INSPIRING WOMEN

Tech Savvy Women
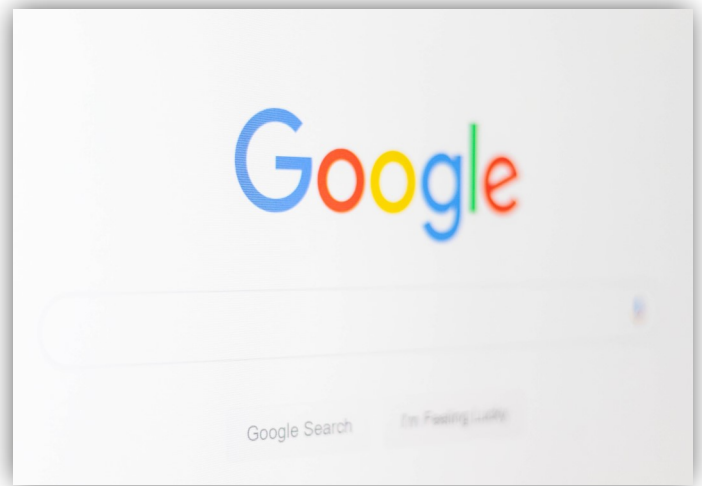
FAWCO
Inspiring Women Worldwide

Googling My Way from Journalism to Engineering and Back

Carolyn Stransky, member of AWC Berlin, Germany, on using Google's search engine to find a job.

If living in Berlin has taught me anything, it's the importance of search engines.

My first life-altering Google search happened shortly after moving to Germany from the United States. It had been days since I had had a conversation with another human besides my German partner. I was lonely. So I apprehensively typed six words into the box on my screen: "how to make friends adult berlin". When those results were useless because *Freund* was out of my vocabulary, I added "expat". That's how I found the American Women's Club of Berlin.

The second significant search led me to a career in technology. And the third, software engineering. Before I get into that, some context.

Enjoying life in Berlin

Arriving in Berlin

I arrived in Berlin with only a journalism degree and a whole lot of unfounded confidence. I was an idealist, planning to "change the world with my words." Turns out, being a journalist in a country where you don't speak the language is *hard*. A byline here and there didn't pay enough to cover my rent or qualify for a visa. I realized that I needed something more sustainable.

After weeks of uncertainty and growing concern that my tourist visa would expire, I did another search: "how to work in Berlin as expat". I learned that this city has a growing technology and start-up scene. And the best part? The primary language in most offices is English. The next day, I submitted my CV for any role on BerlinStartupJobs.com that listed "native English speaker" as a qualification.

Back to the beginning

Two years and a couple miscellaneous marketing jobs later, I found myself back where I started after the start-up sponsoring my working visa filed for bankruptcy. Judging by my empty inbox, prospects for another full-time communications role were grim. My colleagues in engineering, however, were thriving. Most were already snatched up by a competitor and the rest were "weighing their options" (a foreign concept to me at the time).

I always had a hunch that software engineers were better off. Upper management never questioned if their work was important. Not to mention that many of their salaries were double mine. Engineers also possessed an in-demand skill. Comparing their post-insolvency job hunt to mine made this strikingly clear.

There were downsides to engineering, I was sure. For instance, being hunched over a screen all day surely destroys your back, and their office was vaguely sweaty and pungent like a locker room.

But the promise of stability kept creeping into my thoughts. If I wanted to build a life with my partner in Germany, I would need a visa and a reliable income. Job security and the ability to pay off my lingering student debt wouldn't hurt. I didn't have any of that, but the software engineers did.

Learning from Google

Illuminated again by the glow of Google's home screen, I hesitantly typed: "how to become a software engineer". It felt ridiculous to ask a search engine for such major career guidance. The results yielded three options: go back to university; teach yourself online; or attend a coding bootcamp. University would require either money or a better command of the German language, so that was out. I wasn't disciplined enough to be self-taught. The remaining option was a coding bootcamp. The only problem was that I had no idea what a coding bootcamp was.

According to edX, coding bootcamps are defined as "short-term, intense training sessions designed to prepare students for the practical reality of development". This is accurate.. but it fails to articulate how grueling the experience can be.

Coding bootcamp

In 2017, I attended Spiced Academy's twelve-week web development program in Berlin. It was *immersive* – a minimum of eight hours per day at the school, plus review every night and project work over the weekend. Writing code also required rewiring my brain and taking a new, more logical approach to problem-solving. It was

Learning new skills

Enjoying life in Berlin

difficult. I cried frequently. I almost quit three times. But I *made* it.

My job today

Today, I'm working as a software engineer at a different start-up. Most of my assumptions were true, although sometimes that stability is overshadowed by sexism and other systemic problems in the industry. It's hard to complain, though. Building websites is interesting enough and even more so when the paycheck comes in every month.

My background in journalism has also proved useful. I've written presentations about the technical concepts I've learned and traveled to conferences in Iceland, India and Singapore as a result. Now I'm actively trying to combine journalism and engineering by writing for outlets like *Future of Sex*, a publication focused on the intersection of tech and human sexuality.

It's impossible to say where this new career will take me, especially given how quickly technology evolves. But I'm confident I'll be able to figure it out.

Or, worst case, I'll Google it.

At the Spiced Academy

Carolyn Stransky (she/her) is a software engineer and freelance journalist based in Germany. Originally from Seattle, Carolyn moved to Berlin nearly six years ago and has been a member of the American Women's Club of Berlin ever since. During the day, she builds web products with a focus on design and accessibility for early-stage start-ups. Out of the office, Carolyn writes about technology and identity for outlets like Future of Sex *and* Curve Magazine*. You can find her most places on the Internet @carolstran or through her website: workwithcarolyn.com*

The Cover Photo

"A Day at the Academy" (2017)
By Paul Fowler

The cover photo is of Carolyn Stransky (AWC Berlin, on left) and Ingrid Majdalani at Spiced Academy in Berlin, Germany. Spiced Academy provides immersive training for people hoping to get into the fields of software engineering and data science. On this day, Carolyn and Ingrid were writing pseudo code (plain language descriptions for what you'll try to accomplish with code) for their final projects.

Both women attended Spiced Academy's 12-week web development program in 2017 and have been working as software engineers ever since. You can read more about Carolyn's story and career transition in the feature on p.47 "Googling my way from journalism to engineering and back".

The Back Page Photo

"Working anytime and anywhere!" (2020)
By Tugba Asmazoglu

"One of the perks of freelance work for me is to be able to work anytime and anywhere, as long as I have access to coffee and internet. Having been working as a freelance writer/content creator for over a decade, I feel like if I go to a library to work, I won't be able to concentrate due to an excess amount of silence!

This photo was recently taken by Tugba Asmazoglu, an expat friend who had just moved to Moscow. We wanted to meet at GUM, the historical market site in Red Square, but I also had to meet a deadline that day. So I went to a coffee shop earlier to work on my latest animation before we met and when she came, she found me working on cave people's eyebrows. It was a part of a new animation for my educational video channel, Curious Mind TV. "