Innovation and digitalisation are aspects that are also reflected in SCHUFA’s art collection: FARBRAUMWELTEN – a name that translates as “worlds of colour space”. For instance, in “Composition m #1” by Betty Rieckmann, an artist known for her light-based artworks. With the aid of a self-programmed microcomputer, she creates vibrant colour tones and modern spatial illusions – a digitalised artistic experience.
Dear Readers,

We live in exciting times. The digital revolution is in full swing and innovation cycles are getting increasingly shorter. New technologies are enhancing our quality of life, with smart assistants easing the burden of everyday chores. Above all, they are imperative for our future, social and economic development. In order to facilitate innovation, there needs to be a widespread acceptance and trust among users. This applies in particular to the confidential and secure handling of sensitive data, albeit digital convenience also has its downside, with increasing numbers of criminals hijacking the internet for their own illicit purposes.

SCHUFA plays a central role in this regard. Thanks to our expertise in credit-relevant information, we have been instrumental for decades in establishing trust between business partners – and in helping to prevent fraud with our tailored solutions. For example, with the new SCHUFA-FraudPreCheck for online retailing, which is based on state-of-the-art, machine-assisted analytical methods. Data protection and data security are inherently every bit as important to us as transparency and independent control. Our solution, developed together with customers and partners, strongly emphasizes that the innovation process thrives on bringing the right people together. Setting challenges and collectively thinking ahead are key requirements ensuring intelligent use of the opportunities created by digitalisation and tailoring these for the benefit of the wider market.

Accordingly, this year’s Enabler_ shines a spotlight on the question of “innovation” from various perspectives, talking to high-profile and committed individuals. Furthermore, we demonstrate that it is essential to create room for inspiration and creativity in order for new ideas to develop and grow.

On this note, we wish you an enjoyable read.

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97.8 percent – this repayment rate for loans is the highest in ten years. These and other figures demonstrate the success of SCHUFA’s work – and their significance for the economy as a whole.
Technological innovations and traditional professions are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, new digital solutions can provide valuable inspiration for craftsmen’s trades. Five experts from different branches demonstrate what forms this can take.

Photography: Michael Zellmer

INNOVATION MEETS TRADITION

The jewellery designers

“In our studio, we design luxurious lifestyle products – including chains, rings and individual bag charms. Our clients include major fashion designers such as Alexander McQueen and Carolina Herrera. Thanks to 3D printing, we can now realise creative designs that would otherwise be very difficult and costly to produce by traditional means – and less cost-effective. This applies above all to complex geometric shapes. Each piece starts with a traditional sketch on paper and ends up being polished by hand, however the automated printing process is the core component of production. With our individually configured equipment, we can produce everything in a single assembly stage, thereby avoiding the cumbersome process of pre-producing individual elements. This has many advantages: for instance, the products do not have the noticeable irregularities that sometimes occur when fitting different parts together. Moreover, it is easier for us to produce supplementary quantities should demand increase. For raw materials, we predominantly use special ceramic mixtures that we refine by combining them with leather, wood, glass or stone. It is even possible to produce personalised pieces at comparatively low extra cost. Thus, we are subsequently supporting a major trend.”

Hristiyana Vucheva and Christian Hartung, founders of VOJD Studios, Berlin
ENABLER...
Innovation meets tradition
The teacher

“We should start preparing the young generation for the ever-changing world of work while they are still at school. At our vocational school, we focus on this, among other things, through the “Bring Your Own Device” concept. Furthermore, we leverage collaborative online tools and a school intranet. QR codes on worksheets offer additional material and allow students to work towards a common learning goal at their own pace. This ensures mobile devices are used consciously and with a clearer target in mind. Moreover, they develop digital skills with which they are far better prepared for their future working life. This independent approach to working helps to free up more time for us teachers – time we can use to focus more on students’ individual strengths and weaknesses. Of course, it is also important to set limits: we still set aside our laptops when we have discussions or conduct experiments. In this example, we will only utilize the advantages of digitalisation if we want to evaluate results more quickly.”

Jaqueline Fuhrmann, teacher, Erich Gutenberg Vocational School, Cologne
The care researcher

“As a result of demographic change, there will be a substantial amount of money spent on care in the future. This is why we are testing how new technologies can help both patients and us. The focus of two successful studies is on two robots: Pepper and Paro. Pepper is a humanoid robot capable of talking patients through examinations with MRI magnetic resonance imaging scanners – with a clear voice and display. It also asks patients about pre-existing conditions and documents these for the following consultation with a specialist doctor. A welcome distraction for patients and a significant time-saver for the surgery team. Paro, on the other hand, is a cuddly toy-like emotional support robot which has proven its worth above all with dementia patients. Thanks to its acoustic, haptic and optical sensors, Paro is able to interact with people to an astounding degree. Patients relax more easily, making it easier for personnel to interact with them. In addition to robots, we test innovative external prosthetic devices that record muscle impulses and assist them with small motors. We are already using them successfully for rehabilitation patients suffering with paralyses, but they are also of interest for nursing staff. Such new developments are extremely encouraging as they have the potential to greatly take the strain off nurses and carers.”

Dr. Patrick Jahn, Head of Care Research Department, University Hospital Halle (Saale)
The librarian

“Digitalisation has been influencing different activities in libraries for quite a few years – and thusly my profession as well. For example, I work with a software that recognises our books via RFID codes. This means users can borrow and return media themselves using a self-check system. Being able to research information in large digitalised encyclopaedias and media archives is also a significant time-saver. Both of these factors free me up to spend more time advising users rather than inputting data. This is a good thing, because the more new tools there are, the more frequently I need to explain things to users. One real highlight for me are the additional educational programmes for young visitors. For example, small children can listen to portable speakers in bright colours which read a specific audiobook out loud as soon as a certain figure depicting a character from the book is inserted. Additionally, library tours for school classes have now evolved into a digital treasure hunt. Schoolchildren use tablets and QR codes to explore the library – a fun approach that goes down really well. However, the new technologies do not only change my work but also the libraries themselves. There are pioneering projects in Germany whereby, for example, visitors can try out a 3D printer or loan programming sets. In this capacity, a library is not only a place for learning and reading, but also a platform for fostering ideas and creativity.”

Gillian Adelson, Media and Information Service Specialist, Wiesbaden City Library
The caretaker

“Since I began my profession almost 20 years ago, the job has changed enormously. Back then, I would complete up to 20 orders a day by hand. What is more, there were tradesmen’s invoices that needed to be checked, stamped and sorted. Today, tenants can report issues around the clock through our member service portal – we then place the orders via our SAP platform. In some residential buildings, there are screens through which we can communicate information concerning planned repairs, provide contact details, etc. New developments like this not only save on paper but also make our job a whole lot easier. Other areas also benefit from digital solutions: one current test project is an electronic apartment handover that will be undertaken entirely via tablet in the future. This implies that tenants receive the protocol in electronic form immediately afterwards. At the moment, we are looking into which information is really required for this and how this information is processed. All in all, I spend a lot more time working on large and small screens than I used to, but human contact is still very important. Older people in particular place a lot of importance in having a personal conversation, so every now and then I am a counsellor of sorts – that’s another part of the job that is still the same.”

Horst Kohnke, caretaker,
NEUE LÜBECKER Norddeutsche Baugenossenschaft eG, Elmshorn
ROOM FOR IDEAS

Inventing something new demands curiosity, courage and willingness to diverge from the norm trusting your instincts. However, in what kind of environment do intelligent ideas and solutions develop? Can artificial intelligence be used to drive innovation processes? And what challenges does the digital shift entail for the financial sector? We spoke to Catharina van Delden, founder of start-up innosabi and presiding member of Bitkom, and Dr. Michael Freytag, Chairman of SCHUFA’s Executive Board.

PHOTOGRAPHY_ MATTHIAS HASLAUER
Dr. Freytag, Ms van Delden: Which recent innovation made the biggest impression on you and the biggest change to your everyday life?

Dr. Michael Freytag: The smartphone. It often seems that smartphones have been around for decades, but the iPhone actually only came onto the market in 2007. Today, a smartphone is a multifunctional tool for communication, music, news or photos. The smartphone has completely revolutionised communication. We can interact with users all over the world any time and anywhere.

Catharina van Delden: My favourite innovation is somewhat older. At the end of the 19th century, my great-great-grandfather Professor Arthur Wehnelt invented what, unfortunately, was to become known as the Braun tube – for the sole reason that Karl Ferdinand Braun managed to patent the invention before him. This world-famous invention would be built into every television and computer monitor up until 2005. My great-great-grandfather could have thrown in the towel in a fit of annoyance, but decided to develop Braun's work further with his research. This emphasizes two important messages to start-ups which are still valid today and that had a great impact on me personally: Don’t give up, believe in your idea, but also: successful innovations have always needed speed as well – and not just since the beginning of the digital age.

Ms van Delden, your company innosabi does exactly that – driving forward innovative processes in companies. How does that work?

Catharina van Delden: We offer companies specialised software solutions in order to speed up innovation processes. For example, the companies use our platforms to work together with customers, employees or business partners early on in the product development stage. This draws their attention to aspects that otherwise never would have appeared on their radar. The thinking behind this is that knowledge only multiplies if it is shared. You have to know how to bring together innovators who bundle the ideas and expertise of internal and external partners.

Dr. Freytag, how important is this outside-the-box thinking for SCHUFA?

Dr. Michael Freytag: It is an integral part of our everyday work. We are at home in the digitalised world, interact regularly with companies in Silicon Valley and the German fintech sector and cooperate with universities. We are also involved in the HTGF III fund and provide ongoing assistance to dynamic start-ups. A further format is our “Innovations-Werkstatt” whereby we invite experts from different sectors to work with us on digital innovations.

Catharina van Delden: Equally important is the need for companies to involve their own people. For example, we developed the internal crowdfunding platform “Quickstarter” for Siemens. Here, employees submit their own ideas and distribute budgets to projects they view as having particularly great potential. This encourages them to make a stand for ideas they believe in, to implement them or to promote them. What is so special about this process is that it is completely centred on the workforce – in other words, the decisions no longer reside solely with top management.

Does this mean that a suitable working environment is necessary in order for smart ideas and solutions to emerge?

Catharina van Delden: Yes, definitely. Employees today should be able to take on more responsibility and develop to their full potential. To do so, they need an environment in which they feel secure and in which they are allowed to make mistakes. This may sound fanciful at first, but I see it as being fundamentally related to performance: people will only deliver top performance if they are able to give their all. This requires a genuine culture shift, towards a culture of appreciation and security – it’s not enough just to give them a football table.
Room for ideas

Academy of Fine Arts in Munich
The Academy of Fine Arts in Munich is one of Germany’s oldest and most important art colleges and sees itself as an “acceleration laboratory”.

CATHARINA VAN DELDEN

is the founder and CEO of innosabi GmbH, an internationally leading provider of innovation management software. She has an MBA from the Technical University of Munich (TUM) and UC Berkeley and previously studied Business Administration and Food Production. Catharina van Delden has been a member of Bitkom’s Presiding Committee since 2013; in 2014, she received an award from the German Informatics Society (GI) in recognition of her pioneering work in modern digital technology. German IT publication Computerwoche described her as “one of the 50 most influential women in German IT”.

»People can only deliver top performance if they are able to give their all. This requires a genuine culture shift: It’s not enough just to give them a football table.«

CATHARINA VAN DELDEN, CEO OF INNOSABI GMBH

Some of our best people used to work in completely different sectors and contribute fresh ideas and new ways of thinking.

»Internationality is a good catchword. When it comes to innovations, many people tend to look to Silicon Valley rather than Germany. How do things look for our innovation culture?«

DR. MICHAEL FREYTAG

Innovations need an open and trusting work environment. Based on this, we make every effort to create a supportive atmosphere in which our employees go to work happy and motivated. This involves treating each other with esteem and communicating extensively with each other, either personally or digitally. Needless to say, my Executive Board colleagues and I can be reached by employees at any time via a mailbox and we respond within 24 hours. In order for innovative ideas to emerge, you also need talented people from various cultures and sectors. SCHUFA has people from 40 different countries in their workforce.

In 2013, I was with a German government delegation in Silicon Valley. That was all very exciting and we were hugely impressed. Nonetheless, we should not underestimate ourselves here in Germany. A Facebook employee said to me at the time: You have an established industry in Germany – that is a huge market for start-ups. A real competitive advantage. It’s always a question of perspective. We shouldn’t expect to come up with the next Facebook. We have other interesting markets such as artificial intelligence and robotics and we need to stay ahead of the pack in these areas.

Internationality is a good catchword. When it comes to innovations, many people tend to look to Silicon Valley rather than Germany. How do things look for our innovation culture?
DR. MICHAEL FREYTAG_ German companies – particularly SMEs – are innovative and develop extensive technological expertise. However, it all comes down to maximising this potential and there is still room for improvement here. We have to be forward-looking in our thinking and our actions.

_You say “forward-looking in our thinking”. SCHUFA is more than 90 years old: is it able to keep pace with the digital shift and the innovative capacity of start-ups?

»New technologies such as machine learning also help us in our efforts to combat online fraud. Innovations should not be merely an end in themselves, but should always have a purpose rooted in serving people.«

DR. MICHAEL FREYTAG, CHAIRMAN OF THE SCHUFA EXECUTIVE BOARD

DR. MICHAEL FREYTAG_ Tradition and innovation are not diametric opposites. 92 years ago, SCHUFA was already what we would now call a fintech. Since then, we have been evolving constantly: from index cards to electronic information systems all the way to the current use of artificial intelligence. In our Innovation Lab, computer specialists and data scientists are optimising processes today by means of state-of-the-art algorithms and machine learning techniques – always monitored and controlled by people. Furthermore, we make a point of investing in innovative fintechs.

_What challenges does the future hold for companies in the financial sector?

CATHARINA VAN DELDEN_ Many banks, insurance companies and financial service providers are still struggling with the digital shift. At the same time, digitalisation has a fundamental impact on the services they provide: customer expectations are changing. Orders arriving the
very next day? Communicating with customer service via chat? All of this has become the norm for many customers, who in turn expect the same kind of flexibility from their bank or insurance company. What gives me cause for optimism is that most of our customers come from the financial sector and are stepping up to the challenge posed by the digital shift. They will be successful in doing so if they cultivate a close dialogue with employees, customers and business partners and if they develop digital products and services themselves rather than outsourcing them. That is a major challenge in structures traditionally geared towards security.

**Dr. Michael Freytag**_ The digital shift is something that motivates us every day. Consumer behaviour and consumer needs are constantly changing. More and more purchases are being made online these days: the physical distance between companies and their customers is growing, and in many cases there is no longer any direct personal contact. To put it bluntly: some young people need to Google the word “bank branch” to find out what it means. (Laughs.)

**Catharina van Delden**_ The last time I was in a bank branch was when my app froze. (Laughs.)

**Dr. Michael Freytag**_ Nonetheless, many people appreciate their local bank. This has a lot to do with personal customer care. And with trust. The trust factor is more important than ever – particularly in a largely digitalised daily environment. Trading and credit transactions are unthinkable in the absence of trust. This aspect applies to the analogue world as well as to the growing digital one. It is all a question of understanding people in their everyday environment, taking their needs and concerns seriously and taking these on board when developing new products.

_You mentioned trust and the digital shift. One major social and political talking point is artificial intelligence. What opportunities are created by technologies such as machine learning and how do you use these for your work?_

**Catharina van Delden**_ innosabi has developed artificial intelligence that understands the language of innovation. When people report on their ideas or share solutions, they communicate in a certain way – this affects their choice of words and the emotions they convey. Our AI helps to identify smart ideas and to convert huge amounts of data into readily usable units of information. Assuming that the task of evaluating information will be increasingly performed by AI, our “human” skills such as creativity or out-of-the-box thinking will become all the more important.

**Dr. Michael Freytag**_ SCHUFA processes up to a million credit inquiries each day. Locating information on questions regarding identity, creditworthiness or fraud prevention only takes milliseconds: without digitalisation, this would simply not work. These days, we answer 99.7 percent of all inquiries digitally. It used to be the case that our employees still responded to around five percent of inquiries manually, which took an average of three minutes. In today’s online retail world, this is far too long – users would cancel the order process straight away. We therefore are training machines with the expertise of our specialists so that they can respond to inquiries independently in a fraction of a second. The machines optimise human expertise. Modern, data-centred technologies such as machine learning also help us in our efforts to combat online fraud. However, innovations should not be merely an end in themselves, but should always have a purpose rooted in serving people.
What happens in our brains during creative thinking? And above all: how can companies encourage creativity to increase innovation? Neurobiologist Prof. Dr. Gerald Hüther has the answers to these questions and explains what influence digitalisation has on our inventiveness.
Without creativity, there would be no innovation. There is no doubt about that. But, as Prof. Dr. Gerald Hüther explains: “We need to make a distinction between linear innovations and what might be termed ‘breakthrough innovations’.” The invention of windows in house construction is one such real innovation. All steps that followed, such as double glazing and round or rectangular windows, are only linear improvements. This calls for combinatorics rather than creativity. In other words, our brain takes existing units of knowledge and experience, rearranging them based on an envisaged goal or adding another element. Modern computers also work according to the same principle, as is the case with machine learning, for example.

Genuine creativity works differently from a neuroscientific perspective. It is what differentiates us humans from computers. As Prof. Dr. Hüther explains: “When we are creative, we are in a situation where as many areas as possible in our brain are active simultaneously without pursuing a clear objective. Ideally, elements of memory and knowledge that normally have no overlap with one another will link up together by chance. You might say that our brain is ‘at play’. Children are great at coming up with ideas because they do not yet have many pre-fabricated solutions in their heads. Throughout the course of our lives, education and training have an influence on our thought processes and, in turn, on our creativity. These days, digitalisation plays a significant role in the human development process. But what influence does it actually have on our ability to create? “Given that all knowledge is available online these days, we don’t remember as many things. As a consequence, this information is not available to the brain for creative processes. On the other hand, digitalisation makes it possible to network humans and knowledge across hierarchy levels and national borders in a way that has never been seen before.”

Companies can harness these neurobiology findings for their own ends: “We need to learn that truly pioneering individual creations are scarcely possible anymore – only co-creativity leads to genuine innovations.” In his capacity as consultant, Prof. Dr. Hüther helps companies to form teams that bring together as wide a cross-section of people as possible – much in the same way as the areas in the brain interconnect. This calls for a culture in which people can look for solutions in a fun way – ideally not just in brief workshops but long-term. Start-ups are a prime example of this at its best, not least because they set out to satisfy real needs. It is easier for people to achieve this objective creatively when part of a team. According Gerald Hüther, unconditional trust among employees, something that – in a highly competitive society – will also need a fundamental change in outlook. The younger generation is setting an example in this regard. Hierarchical thinking is alien to them. Young people see themselves as strong individuals in a society. As Prof. Dr. Hüther puts it: “Allowing this co-creative potential to develop is, I feel, one of the most important tasks of the 21st century.”
**Linear creativity**

The frontal cortex – or, to be more precise, the prefrontal cortex – is where complex actions are organised as a sequence of individual steps. This means that we activate this region if a clearly defined objective is specified to us. In this case, connections with other regions are unlikely. The way we work is effective rather than creative.

**Motor skills**

Learning movements, coordinating them and remembering them. This is the job of the motor cortex. For example, when a pianist is listening to a Mozart piano concerto, the area in his motor cortex showing the finger movements is activated. This means that the brain is playing the music – even if the listener’s fingers are not moving at all.

**Listening pleasure**

Here, in the auditory cortex, is where acoustic stimuli are processed and associatively linked. When people are making or listening to music, their brain releases endorphins, which – according to recent research – can boost thinking.
Genuine creativity

Creative thinking involves extensive networking: according to a study from 2016, some 360 areas of the brain are involved in creative thinking – some on their own, some in tandem with others. Their functions can be mapped roughly and the individual areas change in the course of our lives depending on how they are used. From a creative perspective this implies that, when all areas are simultaneously activated with one another, there will be a good chance of developing truly creative ideas. This works best without pressure or a specific objective. Unsurprisingly, inventors often report inspiration striking them while “out for a walk” or “lying in bed in the morning”. However, these eureka moments are more likely to occur if they had been working extensively on the problem beforehand – in this case, the personal database from which we develop ideas is better stocked.
Joining forces against fraud
JOINING FORCES AGAINST FRAUD

Online retailing is booming – ordering products from home is easy and convenient. But there is a seedy underbelly to the ever-growing e-commerce phenomenon: fraud. This is a problem affecting companies, consumers and society as a whole. But how can it be tackled? At Germany’s first ever Fraud Prevention Congress, this pressing question was discussed extensively – and an answer was found.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SCHUFA
“Welcome to a genuine premiere!” Using these opening words, Dr. Michael Freytag ensured that all participants in the hall were listening attentively. On 29 November, over 100 guests came to the Haus Ungarn venue on Berlin’s Alexanderplatz for the first ever SCHUFA Fraud Prevention Congress. Never before had so many leading online retailers, banks, authorities and data protection professionals come together in this setup to discuss measures to mitigate online fraud and to share their experiences. This issue is more urgent than ever.

In Germany alone, the financial loss to companies resulting from online retail fraud amounts to €2.4 billion and is still rising. This encompasses various types of retail fraud, all of which essentially involves ordering products or services without the intention of paying for them, implying that it is time to focus on identifying viable solutions.

It is very important for companies to interact with companies in other sectors, and with different institutions and stakeholders. We can learn a lot from one another.«

HANS GEORG SPLIETHOFF, HEAD OF CREDIT MANAGEMENT/ FC-KM OTTO GMBH & CO. KG

As Stephan R. Peters, Head of Digital Identity & Fraud Prevention at SCHUFA, explains: “At the 90 Years of SCHUFA anniversary congress, the great need to talk about this issue became apparent. With our Fraud Prevention Congress, we wanted to provide a real platform for sharing views and information.”

As a consequence, various renowned experts came together on this day in Berlin. The first speaker, Thomas Simmroß, outlined the forms online fraud can take. Simmroß, who is Head of Fraud Investigation at the Berlin State Office of Criminal Investigation (LKA 2), cited an example from the largest problem area – identity fraud: “The most extreme case in Berlin involved a man using around 40 stolen identities to commit acts of fraud all over Germany.” In order to track down this kind of “third-party fraud”, fast communication between the federal state authorities was of prime importance. Needless to say, Simmroß would prefer if companies worked to reduce the number of fraud cases by adopting more effective protection measures – which is why he deems the interaction at the Fraud Prevention Congress as essential.

The framework for allowing companies to detect, for example, criminal identity thieves, is partially provided by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Elaborating on this, Frederick Richter, director of the German Foundation for Data Protection, emphasizes pre-empting fraud can be deemed a justified, GDPR-compliant reason for collecting data.
This is an important signal from the perspective of online customers and companies who are seeking to protect themselves from fraud.

The in-depth discussions continued during the break. The Fraud Prevention Congress ultimately provided the first ever opportunity for cross-sector dialogue on this subject. The subsequent podium discussion also explored questions such as: What makes a good defence against fraud? What are the most important aspects in this regard? And where is improvement needed in your own company?

In addition to criminal police and data protection experts, speakers included representatives from online retailer Otto and Targobank. At the same time, the auditorium was asked to vote on certain questions, some of which could be answered via smartphone. How well are you prepared to deal with this issue? Or: How acute is this problem for you? The results could be seen live and point to a clear trend: for SCHUFA customers, the question of prevention by automatically recognising fraud patterns is becoming increasingly important – in order to minimise financial damage and to adhere to compliance regulations.

In other words, the challenge is to make online shopping as simple and convenient as possible for users, whilst increasing protection from identity fraud. One example of this is the popular option of ordering on account, which no online retailer would like to do without.

At this point, the discussion shifted to SCHUFA’s latest security solution. “We will now show how the SCHUFA-FraudPreCheck can help each e-commerce company individually,” Stephan R. Peters, Head of Digital Identity & Fraud Prevention at SCHUFA announced. The SCHUFA-FraudPreCheck (FPC) is used to identify fraud patterns and to report suspicious actions to retailers. This allows them to respond before sending the goods, e.g. by initiating a further check or requesting pre-payment or credit card payment.

Heidrun Odenweller-Klügl, Head of Banking & Financial Service Provider Sales at SCHUFA, engaged in discussion with specialist panel members.
The FPC is based on state-of-the-art machine learning technology, which allows SCHUFA to identify relevant fraud indicators in real time – individually for each company. The FPC was developed in close cooperation between data experts at SCHUFA and seven major online retailers and payment service providers with input from data protection authorities as well. It was particularly important for major players to work closely together, given that pattern recognition works best when computer models are trained with as much order data as possible. One of the participants in the pilot project was Hans Georg Spliethoff, Head of Credit Management at online retailer Otto, which is one of the first customers to use the FPC. Spliethoff sees effective fraud prevention as follows: “Prevention works best with a healthy mixture of people and machines.”

Fittingly, the schedule included a hands-on section for all participants in the specialist panels. Within two hours, customers were able to interact with SCHUFA employees, sharing their thoughts on regulations and fraud prevention in e-commerce, real estate business or in the financial sector. It also became clear that each individual company had their own special requirements for their particular sales or service models. The more familiar SCHUFA is with these, the more precise the impact for their technology will be.

»When considering the sizeable losses we have been able to prevent in recent years, the vital role of prevention measures in the fight against fraud becomes apparent.«

HOLGER BRÜMMER, HEAD OF FRAUD MANAGEMENT STRATEGY TARGOBANK AG & CO. KGAA

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Summing up the day’s events, the e-commerce sector is growing steadily – albeit so is the risk of fraud. Which is why it is all the more important for companies, online retailers, financial institutions and data protection professionals to interact directly with one another. The same goes for prevention. With solutions such as FPC, SCHUFA will continue to provide forward-looking assistance to their customers and partners in the future.
WHAT IF ...?

HEAD OF FRAUD INVESTIGATION THOMAS SIMMROß ANSWERS OUR QUESTIONS

Thomas Simmroß
Head of Fraud Investigation at the Berlin State Office of Criminal Investigation (LKA 2), Thomas Simmroß comes into contact with fraud and its effects every day. In four scenarios, he explains the problems associated with online fraud and the measures required to prevent it in the long term.

If a perpetrator places 100 orders with six different companies … … then this probably won’t raise any flags to begin with. The only way to register this is to exchange information on an ongoing basis. Only by doing this it is possible to identify links and to introduce suitable measures.

If fraud is reported … … then time is a key factor. Many reports only reach us weeks or months later, making us play catch-up. The chances of detecting internet fraud at this stage are extremely small.

If you want to protect yourself from internet fraud … … then you should start with yourself. The greatest problem with data protection, quite simply, is the way people use computers. We are all perfectly transparent if we allow ourselves to be. It is easy to get hold of someone’s name, age and address. With a bit of investigation it is even easy for fraudsters to find out customers’ bank account numbers. Needless to say, secure identification processes and personal risk management play an important role, i.e. knowing how to deal with e-mails from unknown senders and having secure passwords.

If we want to prevent fraud in the long term … … then retailers and authorities will need to work together collectively. Perpetrators often work on an international level and can simultaneously target 20 companies that have no knowledge of one another. Only by sharing information is it possible to warn and inform one another, to identify patterns and to work together to prevent fraud.
One of the most important processes for SCHUFA is the search method. When an inquiry is made, the right information must be identified and communicated within a very short space of time. Based on machine learning, SCHUFA has developed a search system called E3S that also serves as a technology platform for further solutions.
As Dr. Tobias Kranz, Head of the Search Systems and Quality Department at SCHUFA, explains: "SCHUFA has approximately 943 million pieces of information stored on 67.7 million private individuals. The greatest challenge associated with queries is finding the relevant consumers in our data set – in a matter of milliseconds". The process of “finding” this information actually consists of two steps. Dr. Kranz: “First of all, there is the search process: This suggests a definite number of data sets is selected that are identical or very similar to the data set in question. This is followed by the identification process, i.e. selecting the right data set based on the query and the search results.”

As the search process is one of SCHUFA’s central processes, it is constantly analysed and optimised. The efficient scalable search system – E3S for short – came into effect recently. As Dr. Kranz explains: “As our database is constantly growing and data volumes are increasing accordingly, we need a system that consistently guarantees high quality search results and short response times. We place the highest demands on our search system with regards to performance and future viability. For our last update, we began by looking at the leading search systems on the market. However, we were not very impressed by available solutions and developed our own system instead.” Apart from working to maximum efficiency using state-of-the-art algorithms, E3S offers practically unlimited scalability. How does E3S work in practice? For queries relating to a person, the search is tailored using specific attributes such as first name, surname or date of birth. These can be weighted individually in order to manage the quality of results in case of discrepancies. Dr. Kranz: “The challenge here is to find the right weighting for the attributes.” This is where automated processes come into play. It is important to note processes are always monitored by people. Comparative data is provided by our colleagues in Data Quality and Procurement. Our experts in the Innovation and Strategic Analysis Department are in charge of applying the statistical procedure. These were the same people responsible for developing the basic technology and procedures of the E3S search system, which is currently in the patent application process. Thus, E3S is far more than just a search system and demonstrates further potential. As Dr. Kranz puts it: “We also consider it a technology platform that can be used as a basis for developing further solutions.”

»By using artificial intelligence processes, we develop pioneering solutions for companies and consumers. Our focus is always on making our systems transparent and easy to explain.«

PETER VILLA, MEMBER OF THE SCHUFA EXECUTIVE BOARD
Digitalisation is a monumental game-changer that brings about lasting changes to the financial sector. For SCHUFA, acquiring a majority stake in Munich-based fintech company finAPI is yet another step towards the future – and part of this future is called Access-to-Account.

Banking, in the form in which it has existed for many centuries, is changing rapidly. Above all, the financial sector is being penetrated by a large number of smaller companies staking a market claim with new technologies and innovative products and services. As Peter Villa of the SCHUFA Executive Board explains: “We are actively shaping digital transformation, observing the market closely and keeping a lookout for interesting companies and equity interests.”

Effective 1 January 2019, SCHUFA acquired a 75 percent majority interest in finAPI, a company developing Access-to-Account solutions (XS2A), i.e. interfaces which provide access to account data for financial services. For companies and consumers, Access-to-Account technology brings speedy, secure and convenient bank transactions and online purchases. Peter Villa: “The technology is still relatively new, but Access-to-Account solutions are very important for our contracting partners in further digitalising their business.”

Since 2019, credit institutions holding accounts are required to give third-party providers access to an interface providing contact details of their customers. This is based on the European Payment Service Directive 2 (PSD2) introduced in 2018.

FINAPI GMBH

Founded by Dr. Florian Haagen and Dr. Martin Lacher in 2008, finAPI GmbH is an established provider of software for banks and financial service providers. At their headquarters in Munich, the company develops and implements elaborated solutions for integrating and analysing data, in some cases using artificial intelligence technologies. The fintech company is licensed by the Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (BaFin). SCHUFA Holding AG has held a majority interest in the company since 1 January 2019.
The PSD2 fosters competition in monetary transactions and has established a uniform legal framework for these services across Europe. This is exactly where finAPI’s business model is pitched. The company permits access to business and private customer account data at almost all relevant German and Austrian banks – provided that the consumers in question have given their consent. The account data is merged in an interface, which allows it to be integrated easily into financial applications. Through the automated overview of their accounts and the grouping of the individual account data, consumers are given a coherent picture of their respective financial situations.

The finAPI platform already permits secure access to 58 million accounts. As Peter Villa explains, acquiring a majority stake is an important part of SCHUFA’s business strategy: “Joining forces with finAPI sends a clear signal regarding our future orientation here at SCHUFA and our resolute development as a provider of solutions in the areas of creditworthiness, identity and fraud prevention.” FinAPI also benefits from the collaboration, as founder and managing director Dr. Florian Haagen explains: “Thanks to SCHUFA’s distribution network, we now have access to many other companies.”

In January 2019, finAPI was just the second company in Germany to be awarded licences for operating account information and payment initiation services by the Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (BaFin). Hence, finAPI offers the required legal security and guarantees maximum security standards when processing particularly sensitive information. Market participants without a BaFin permit of their own can use finAPI’s services and interface function and integrate them into their processes.

With “GiroIdent”, SCHUFA and finAPI have already launched their first joint solution for secure and convenient identification of consumers in online transactions. In this case, consumers verify themselves to a company – for example a bank or an online retailer – by successfully logging into their online bank account. This is where finAPI’s interface comes into play. As Dr. Florian Haagen explains: “The module can be integrated easily within the company’s order process and helps companies and consumers alike to avoid fraud through forged or stolen identities.”

»Our module offers companies and consumers alike greater security and convenience in the online identification process.«

DR. FLORIAN HAAGEN, MANAGING DIRECTOR FINAPI GMBH

From left: Dr. Felix Lowinski, Head of Corporate Customer Sales at SCHUFA and head of SCHUFA’s internal finAPI project group, is looking forward to working together with Dr. Florian Haagen and Dr. Martin Lacher.
MY INSPIRATION

That little spark that becomes a thirst for action, an inner yearning, an idea, a passion and a valuable enrichment for our lives – that is inspiration. It can be every bit as individual as we are ourselves. This is how SCHUFA employees find their inspiration.

PHOTOGRAPHY _ MICHAEL ZELLMER, INGO KUTSCHE, TORSTEN ZIMMERMANN
Katja Kruse’s personal best is 10 hours and 53 minutes. This is the time it takes her to swim 3.86 kilometres, cycle 180 kilometres and run a marathon. She has completed the Ironman triathlon no fewer than six times at different locations around the world – including the legendary Ironman World Championships in Hawaii. What she finds fascinating about the sport is how it allows you to test your physical and mental limits and focus on your ultimate goal. An additional appeal is that it allows her to travel while also spending time outdoors. In July, she will be participating in Ironman in Hamburg, for which she trains six days a week – for example in the hilly countryside in the Rhine-Hesse or in the Rheingau region. She has been with SCHUFA since 2001, managing the marketing of private customer projects together with her colleagues. For Katja Kruse, sport is the perfect way to clear her head, which helps her perform well at work, too. When taking part in competitions, she always meets interesting people – such as a PR specialist and author with whom she still exchanges creative insights about marketing trends.
For Stefanie Burchard, much of her affinity for music was inherited from her father. The daughter of a music teacher, she began to play alto and tenor saxophone at the age of ten, as soon as her hands were just about large enough. What she particularly loves about the instrument is its versatility – which she uses to full effect in her local music society, playing everything from traditional brass band music to Lady Gaga. For Stefanie Burchard, music extends far beyond merely playing an instrument – for example it allows her to take part in cultural exchanges with orchestras from all over the world where she and her fellow ensemble players take part in international events. However, playing the saxophone also helps her find inner peace and calmness: “What makes playing the saxophone so special is that I can play either on my own or with other people.” And although music is a world unto itself, Stefanie Burchard recognises parallels between her hobby and her job: “Whether playing music with others or working in the office – at the end of the day, it’s all about teamwork and pulling together to create the best possible result.”
For Dr. Werner Hladil, flying above the clouds means boundless freedom. Eight years ago, he therefore fulfilled a long-held dream and completed ten months of training to become a private pilot. Since then, he loves to spend his free time in the air and manages around 40 to 50 flying hours every year. From Itzehoe, an airfield not far from Hamburg, he then sets off for destinations such as Sylt or Usedom. Each flight must be planned, executed and followed up on with extreme care. As Dr. Hladil points out, the qualities required for flying are also very much in demand in professional life: “You have to be aware of many things, be it legal constraints, aerodynamics or weather conditions – it is all an ongoing learning process.” In order to gauge all potential risks, he feels it is necessary to consider various perspectives. Furthermore, it is important for pilots to share their experiences openly afterwards: “Only in this way is it possible to pinpoint causes and to warn other pilots about similar issues. The same goes for my job where I frequently have to look beyond standard solutions and develop individual ones instead.”
Although American football is still quite a rare hobby in Germany, Dortmund native Janina Weißwange, who has played the sport since 2016, knows no better way to relax: “On the pitch, everyone is needed – whether big, small, young or old. There is a position for every type of character, just like in our office.” She has been with SCHUFA in Bochum going as far back as 2007, holding the position of Sales Consultant since 2015. After a day chock-a-block with meetings and to-do lists, she likes nothing better than to let off steam on the field and let her competitive instincts take over. Her team is aiming to be top of the North Rhine-Westphalia first ladies division in the five-versus-five configuration. Apart from training with her team for two hours twice a week, Janina Weißwange does CrossFit workouts to help her gain muscles – this in turn allows her to withstand the very physical encounters involved in this contact sport. American football is not only physically demanding but understanding the complex rules is also challenging. This and the extremely close-knit relationship she enjoys with her team constantly inspire her. As she says herself: “Sport is something I simply can’t do without”. 

JANINA WEISSWANGE
Sales Consultant
JOCHEN LUKASSOWITZ
Product Owner

Jochen Lukassowitz finds inspiration in many areas. An inventive character by nature, his ideas take shape very quickly. Repetitive processes motivate him to automate things. This is how he found a new hobby — developing his own smart home applications. It all began with his lawn which, measuring 600 m², was a real chore to water by hand. These days, he can water his garden by pressing a few buttons on his smartphone. To do so, he spent several weeks laying nozzles, connectors and pipes, digging a well and programming a mini-computer. Off-the-shelf solutions are not enough for him. He loves combining electronics, computers and manual work and doing it all himself. Jochen Lukassowitz is always open to new things — and of course this is the case at work as well. An IT expert, he has already automated various work processes — such as QA analyses — which not only reduces errors but also saves valuable time, much to the delight of his colleagues.

»Inspired employees are the secret to truly successful companies. Hence, here at SCHUFA, we strive to create an environment in which everyone can contribute their values and talents.«

HOLGER SEVERITT, SCHUFA EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER, WITH COLLEAGUES IN THE SCHUFA DRAGON BOAT
Innovation is THE buzzword in modern business – particularly in the financial sector. The ability to develop new products, services and business models in a short space of time is one of the keys to success. Dr. Bernhard Doll from Orange Hills and his team are accompanying SCHUFA on this innovative path.

We are not a consultancy in the traditional sense. Rather, we enable our customers – for example SCHUFA and their employees – to develop innovations themselves within a structured process and to bring these innovations to market successfully. Apart from fresh ideas, it is also important to understand whether and how the ideas fit with SCHUFA’s strategy and objectives, whether they are feasible from a technological and organisational perspective, and whether SCHUFA can use them to dazzle their customers.

Being innovative is not without challenges for a company: established ways of thinking and working that have proved their worth over the years must be, as we put it, “unlearned”. For instance, we get experts from different areas to work together in small, hierarchy-free teams on projects for which no business case has been clearly defined. Here, we also have customers and partners on board to talk about new ideas even if these are not yet fully developed. These ideas are converted into tangible models and prototypes extremely quickly. It is regularly the case that we change the direction of projects or even call a halt to them if the facts show that an idea cannot be marketed successfully. This is all part of a modern innovation culture: “facts over opinions.”

We have developed a model specially for SCHUFA to help their employees to work more easily on innovation projects. This helps to put new ways of thinking and working into practice. Various formats are based on the model, such as the “innovation workshop” in which new solutions are worked on together with customers and partners. As coaches, we assist the teams at a methodological and technical level – for example when conducting field research or developing prototypes with our designers and engineers. The first successes have already been achieved – among other things because SCHUFA has demonstrated courage, stamina and a certain willingness to take risks. After all, the greatest risk in our generation is not taking any risks.
RESPONSIBILITY AT SCHUFA

As an SME playing a significant role in the national economy, we are firmly rooted in German businesses and society. Our understanding of corporate responsibility (CR) is being accountable not only for our services, but also for the social impact of our actions.

How we understand responsibility

An important touchstone for our everyday work is our company mission statement with the central promise "We create trust". Setting the bar high for our business model and actions, we aim to be a pioneering force in our sector with regard to: neutrality in our role as a link between companies and consumers; innovation and development of customer-oriented solutions; responsibility towards our customers, society, our employees and the environment; as well as legal certainty and conformity with data protection requirements.

Our understanding of responsibility is visible and put into practice in five fields of action:

For our employees, we are a reliable and attractive employer.

Aiming to minimise the environmental effects of our actions, we operate as resource-friendly as possible.

We are actively involved in the community, particularly in the area of financial education.

Each of our fields of action has defined clear goals with which we can measure our success and regulate actions. With a company-wide working group and our own consumer board and SCHUFA Ombudsmann, we have established central structures ensuring the transparency of our actions and communication. This also includes interaction with relevant stakeholders, particularly political representatives and consumer groups. We aim to integrate their interests in our CR strategy, thereby fulfilling our commitment to creating trust.

Our customers are the central focus of our work – it is for them that we develop solution-oriented products and take the greatest care with the data entrusted to us.

In the digital society, we stand for a responsible use of technology and work towards using the opportunities digitalisation entails – while minimising risks at the same time.
CUSTOMERS AND PRODUCTS

SCHUFA is Germany’s leading provider of credit agency and information services for companies and consumers alike. Our work focuses on ensuring that our customers’ needs are met, that data entrusted to us is handled with the greatest of care and that our actions comply with all relevant laws and regulations.

Our wide range of services helps companies to determine the opportunities and risks associated with business transactions and to take on the challenges digitalisation entails. We also offer reliable services to private customers and consumers with user-friendly products such as SCHUFA credit checks and innovative solutions for identity protection or fraud prevention. For SCHUFA, a high level of customer satisfaction is an important indicator for the success of our business actions. The secure and confidential handling of data entrusted to us is our top priority, hence we monitor and improve the quality of this on an ongoing basis. Every year, our compliance processes are audited and certified by TÜV Rheinland Cert GmbH to ensure that they adhere to relevant laws and regulations. Furthermore, our employees are given regular training to be compliant with laws and guidelines.

SCHUFA in dialogue

SCHUFA is the only credit agency in Germany to have set up an ombudsman procedure for consumers. SCHUFA’s Ombudsmann Prof. Dr. Hans-Jürgen Papier, former President of the Federal Constitutional Court, acts as a neutral mediator between SCHUFA and consumers.

The SCHUFA consumer board is made up of scientists, journalists, politicians, debt counsellors and business representatives. As an advisory body, it discusses topics that are of relevance to consumers.

Our customer advisory boards discuss current issues relating to corporate strategy and business development. The cross-sectional advisory boards also provide valuable input from the world of business.
DIGITAL SOCIETY

SCHUFA’s function – to establish trust between business partners – is more necessary than ever in the digital age: every day, we provide an average of 450,000 reports to companies, thus helping to facilitate fast, uncomplicated business transactions.

An important principle for us is transparency: we inform consumers regarding which personal information about them has been stored and explain how scoring procedures work. Another part of consumer communication is the external, independent SCHUFA Ombudsman who examines disputes neutrally with minimum red tape. What is more, our scoring procedure is scientifically reviewed on a regular basis and disclosed to the supervisory authorities.

We work according to the principle of data economy, i.e. we will store and use information from a data record if the information is really necessary.

The rising tide of digitalisation in the business world and society in general is creating new side-effects such as online fraud and identity theft. We aim to tackle these challenges with our innovative products relating to identity protection and fraud prevention. Subsequently, SCHUFA is making a contribution towards protecting companies and private individuals from fraud and its consequences.

Some of our solutions make use of new procedures such as machine learning. Here, the “people and machine” principle comes into play. For instance, we do not use “self-learning” systems. Instead, our experts are able to ensure the best possible outcomes by regularly training our systems and monitoring them on an ongoing basis. This allows us to remain in control at all times.

With our expertise, we want to make a contribution to the world around us. Involved in public debate and in research activities, we help shape the digital society.
We strive to be a responsible and reliable partner in our role as employer: almost 90 percent of the contracts we enter into with our employees are unlimited. The attractiveness of SCHUFA as an employer is demonstrated by the fact that people work here for an average of over ten years and that employee fluctuation is low at 4.4 percent. With their knowledge, ideas and commitment, our employees are the foundation of our company’s success. Furthermore, an important role is played by modern and competitive leadership and by a cooperative management style based on teamwork and partnership across all hierarchical levels. At SCHUFA, all employees have the same opportunities regardless of age, gender, origin, sexual orientation or physical condition.

We have set up an extensive company health management system with a view to maintaining and promoting the physical and mental well-being of our workforce. This includes sporting activities and the “Work. Health. Life.” initiative with regular occupational safety training and health promotion courses.

We also help our employees to strike a healthy balance between working and family life. In 2018, for example, more than a quarter of our employees took advantage of part-time work models. Moreover, we provide ten crèche places in cooperation with a local day care centre and have parent-child offices at all of our locations. Our family-friendly approach is clearly successful: in 2018, 100 percent of our employees returned after taking parental leave.
ENVIROMENT AND PURCHASING

SCHUFA aims to use natural resources responsibly and sparingly in their business operations. To consistently reduce the ecological impact of our activities, we have implemented a multitude of measures to protect the environment and resources.

Even though our services are almost exclusively digital at this stage, we need natural resources for our business processes – and aim to keep the consumption of these to a minimum.

As a consequence, we introduced an environmental management system back in 2005. In addition, we are taking part in “Ökoprofit”, a Wiesbaden-based environmental consulting and cooperation project for sustainable business management. In 2018, we were again certified as Ökoprofit company. Thanks to our service water system used in our Wiesbaden headquarters, we managed to save 3,023 m³ of fresh water. Further measures included more energy-efficient cooling and a new heating system. Our solar panels on the roof of the SCHUFA headquarters fed 2,139 kWh of electricity into the Wiesbaden power grid. We have been using 100 percent green electricity at all of our locations since as far back as 2015.

Another important move towards protecting scarce resources was our decision to switch over to sustainable paper. For internal business operations, we only use paper bearing the “Blue Angel” environment label. When sourcing services and goods such as office and advertising materials, we verify that these meet specific social and environmental standards and make a point of opting for sustainably produced items. In order to reduce the amount of CO₂ emissions produced by our business travel, we are continuously optimising our vehicle fleet. In 2017, we modified our vehicle guidelines, paving the way for alternative vehicles. Employees entitled to a company car now can also choose from gas-powered, hybrid or electric cars. Furthermore, many of our employees use Deutsche Bahn trains for business trips, which run on 100 percent green electricity.
COMMUNITY

Social commitment has been a permanent feature of SCHUFA for many years. Based on our core business, our actions are centred on nationwide financial education projects for young adults. At our various locations, we are committed to supporting the common good in the local region.

SCHUFA’s social commitment focuses on the areas in which our expertise can make the greatest difference. With our “WirtschaftsWerkstatt” educational initiative, which launched in 2013, we help young people to improve their financial literacy. To date, more than 7.9 million young people and young adults have made use of our online and social media programmes through which we provide information, helpful hints and interactive formats on various business and financial topics. With our “SCHUFA macht Schule” programme, we also make materials on financial subjects available to teachers free of charge.

SCHUFA’s social commitment is also reflected in the voluntary work undertaken by our employees. Once a year, they take part in charitable projects in their respective locations. In 2018, we held corporate volunteering days at five locations, to which 68 of our employees contributed a total of 544 hours. SCHUFA is also actively involved in the “WiesPaten” initiative for providing additional tuition to young people from immigrant backgrounds and organising activities for them together with employees from their sponsor company. In 2018, our efforts were once again acknowledged by the City of Wiesbaden with its “Goldene Lilie” award. SCHUFA also has their own company art collection “Farbraumwelten”, which we open up to the public as part of the “Kunst privat!” series. By supporting initiatives such as “Schüler entdecken zeitgenössische Kunst” (“contemporary art for schoolchildren”), we help to foster an interest in modern art.
COMPANY STRUCTURE 2018

SHAREHOLDERS

SAVINGS BANKS (26.4 %)  
CREDIT BANKS (34.7 %)  
COOPERATIVE BANKS (7.9 %)  
TRADE, ETC. (13.1 %)  
PRIVATE BANKS (17.9 %)

LOCATIONS

SCHUFA has locations in Berlin, Munich, Hanover, Bochum, Cologne, Wiesbaden (headquarters) and an office in Hamburg.
KEY COMPANY FIGURES 2018*

BUSINESS FIGURES

34.6
MILLION EUROS IN NET INCOME
were generated by SCHUFA.

190.3
MILLION EUROS IN SALES
were generated by SCHUFA.

900
PEOPLE ARE EMPLOYED
by SCHUFA at their six locations.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

165.6
MILLION REPORTS
and subsequent reports
were provided by SCHUFA for
corporate customers.

2.5
MILLION REPORTS
were provided by SCHUFA
to consumers.

450,000
REPORTS
are processed by SCHUFA
on average every day.

9,500
CORPORATE CUSTOMERS
are served by SCHUFA.

DATABASE

943
MILLION ITEMS OF INFORMATION
are stored by SCHUFA on
individuals and companies.

67.7
MILLION is the number
of people on which
SCHUFA stores data.

6
MILLION is the number of
companies on which SCHUFA
stores data.

* Figures rounded.