

NEW KID IN TOWN

Parachuter. Red light district bartender. Digital creative dynamo. **Andrew Jennings** discovers that Razorfish's new creative lead doesn't fit your typical German stereotype

Spike Milligan famously said "the German sense of humour is no laughing matter". And a survey carried out last year by social networking site Badoo seemed to reinforce this national stereotype when it concluded Germany to be the least funny country in the world. The Germans' favourite comic creation? Mr Bean.

This supposed humour dearth supplies some ammunition for a second stereotype: that Germans are hardworking, efficient and disciplined.

Christian Behrendt is German. He's indeed hardworking, efficient and disciplined, but also very funny. The recently installed executive creative director at Razorfish Australia is something of a creative high-achiever to boot.

Named one of *AdWeek's* worldwide top 10 creative minds in digital in 2011, he can boast more than 160 awards for his work.

A glance at Behrendt's old creative portfolio website shows you a man that doesn't take himself too seriously. The fact he bestowed his decade long creative partnership with Leif Abraham with the moniker "Innovation Thunder" tells you something. The website introduces miniature photos of the two men spinning around surrounded by roaring flames to thumping heavy metal music.

"It was a bit tongue in cheek," says Behrendt, who landed a job as lead interactive creative at Crispin Porter + Bogusky in Boulder, Colorado through the website.

Behrendt arrived here in May, tasked with finding a better way for Razorfish to digitally engage with its major clients (Samsung, Qantas and Australia Post). But the path that eventually led him Down Under began somewhat unexpectedly.

"I started art and design school in Hamburg aged 22," he says, after two years' mandatory service in the German military's parachute division.

"Unfortunately, I didn't finish arts school. In order to finance it I bartended in the Reeperbahn."

For the uninitiated, the Reeperbahn is Hamburg's most vibrant quarter. It's also the city's red light district.

"One night I met the manager of one of Germany's biggest pop and dance labels," he recalls. Following that conversation, Behrendt's studies took a backseat. "Once I got drawn into the world of music I wasn't going anywhere," he says.

Behrendt spent a year at the label in the late '90s before being poached by Sony Music to the role of A&R manager. He later shifted stables to Warner Music as chief marketer of dance.

However, having reached 30, and with the music industry in the throes of major structural change, Behrendt realised he had a creative itch that needed a scratch.

"I witnessed a lot of change happening in the music industry, like illegal file sharing. I was confronted by the reality that I hadn't finished my studies because I'd moved over into the music industry, which was slowly dying," he says.

Behrendt took a job offer as a junior art director at Jung von Matt in Hamburg - an agency where he was encouraged to hone his digital craft.

"I was curious about what was happening in digital advertising. I got fucked by the change in the music industry. I realised that I never wanted to be in that situation again, where the change negatively affected me," says Behrendt.

This change of career direction didn't come without growing pains. "I was 30 and forced to

move back into my parents' house," says Behrendt, adding the move had a quite an impact on his sex life. "My dad asked me, 'Son are you sure you're on the right track?'. But I had an inner trust that I was on the right path."

Following his passion, Behrendt and creative partner Abraham went international with Innovation Thunder when they accepted the Crispin Porter + Bogusky offer, leading the interactive team on Activation (Guitar Hero), and on projects for Best Buy, Volkswagen and Burger King.

After a year in Colorado, the pair switched to R/GA New York, where they worked with blue chip brands including Google, MasterCard and Nike.

Behrendt was part of the team working on Best Buy's 'Twelveforce' that won the Titanium Grand Prix at Cannes in 2010. He is also co-founder of 'PaywithaTweet.com', the first social media payment system, which won at Cannes the following year.

He's co-authored *Oh My God What Happened And What Should I Do?*, a book that has been sold and downloaded over 350,000 times.

So with his star quickly rising after three years in the Big Apple, why the move Down Under?

"New York is an amazing place to live," he says. "But after getting married and spending three-and-a-half years there, I didn't feel it was the place where I wanted to raise a family."

So now, after four months at Razorfish, what are Behrendt's impressions of Sydney's creative community? "I still have a rather superficial impression of things, purely because I haven't had a chance to connect with the community yet. But based on first impressions, the community appears not overly big but pretty tight knit." ■

SEPTEMBER 2013 **BANDT.COM.AU** 19



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Photography: Anna Warr