manufacturers who are currently thinking about these very problems and are on the look-out for a technology partner.

Start-ups are frequently credited with a key role in mastering the energy revolution and putting the climate goals into practice in buildings. Can start-ups really match up to these high expectations?

Arnold: Start-ups alone can't save the world. To do that, everyone in the industry must work together. But a great push for innovation comes out of the start-ups. At the same time it is not simple to get established in the industry. One difficulty lies in the two speeds at which start-ups and established firms operate. Are there exaggerated expectations? Absolutely! But these expectations are human and part of a learning process.

Urbanek: Overall we are seeing some very exaggerated expectations in current circulation. At the same time there exists on many sides a data-silo mentality. Up to now

the industry has not succeeded in creating a uniform data basis. We need a new mind-set, for if we work together we can achieve more and create a corresponding added value.

Interest within the industry in start-ups is considerable and ISH is a suitable place to gain and extend contacts. From the angle of a start-up, what do you wish from firms which want to work with you?

Arnold: We need a more efficient interface between start-ups and companies. For, in the last resort, the most valuable resource which I have is time. Start-ups are quick in their tempo. Some companies have a different order of time. To put it over-simply: if a five-week strategy collides with a five-year strategy, this leads to no outcome. As a start-up which intends to survive in the market, we need to take quick, targeted decisions and seal partnerships after a few weeks. As start-ups, we are really not the firms' change managers; instead, we sell a particular product. It's a backbreaking job. Idling and over-lengthy initiation phases are things which we afford only to a very limited extent. Firms should be clear about this quick tempo if they want to work successfully with a start-up.

Urbanek: I agree absolutely. This interface problem also accounts for a considerable part in the life of a start-up founder. At the start everyone must pass through the vale of tears. We too had many meetings with companies which led to nothing because companies approached a joint collaboration with false expectations. We are not offering a business-development plan but a concrete product. The time factor in such collaboration is decisive. To take up Friedrich Arnold's interface example: I can complete an interface into his world within two hours. What I, as a start-up, absolutely cannot do purely for economic reasons is to work on an interface for seven months because the agreement processes with the company are so protracted.

So a successful cooperation depends essentially on whether companies can keep up with the tempo which start-ups must stipulate in order to subsist?

Arnold: Absolutely. Balancing the expectations of companies and start-ups is very important. On the other hand, neither Martin Urbanek nor I would be working in the building-technology sector if we had not also adapted a bit to the companies here and achieved good results even with protracted negotiations.

Many thanks for the interview.

The interview was conducted by Stefanie Bresgott, VdZ

Profile:

Drivr

Founded: 2019

URL: drivr.cloud



Friedrich Arnold / Drivr © DRIVR

openHandwerk

Founded: 2018

URL: openhandwerk.de



Martin Urbanek / openHandwerk © openHandwerk

VdZ

Press contact

Stefanie Bresgott

VdZ communication officer

stefanie.bresgott@vdzev.de | * 49 30 27874408-22

VdZ – Forum for Energy Efficiency in Building Services Technology

The VdZ is working for a sustainable and energy-efficient building technology. Its members provide techniques and working arrangements for the economically viable modernisation of energy in buildings, thus making a major contribution to the achievement of energy and climate goals. This industrial association represents the interests of the

three-level value-added chain of building and energy technology: industry, wholesale and the installation trades. These include just under 50,000 businesses with around 52,000 employees and a sales revenue for the sector of more than EUR 60 billion. The initials VdZ refer to the association's original name, "Vereinigung der deutschen Zentralheizungswirtschaft." The association has been in existence since 1963 and since 1967 has been one of the sponsors of ISH, the leading international trade fair, in Frankfurt.

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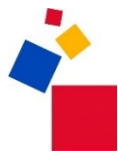
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Contact:

Antje Schwickart

Tel.: +49 69 75 75-6474

Antje.Schwickart@messefrankfurt.com

Messe Frankfurt Exhibition GmbH

Ludwig-Erhard-Anlage 1

60327 Frankfurt am Main

www.messefrankfurt.com

Background information on Messe Frankfurt

Messe Frankfurt is the world's largest trade fair, congress and event organiser with its own exhibition grounds. The Messe Frankfurt Group employs around 2,500* people in a total of 30 subsidiaries. The company generated annual sales of approximately €250* million in 2020. Even in difficult times caused by the coronavirus pandemic, we are globally networked with our industry sectors. We have close ties with our industry sectors and serve our customers' business interests efficiently within the framework of our Fairs & Events, Locations and Services business fields. One of the Group's key USPs is its closely knit global sales network, which extends throughout the world. Our comprehensive range of services – both onsite and online – ensures that customers worldwide enjoy consistently high quality and flexibility when planning, organising and running their events. We are expanding our digital expertise with new business models. The wide range of services includes renting exhibition grounds, trade fair construction and marketing, personnel and food services. Headquartered in Frankfurt am Main, the company is owned by the City of Frankfurt (60 percent) and the State of Hesse (40 percent).

For more information, please visit our website at: www.messefrankfurt.com

* preliminary figures 2020