LONDON I UNITED KINGDOM - TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY

Tech makes the world go round

As well as being a leader in education, arts, fashion and media, London is also Europe's financial center. It is therefore no surprise that it has the third-largest technology start-up cluster in the world after San Francisco and New York City. Silicon Roundabout is located in East London and features over 2,000 start-ups, 30 accelerators and 48,000 people employed in the digital economy. This is partly thanks to governmental efforts such as big PR initiatives, tax incentives and the 'Entrepreneur Visa' for people from non EU-founder nations. These advantages are coupled with the present availability of capital and a driving entrepreneurial spirit to make London a buzzing scene in this field.

Travel Technology is a hot topic in many start-up scenes. In a broader sense, the term means the application of IT, software and e-commerce solutions to the travel and tourism industry.

London has a very active Travel Tech scene with several events and activities hosted every month by, and for, start-ups and tech companies. The UK's capital even has a designated Travel Tech co-working space, the Traveltech Lab, which adds to its reputation as a vital hub for the travel industry.

Sales expert meets data specialist

Although these Travel Tech insiders had never met before, their connection was such that the interview in London felt like a meeting of two old friends. Both have a great deal of experience in the Travel Tech sector and are excited by the impact it has had on the global travel industry.

Charlotte Lamp Davies (left)
Originally trained as an opera singer, Mrs. Lamp Davies decided to go into sales and marketing 18 years ago. She joined DataArt London in 2012 as Vice President of Travel & Hospitality for Europe. She enjoys speaking at industry events where she passionately endorses innovative Travel Technologies.
www.dataart.com/
Steffi Schweden (right)
Mrs. Schweden worked for the Amadeus IT Group for 10 years before joining the OTDS (Open Travel Data Standard) association as CEO in 2012. OTDS is a free data format developed to serve the travel industry. Travel providers use it to distribute their offers to all sales channels, be they travel agencies or websites.
www.otds.de/en/home/

What is Travel Technology exactly and what challenges does it face?
Charlotte Lamp Davies: Travel Tech represents evolution and is a necessary evil; we wouldn't be here without it. In the past few years, technology has grown up and with it the needs and habits of the consumer. This combination is a real challenge for the sector because it is still behind some others, e.g., retail, which knows exactly how to reach its clients.
Steffi Schweden: For me, it's the invisible heart of the travel industry. It keeps it running and connects the billions of providers and in-between sellers with billions of customers. The Internet has changed the industry, today's consumer is much more educated and self-confident, and they have the chance to buy directly, which has brought new players and completely new business models to the industry.

Where is Travel Tech heading?

StS: I think, with the help of big data, we can expect more personalized solutions. For instance, I am a kite surfer and I'm waiting for the day when my smartphone tells me: your calendar shows a free weekend in three weeks and a weather site points out that there is going be windy conditions in Denmark. It will then suggest a way for me to get there and allow me to book it all at a push of a button. This is what I see happening with Travel Tech.

CLD: More and more gadgets are coming into the market which will enable consumers to have the experience they want. Bizarrely enough, we talk and talk about Big Data and we collect it, yet, for all the information gathering, travel companies are still unable to tell Steffi when to go kite surfing in Denmark. I strongly believe we'll address this successfully in the future through technology. We have to.

What makes London and Berlin meccas for start-ups?

CLD: London is such a fertile breeding ground because it is a melting pot of cultures and nationalities and it has venture capital. It just epitomizes the entrepreneurial spirit. I fell in love with the city for this reason.

StS: Berlin was lucky to get the chance to redefine itself after the wall came down. There was a sense of "now we can do everything" and a great level of enthusiasm, which is still there. Great minds come to the city to start companies because rent and living costs are still relatively low. Still, I see room for development regarding real Travel Technology. For example, we could create companies that use ideas to improve mobile travel solutions.

Is there gender equality in Travel Tech?

StS: In fields like marketing and product management it is already quite balanced, but there are still more men working in software development. What we need are schools guiding young girls and women into, for instance, Ruby on Rails (programming language). We should give them first rate programming ideas and show them success stories, so they get excited about working in this field.

CLD: We're definitely seeing more women going into software development. We are also seeing a culture shift as more women are encouraged to go down a path previously seen as male driven. To maintain this, the educational system has to make it enticing and exciting for women to want to get into tech. It is not for a lack of ability that we have gender imbalance in technology. Millions of women have mathematical talent, are process driven and fit right into the world of technology. It's not a matter of gender, it's a matter of education and a desire to work in what is a very challenging, fun and sexy industry.

Original article – http://www.itb50.com/#fancybox_london