CATHARINA DAUM

In the fast lane

What do you do if you're unhappy with a product? If you're Frank Zieger, you just make a better version of it yourself. In 2005, the entrepreneur couldn't find a high-quality license plate holder for his motorcycle. So, he simply made one himself out of sheet metal. And that's how the Dresden-based company IBEX GmbH got started.

You would imagine the average 19-year-old spends more time thinking about parties than founding their own company. But Frank Zieger is far from average. He completed his apprenticeship in metalworking with distinction, earning the top spot among all that year's apprentices in all of Germany. He never intended to set up a big company, but he had always harbored an ambition to make things better. So, his spontaneous decision to improve on the plastic license-plate holders for motorcycles by making them out of sheet metal instead made perfect sense. "Bit by bit, I started to build up my company, doing everything off my own back," says Zieger. That was in 2005. Today, this ambitious entrepreneur from Saxony, Germany employs 21 people – and his company is growing.

IBEX is a leading specialist in the motorcycle-accessories market, and it has a reputation that extends far outside Germany. From travel accessories and work stands right through to engine covers, the company designs and manufactures a complete range of Motorcycle add-ons. And if the Dresden team discovers that a part doesn't exist, that simply spurs them on to develop it themselves!

In this article, we review some of the key milestones in the evolution of IBEX – and take a brief look at what the future may hold.

2005 - Everyone starts out small

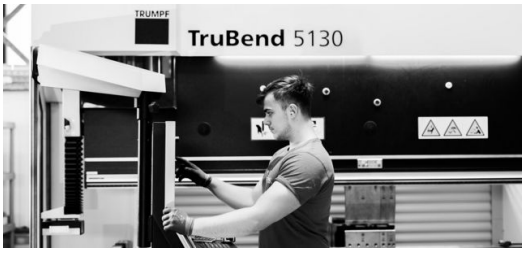
It all started in his mother's basement. That's where Zieger began putting his own ideas and designs into practice. Eventually he moved to a simple garage space where he started producing small batches of parts. "My first license-plate holder was actually made by a job shop. But, as my business grew, I decided I wanted to make the parts myself."

Internet first

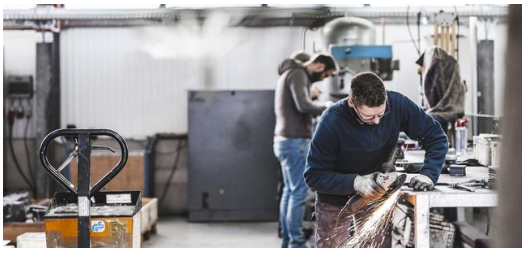
The thing that distinguishes Zieger from many other sheet-metal fabricators is his sales strategy. Right from the start, he sold his products on the Internet through his very own web shop on eBay and Amazon. "That was the simplest way to distribute

my products, because back then it was just me on my own!" This channel continues to pay dividends, allowing Zieger to reach his customers quickly and easily in a format they feel comfortable with: "People nowadays are completely fine with buying things online."

Frank Zieger owns several motorcycles, and he enjoys using them to try out his accessories. – Marlen Mieth



Only two years after the company was founded, Zieger bought its own bending machine.



In 2015 IBEX moved into a 2,300 square meter production hall with an attached office in Dresden. – Marlen Mieth

IBEX aims to make everything people need for their motorcycles out of sheet metal. These crash bars are just one example of what the company offers. – Marlen Mieth

2007/ 2008 - His first bending machine – and his first employee

Just two years after founding his company, Zieger purchased his first bending machine. At the same time, he took on his first employee: "That was such a new experience for me. Suddenly I found myself having to give instructions and being responsible for someone who worked for me. And, of course, the TruBend 3066 was a big investment, too." The young entrepreneur needed to take out a loan, so he approached a major bank. It turned out they didn't have the same confidence in Zieger's ambitious goals – but fortunately TRUMPF did. "I ended up buying my machines with a loan from the TRUMPF bank. It certainly paid off, and now that same bank that originally turned me down is eager to finance my next purchases!" he says with a smile.

2010 - A bigger range of products

By 2010, Zieger was offering his customers everything from a single source, from blanks and bending right through to welding. And his ambitious plans still held out plenty of promise for the future. When he bought his first machines, the founder of the fledgling company even gave them names. Bärbel, Derrick and Herbert have since been replaced by newer models and are hardly used anymore, but they're still on the factory floor. "It's important for us to see where we've come from, and where everything started." Over time, Zieger achieved the goals he had set for himself and for IBEX. But he kept on setting new ones – including moving to a larger manufacturing facility.

2015 - His own production hall and a steadily expanding business

In 2011, Zieger purchased some land, and four years later his factory was up and running: IBEX shifted its manufacturing operations to a dedicated, 2,300-square meter production hall with adjacent offices in Dresden. IBEX had finally said goodbye to its leased manufacturing facility – and now there was enough room to handle design work, commissioning and storage under one roof. Zieger also decided to invest in solid-state laser technology, purchasing two additional TRUMPF machines. His goal was clear: to offer his customers turnkey solutions as well as to produce and distribute all his products himself. Even though he now offers more than 3,000 different products, one thing has remained constant over the years: to this day, IBEX's top-selling product remains its license-plate holder.

2016 - Fostering connectivity

In 2016, Zieger invested in a new, fully automated ERP system. This provides multiple benefits, including the ability to manage all his incoming and outgoing goods on a digital platform. The ERP system also allows him to synchronize his online shop with his warehouse. Having everything connected makes it easier to keep an eye on the big picture. It has also streamlined his processes and reduced defect rates.

What does the future hold?

Zieger has very definite plans for the next few years. These include expanding his range of machinery, introducing new technologies such as tube lasers, and continuing to design new products for the motorcycle market. By the end of 2018, he hopes to offer his customers everything they could possibly need for their motorcycles. "It's the ideas we come up with that set us apart. And you can be sure that anything with IBEX on the label is pure IBEX, one hundred percent!"

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