

# ASK THE ARTISTS: SEBASTIAN SPIEGL



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Sebastian Spiegl has been a part of the Ventuz circus for a whole decade and ranks among the most sought after players in the business. Among his customers are a number of automotive companies, media providers and service agencies. He spoke with us about innovation, his issues with content creation and his unique approach to Ventuz.

*Ventuz:*

*When did you first discover your interest in technology?*

*Sebastian:*

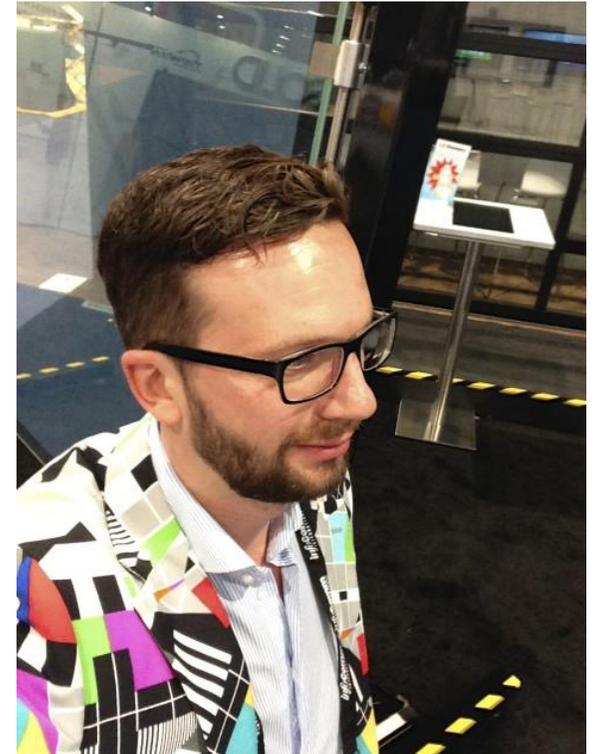
I started programming as a kid on my C64 – the typical nerd cliché. But unlike many of my friends, I was never a kid of the demoscene. Instead I started integrating hardware at an early stage. I remember, there were these input/output cards for the C64 which connected to the printer port. They let you control relay modules – this is how I created my first little light show.

*Ventuz:*

*So you knew quite early on what you wanted to be when you grew up?*

*Sebastian:*

Not at all. Like so many in the industry, my path wasn't really straightforward. After graduation from school, I went to an art school in Munich – you know, to learn something with media. So that's where I went into design and art, but we did all kinds of things: glass work, wood shop, metal, you name it. During that time, I also did some internships, one with a Munich architect who did large media installations.



So the combination of art and media technology was already there, but then I ran out of money and had to rethink. I put the whole art thing aside and learned a real job: mechatronic engineering. Did that, graduated, but couldn't find a job. I eventually applied at this company called MediaScreen, and two weeks later I found myself in South Korea setting up a massive 3D roadshow for Bosch.

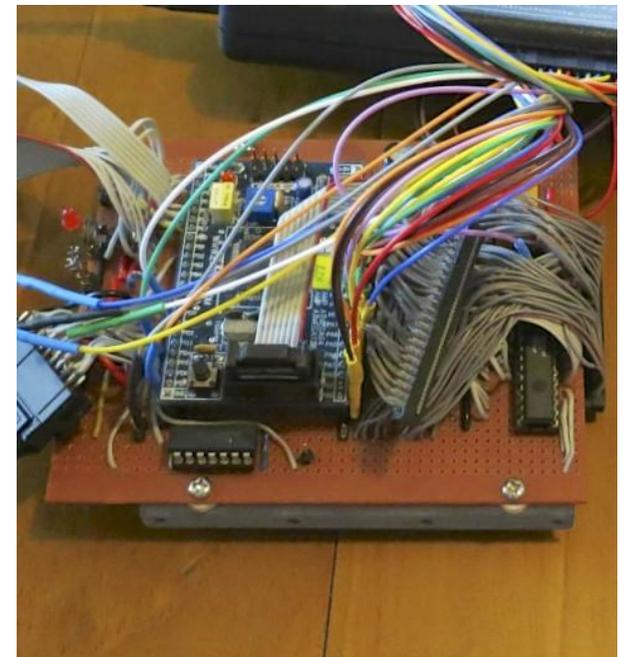
*Ventuz:*  
*What brought you and MediaScreen together?*

*Sebastian:*  
MediaScreen was a display technology company. They were really good at developing innovative display ideas, such as rounded screens, simulators, 3D displays, that sort of thing. They were at the forefront of innovation. Yet, they always had the problem that customers would find their products really great, but had no idea what to do with them. I came in to fill that gap. I was the one to develop use cases and show customers the potential of the technology. My job was to come up with crazy ideas and make them work. The money came from selling the hardware, so I never

actually had to develop stuff that people would buy. My life consisted of proof-of-concepts.

*Ventuz:*  
*And you did that using Ventuz?*

*Sebastian:*  
Not at first. I had worked with a number of 3D tools when I was younger: Cinema 4D, 3ds Max, and then at MediaScreen I needed to get into real-time, mostly because of the 3D displays. So I taught myself S.Ha.R.K. and Quest 3D. We stumbled upon Ventuz in 2006, well before the first commercial version was released. A guy from our company knew a guy from their company. He just slapped the software on our table one day and I went to play with it. It was pretty remarkable. I quickly realized that it had all the potential of the 3D real-time tools I was working with, but that Ventuz was at the same time much more straightforward and geared towards the things I needed to do. Much more efficient, much faster workflows, but also quite broad in its possibilities. Although I have been working with Ventuz for about a decade, I am still not sure that I know everything about it, or even enough.

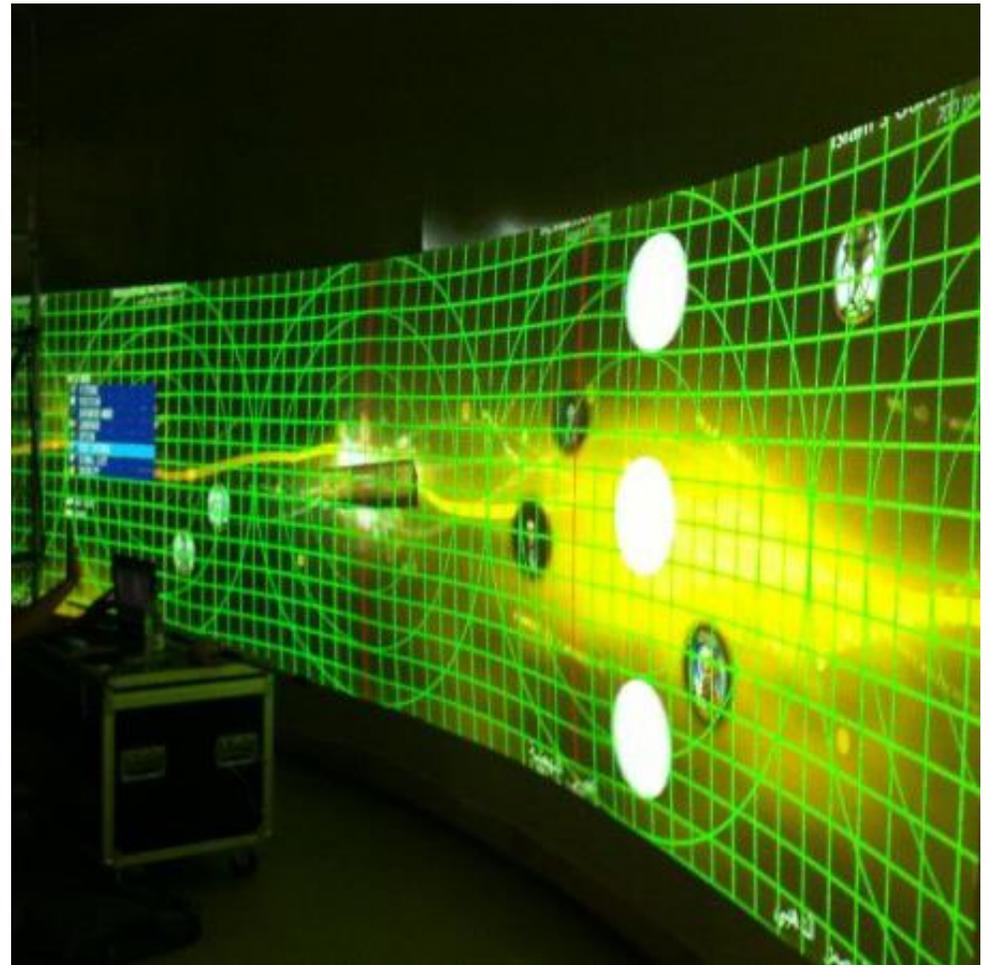


*Ventuz:*  
*Has this experience continued?*

Sebastian:  
All the tools I use fall into one of two categories: they are either professional tools, which tend to be bulky and not flexible enough, and then there are the cool, flexible tools, which are usually not made for what I use them for, which is why I don't get proper support. Ventuz is the perfect combination. There are solutions for every idea I come up with, and there is always someone I can call when I need help. Also, I have been able to make development wishes, especially in terms of hardware integrations, which is quite amazing. Plus, I have always had the feeling that Ventuz is more stable and reliable in live situations, which is essential when you work with a-list customers.

*Ventuz:*  
*What is your workflow with Ventuz?*

Sebastian:  
I open the script node. (laughs) No, really, my workflow is probably a lot different from the common Ventuz operator. When I open Ventuz, I already have a solution for my problem in mind. So my first step is to open the script node and usually hack in some API code.



*Ventuz:*  
*So you don't really create content?*

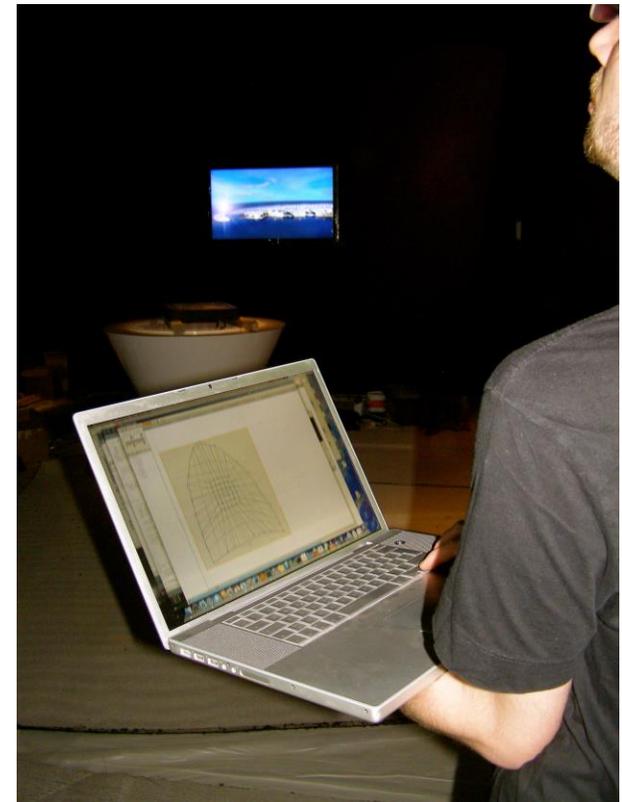
*Sebastian:*  
I have created framework scenes for many of the technologies at MediaScreen that customers can then easily fill with their own content. But I don't really create content myself. A few years back I was sort of on the verge of deciding whether I should specialize in content production. So I did a media science program in the US to understand how viewers really perceive media, what our brain does, what our eyes do. After the program I was sure that I didn't want to go into content. Now, I am a full-on programmer, I rarely ever build a scene. I also don't do animations, and if I do, I code them, I almost never use keyframe animations. This would probably scare a lot of people. But it's the only way I can get the level of flexibility I need. And this is also great about Ventuz, that it allows me to work the way I need. It doesn't force me to go either this way or that way, I am free to choose.

*Ventuz:*  
*Does this help you when you try to create innovative ideas?*

*Sebastian:*  
Certainly. Working in the same straight lines over and over again kills innovation. At MediaScreen, we had very tight innovation cycles, which meant we had to reinvent the entire company almost every year. Technologies and ideas were just thrown into the room, and we went to play with them. The openness of Ventuz gave us the opportunity to think and work in many different directions. Much of the stuff we came up with wasn't really useful or feasible, but for the 80% we discarded, we had 20% that were really cool. Also, those 80% wouldn't be dumped, but they stayed around until someone picked them up and thought: I can do something else with this.

*Ventuz:*  
*So in your view, innovation is much about playing around?*

*Sebastian:*  
There is a strange idea about innovation out there: Companies think that you can have one person who is responsible for innovation, and that you have to make this person work very efficiently. That is not how innovation works.



If you want to be an innovative enterprise, every member of your staff has to be a part of this. Every idea needs to be welcomed, no matter whom it comes from. And you cannot do innovation efficiently. Innovation is trial and error – even worse: it is about doing something, working on something, even though you know that you are going to fail. Because it brings you one step further on your path and whatever you have found out might come in handy at some other time.

*Ventuz:*  
*You have recently left MediaScreen. Is innovation still a part of your everyday work?*

*Sebastian:*  
Absolutely. I went through an Executive Leadership Program in the US a while back, where we learned a lot about how to lead in a way that creates an environment for innovation, that leadership is more about coaching than giving orders. We also spoke about creativity, communication, all these things. Since I left MediaScreen, I have been doing a lot of jobs as a consultant for companies who want to do things they haven't done before.



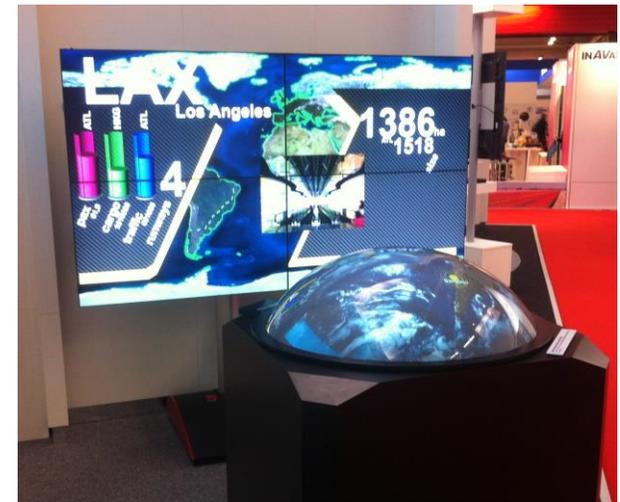
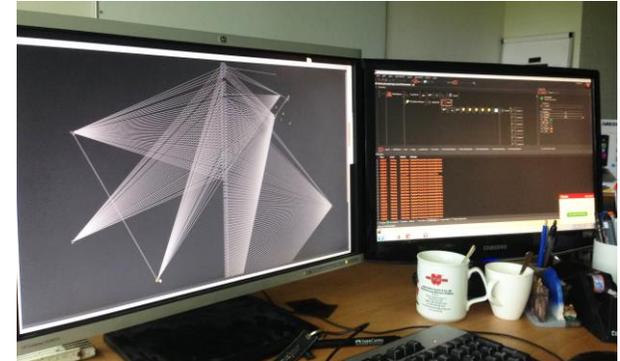
Many of them are media technology providers who need to add new skills to their portfolio to be able to withstand in the industry, such as content production or integration jobs. For example: American customers usually approach only one service provider for a project, and if this company cannot handle the entire project, they ask someone else. With my 15 years of experience in the industry I cover almost every aspect that media technology companies need to become a full-fledged agency. And I can show them how to integrate this innovation process into their everyday business. I really want to explore this portion of my work and do more full-on innovation consultancy. Many companies hold vast knowledge in their staff that needs to be mobilized for them to stay ahead. You don't want to wait for a competitor to come along and present a product that makes yours obsolete. The goal should be to develop this new product yourself. Companies need to learn to see their real potential and use it wisely.

*Ventuz:*  
*Speaking of innovation, what technology do you see as the next innovation that will shape how we consume media?*

*Sebastian:*  
I think the next big thing will be holo-lenses, meaning data glasses or eventually data contact lenses. That will be the end of hardware: nobody will still buy TVs or monitors, because you will be able to consume media wherever you want. Imagine that for your business, for example as an automotive development team. You can work on your car with the car not even being there, but you see it in the middle of the room, you can walk around it, even interact with it.

*Ventuz:*  
*This technology is viewed critically by many people.*

*Sebastian:*  
And rightly so. It allows people to retract themselves from reality or reshape reality in a way they want. You won't like it here? Paint everything pink. The coin definitely has two sides, but the potential is vast. I mean, look at Millennials who don't want to own anything anymore. They could decorate their apartments with pixels that don't cost anything. I think this is where we are headed, with all its upsides and downsides, but a lot of steps still need to be taken to get there.





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