German Center for Research and Innovation – New York

Germany
Land of Ideas

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How can apps help children navigate today's digital age?

Apps are often children's first point of contact with the digital world. They enable kids to take their first steps on digital devices in a safe environment without being confronted with advertising or in-app purchase options. Apps teach them about the general functionality of these devices and give children the feeling of being in control, meaning that each of their taps or swipes trigger an action.

Please elaborate on a few current projects at Fox & Sheep.

In the past four years, we launched different apps together with famous children's book authors, illustrators, and animators. Now for the first time, we have teamed up with DreamWorks Animation from L.A. to launch an app with its most famous characters from the movies "Shrek," "Kungfu Panda," and "Madagascar." This is very exciting for us, as it marks a new milestone in making Fox & Sheep an international brand.

Why is Germany a good place for app development?

Berlin, in particular, is a great place to start your own business and to develop apps. There are many developers, illustrators, and animators from all over the world living and working in Berlin, which makes it a great location for developing apps in over 16 languages. In addition, there is a very lively start-up ecosystem that fosters innovation and knowledge sharing.

What are the challenges of developing apps for children? How does this differ from developing for an older target audience?

The main challenge that developers face is trying to please two different target groups: parents and kids. Parents buy the apps, whereas their children use them. Therefore, a children's app developer has to make sure she convinces parents of the benefits of the app while entertaining kids at the same time. In addition, apps for younger kids should ideally not have advertisements or in-app purchase capabilities disturbing the game flow of the app. This condition, however, makes it more difficult to earn back the development costs of an app, as the user only pays once, but can use the app forever.

What potential does education technology offer for reaching historically disadvantaged user groups?

Digital educational content for kids offers enormous potential for helping close the access gap to education for disadvantaged groups as the marginal cost of digital education is close to zero. Once digital educational content is developed, there are no further costs per new user. Therefore, it offers a great opportunity for families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds to pay for the content while giving it away for free or little money to disadvantaged user groups.