

# The Tech Executive

# Ueli Gallizzi

Many gaming aficionados would agree that Ueli Gallizzi has “a dream job”, as he calls it. He is the Senior Vice President of the Future Technology Group at Sony Interactive Entertainment (SIE). Formerly known as Sony Computer Entertainment, this subsidiary of Japanese multinational conglomerate Sony realizes the PlayStation products and explores new cloud gaming technologies. In his role, Ueli manages a total staff of 600 at offices in California, Texas, London, Berlin, Tokyo, and Adelaide. To keep in touch with the teams in different time zones, his business days often stretch from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. or later. He also travels a lot for work, though he says it’s not nearly as much as before the Covid-19 pandemic. Sometimes, he admits, it does feel like the only thing he has seen of the United States so far are airports — although he has called the country his home for almost twelve years.

More specifically, home is in Orange County, California. Ueli works in Aliso Viejo, and he and his wife and two sons (6 and 9) live in nearby Laguna Niguel, a hillside town with numerous parks and public trails. While he enjoys the warm coastal climate and living so close to the ocean, it’s not at all what he envisioned for himself when he was younger: He grew up in Witikon, a part of Zurich which, he says, “is more like a village than part of a big city.” He has always felt very connected to the close-knit community there. So much, in fact, that when he first moved away — to an apartment in Wollishofen, a neighborhood in Zurich that is only a twenty-minute car ride away from Witikon — he felt homesick almost immediately. “I was relieved when I finally got to move back three years later. At age twenty-one, I was convinced that the rest of my life would take place in Witikon.”

Not only did Ueli think he would always be living in Switzerland — he didn’t start out working in IT, either. He originally completed an apprenticeship in carpentry, then considered a career in the Swiss Army. It wasn’t until Ueli crossed paths with a friend who was

“I don’t think a job like mine even exists in Switzerland.”



View of the pool at Ueli’s house in Laguna Niguel, CA

an IT student that he decided to pursue a degree in communication systems and informatics at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences. Soon after starting his studies, he joined his friend and two other classmates at their startup company. Out of a tiny office in Witikon, the four friends provided server infrastructure management and software development services to a growing client base. While business went well at first, it started to falter once Ueli graduated.

Through another friend, Ueli was offered a position at Cablecom, the largest cable network operator in Switzerland. As their Engineering Lead, it was Ueli who drove the integration of their phone, internet, and TV systems. When Cablecom became a fully-owned subsidiary of Liberty Global, the new parent company was so impressed with his work that Ueli was offered a position at UPC in Amsterdam — to build up the integration architecture in 10 European countries. “My wife — then girlfriend — was up for the move. We figured we would leave for a few years and then return to Switzerland for good.”



Left: Friday is beach day for the Gallizzi family  
Right: Ueli at the PlayStation offices in California

It was in Amsterdam that Ueli met Rui Pereira and Andrew Gault, with whom he co-founded a startup company called Gaikai. Their business idea: a type of “Netflix for videogames,” as he describes it — game streaming and cloud gaming that didn’t require users to download any software or custom plugins to access the games, which was a groundbreakingly new idea at the time. However, it soon became clear that connections to the gaming industry were vital to get the business off the ground, and that those connections were harder to establish in Europe than in the United States. They finally came in the form of David Perry, a game industry veteran and Gaikai’s fourth co-founder. Gaikai subsequently secured the necessary venture capital funding, with one requirement: They had to relocate the business from The Netherlands to the United States. Ueli expected to set up headquarters in the San Francisco Bay Area; but David Perry lived in Orange County, which was how the company ended up with offices in Aliso Viejo.

The move to the United States happened within a few weeks: Papers for Gaikai were signed in December 2009; in January 2010, Ueli and his girlfriend got married in a whirlwind. “We didn’t just tie the knot to make things easier in terms of applying for a visa,” he insists. “I had actually proposed to her before!” Since the paperwork required for a wedding in Switzerland would have taken too long, they got married in Amsterdam, with their next-door neighbors serving as their witnesses. In February 2010, Ueli left with a three-month work visa and immediately applied for an extension upon his entry in the United States, making his case with a folder chock-full of documents. When he explained the kind of business Gaikai was in, he garnered a snarky comment: “Games are bad for kids,” the border official told him before putting the stamp of approval on the visa extension.

Upon his arrival, Ueli was in for a culture shock: “I didn’t know the United States at all. The only other

When did you first arrive in the United States?

Ueli: February 2010

What do you call home?

Laguna Niguel, California

What's your favorite place in the United States?

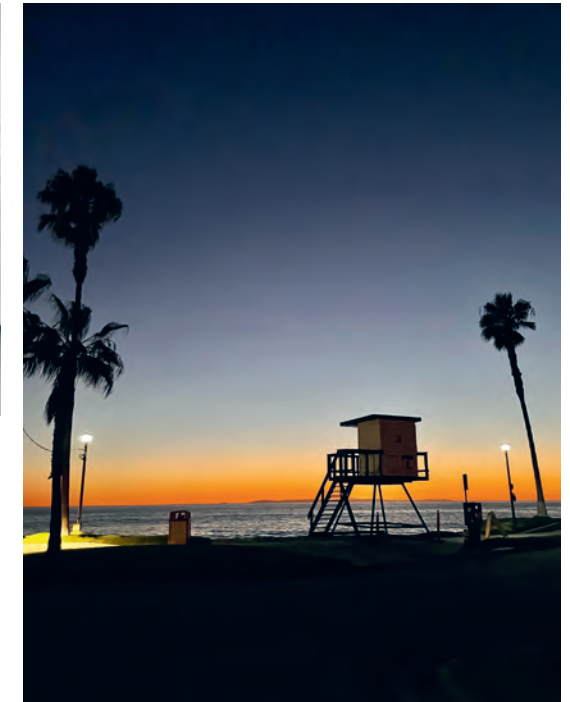
Snowbird, Utah in winter

Do you have a favorite American tradition or national holiday?

Halloween

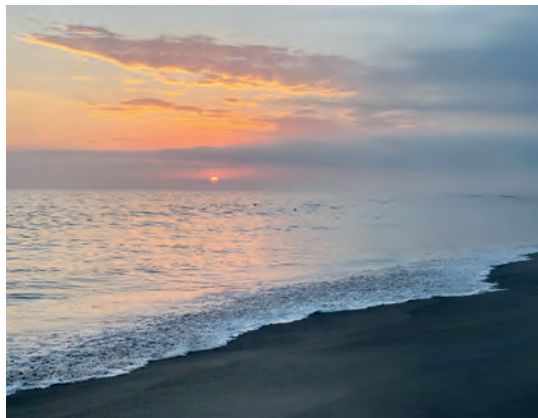


Left: Christmas at Sony Interactive Entertainment  
Right: Sunset at the beach in Laguna Niguel, CA



place I had ever been to was Buffalo, NY, on a short business trip.” Some of his first encounters with American culture left him baffled. He vividly remembers a trip to the grocery store, for example, where a cashier casually started asking him questions about where he was from and what he did for a living. A complete stranger striking up a random conversation — it fueled his initial prejudice that Americans were superficial.

While his wife was packing up their home in Amsterdam, Ueli spent the first nine months alone in his new home. “It was all very un-American — I didn’t even have a car!” He didn’t need one since he was living in an apartment complex just around the corner from the Gaikai offices. “All I did was work — I would walk to the office in the morning, and then walk back home.” All the hard work soon paid off: In 2012, Gaikai’s new cloud gaming technology piqued the interest of Sony Interactive Entertainment. After the PlayStation 3 had lost significant market share to the Xbox in the United States, Sony was nervous about the launch of their PlayStation 4. It was becoming increasingly clear not



Orange County at sunset



Left: The hills around Laguna Niguel, CA  
Right: Ueli presenting PlayStation Now, Sony's cloud gaming service



only to Sony, but also to its competitors, that the future was in cloud gaming. Finally, Gaikai was acquired by Sony for \$380 million.

At first, Gaikai operated as a fully-owned subsidiary and was then integrated into SIE as their cloud gaming and infrastructure division. Ueli is the only co-founder of Gaikai who's still with Sony at this point — he assumed his current Senior VP role at the Future Technology Group after an internal restructuring two years ago. Fun fact: Today, he still works at the same office building in Aliso Viejo where Gaikai started its operation twelve years ago.

After more than ten years in the United States, Ueli has gotten used to many of the things about American culture that he found strange at first. He now appreciates people's openness, for example, and he loves the culinary landscape in California, with its interesting mix of immigrant cuisines from all over the world. There is one thing, however, that still bothers him: "In the USA, everything is awesome — even if you only

What's your favorite  
American food?

Ueli: Ribeye steak

What's your favorite  
American song?

*Born in the U.S.A.*

by Bruce Springsteen

When was the  
last time you visited  
Switzerland?

August 2022

What characteristic  
of yours is most "Swiss"?

I'm direct

and to the point

do a halfway decent job, they'll tell you it's awesome. I like to dig a little deeper than that, which might be why many Americans find me too direct."

But Ueli also still considers Switzerland his home in many ways. The Gallizzis usually visit friends and family over their summer break, and staying in touch has become much easier in the age of video calling. He also keeps up with the local news by reading the online edition of *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Zurich's daily newspaper. Moving back to Switzerland eventually isn't completely off the table for Ueli and his wife — especially now that their parents are getting older, and their health is declining. As for what he would be doing in his native country, professionally speaking, he says he may have to retire: "I don't think a job like mine even exists in Switzerland."

Born in Zurich, Switzerland, Ueli Gallizzi is the Senior Vice President of the Future Technology Group at Sony Interactive Entertainment (SIE). As co-founder of the startup company Gaikai, he played an integral part in developing game streaming and cloud gaming technologies that are now being employed in Sony's PlayStation. He lives in Laguna Niguel, Orange County, CA with his wife and two sons.