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Family Business  
**Slovenia**  
2021



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SLOVENIA



Family Business  
**Slovenia**  
2021



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Most of all, I am pleased that our society as a whole is becoming more aware of the importance of sustainability and that we are slowly making significant changes.



**Janez Uranič**

Country Managing Partner  
EY Slovenia

# Foreword

I am glad to share with you the eighth book in the Family Business Slovenia series. Even though the COVID-19 virus is still very present among us and impacts all aspects of public life, we are grateful that we had no problem finding Slovenian family companies which are successfully navigating the coronavirus crisis and continuing to write their success stories.

The data published by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia shows that the Slovenian economy has been relatively successful in dealing with the crisis. In 2020, GDP fell, but only by 4.2% compared to the previous year and the data for the second quarter of 2021 show positive trends in household consumption, import and export, investments and employment.

Attracting and retaining employees is one of the greatest challenges currently facing companies. Trgovine Jager has responded with leadership by personal example and maintaining a strong presence in stores. In Frigotransport Pišek&HSF, they understand the importance of attracting human resources and motivating people through training. They also understand that they cannot solve all the logistics sector's problems unassisted and that government must work together with industry to plan infrastructure, ensuring safe and good quality working conditions.

Many companies have continued growing even in recent difficult times and these include Tinex, which is ambitiously reaching for new milestones and foreign markets. A factor in their success is undoubtedly the high degree of satisfaction among their employees, who are extremely loyal to the company. Two more elements contributing to healthy company growth are excellence and tradition. We can see this in Scan, where the foundations

of quality and knowledge in the field of electron microscopy, vacuum and cryotechnologies, established in 1990, have resulted in leadership in their field. The origins of Zelinka & sinovi go even further back to 1988, since when the company has seen nothing but growth, with 90% of their revenue from the Slovenian market. Another company that records consistent growth is Kuzma, the success of which in the last few years can also be attributed to its online and social media presence. The story of Perger 1757 is being written by the family's ninth generation, who have also successfully expanded their online channels.

It is commendable that several companies have used this unusual period to comprehensively institute more sustainable operations. In Roltek, sustainability has always been a priority and they are rightfully proud that their products benefit people as well as the environment. Uniforest used this time to prepare a completely new sustainable business strategy, with the solid environmental foundation that 97 % of their machine components can already be recycled. The Podkrižnik Group has focused their latest brand on the e-mobility market, as the concept of sustainable and environmentally-friendly mobility gains in importance for our planet. Most of all, I am pleased that our society as a whole is becoming more aware of the importance of sustainability and that we are slowly making significant changes. EY Slovenia is playing its part in this effort; for example, we have been highlighting the importance of sustainability reporting.

Regardless of all the additional challenges facing family businesses, the one quality they all have in common is persistence. We are glad to add 10 more excellent family business enterprises to our list. As every year, their stories made a special impression and were inspiring.

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Only when we understand the relationships within the family and their working processes, can we start designing solutions that will make sense both for the family and the company.



**Mojca Emeršič, CFBA**  
Family Business Leader  
EY Slovenia



# Introduction

**I**n our meetings with family companies, our conversations often touch upon the topic of professionalization. The questions that arise are when and how to think about the transformation from a lean, family-oriented company to a more complex enterprise.

Research into family enterprise transformations across the world mostly focuses on figuring out the relative success of different improvements in leadership and corporate management, while ignoring the unique features of each family. However, the family aspect of the company's story can be extremely important in ensuring that the changes implemented by the company bring successful results.

Using general solutions to transform the management of an individual family company can lead to problematic or even fatal changes. Any planning of goals the company wants to achieve through professionalization must thus be adapted to the individual situation and individual family. This means we must take time, not only for identification and analysis of business processes, but also to study the family dynamic. Only when we understand the relationships within the family and their working processes, can we start designing solutions that will make sense both for the family and the company. During the entire process, it is important to keep gauging the level of family cohesion, which is key to successful transformation.

The first step in counseling for family enterprises must focus on the family; only the second step can involve concrete solutions in the field

of professionalization, management questions and similar issues. The conversation with the family should begin with topics related to the purpose, values, and culture of the family (and the company). This basis allows us to discuss the way the family and the company operate, their motivation, psychological safety and agreements on behaviors to be encouraged or discouraged.

Based on everything outlined above, EY Slovenia focuses on the culture of the family and the company. This year, we have expanded our approach with the Culture Design Canvas<sup>1</sup>, which is a great first step toward understanding the dynamic of individual families.

It is also worth noting the recent study, "Professionalizing the Business Family: The Five Pillars of Competent, Committed, and Sustainable Ownership"<sup>2</sup>, by the American Family Firm Institute. The study discusses a set of competencies for current and future owners and leaders, which goes beyond the running of business and broadly touches upon family dynamics, personal development and understanding of the time and place in which we live.

The competencies can serve as a foundation for the next step in the development of the family and the family company. They can also serve as a starting point for individual competency development programs for owners of family businesses and their successors, which allow us to set the direction of company development.

<sup>1</sup> *Culture Design Canvas*, Gustavo Razzeti, FearlessCulture

<sup>2</sup> *Professionalizing the Business Family: The Five Pillars of Competent, Committed, and Sustainable Ownership*, Binz Astrachan, Claudia; Waldkirch, Matthias; Michiels, Anneleen; Pieper, Torsten & Bernhard, Fabian (2020).

## Frigotransport Pišek&Hsf d.o.o

**Peter Pišek**, Director and owner

**Sašo Pišek**, Head of Logistics

**Jure Pišek**, Marketing, Sales and Warehousing

**Aljoša Pišek**, Head of Technical Services and Truck Servicing

**Mitja Pišek**, Pišek Bar restaurant

### A champion among providers of agri-foods and pharma logistics

**T**he Pišek family enterprise directs its success story from headquarters in Lopata, near Celje. Peter Pišek, Director and owner of Frigotransport Pišek&Hsf d.o.o bought his first used truck at the age of 19. Today, he and his sons lead one of the fastest growing logistics and transportation companies. The Pišek Group has 100 employees and a vehicle fleet of 50 trucks. They generate around €12 million in revenue, 70% of which comes from foreign markets.

The company's main activities concern logistics and transportation, with specializations in agri-food and pharmacy, but the Pišek Group also includes a restaurant. Their competitive advantage stems from refrigerated warehouses in the Netherlands and Germany, and a 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> logistics center in Lopata, near Celje.

Peter Pišek is also the first Slovenian entrepreneur in the field of transportation to win the prestigious Slovenian title of Entrepreneur of the Year 2018 and his story teaches us about endurance and courage. His sons will take on the mantle to continue his work and his mission.





**"You have to love  
the work you do!  
That's the first  
rule of being  
a successful  
entrepreneur."**

**Peter Pišek,**  
Director and owner



The company's main focus is on logistics and transportation, with specialization in agri-food and pharmacy, but the Pišek Group also includes a restaurant.

## Food safety always comes first

Today, the company offers transportation services in Slovenia and abroad with their fleet of 50 state-of-the-art vehicles and 60 specialized trailers. All vehicles are equipped with the latest telemetry technology, enabling real-time tracking of vehicles and packages. They provide standard transportation of temperature-sensitive goods and special services for transportation of hanging meat, flowers, goods under different temperature regimes, express services requiring a double crew, pharmaceuticals and organization of group transportation. Coolers with single and double-regime systems ensure safe transportation of perishable and quick-frozen goods across the whole of Europe and beyond, from Scandinavia to the Balkans and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

They ensure flexibility and stability of transportation with the use of highly developed loading management, efficient route planning, extensive automation, their own cleaning surfaces, well-trained drivers and control via a track-and-trace system.

When transporting refrigerated goods, they take absolutely no risks - food safety is the main priority of the entire logistics system. They ensure constant food safety monitoring in accordance with the HACCP and IFS standards, with a department staffed by a well-educated logistics team, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## From zero to a strong, recognizable brand

Peter says he always knew he would be a truck driver, even as a child. His educational background was in mechanical engineering but just a couple of months after commencing his first job at Celeia Dairy, he borrowed money to buy his first truck and started his own business. Despite the crisis in the 1990s caused by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the 2006 crisis which forced the company to close their own shop, Peter's belief in following his dreams remained strong. During this period, he also formed a partnership with HSF Logistics from the Netherlands, which remained a capital partner until 2012. Then Peter bought out their 44% share and became the owner of the entire company, while the Dutch company remains a strategic partner.

Investment in development was always a priority, and even during the partnership with the Dutch company, they began thinking about their own logistics center. However, the changes to the municipal spatial plan took so long, their partner company backed out in 2012, which meant the Pišek family had to find an extra €2 million.

“Such circumstances often make development more difficult, but we managed to get commercial loans and build a great logistics center in only four years,” says Peter. The center was completed in 2018, and includes logistics department offices, state-of-the-art refrigerated storage facilities, servicing facilities, a truck and car wash and accommodation for the drivers. The center, in which they invested €4 million, stands on 2400 m<sup>2</sup> in a strategic location, next to the fifth European corridor. It helped the Pišek family to develop their brand and achieve its wider recognition.

## Each of the four sons has a different role in the company

Soon after buying out their capital partner in 2012, the company grew exponentially, from 14 vehicles to 30, and Peter trusted his sons with different responsibilities. Sašo, the eldest, took over logistics, Jure is in charge of Marketing, Sales and Warehousing, while Aljoša is Head of Technical Services and Truck Servicing. The youngest, Mitja, is a restaurateur at heart and is solely responsible for the Pišek Bar restaurant.

Peter remembers that Sašo had to grow up practically overnight, when he was 21 and took over management of 45 people. “None of my sons finished

college, but they are all hard-working and responsible,” says their father proudly. He adds: “In the last few years, I started leaving the management of the company to them, I’m just there to guide them. Even though they are very different, they complement each other perfectly.” He also likes to remind them to relax and take time off for themselves. “A burnt-out worker cannot work efficiently,” he says.

The Pišek family has faced several difficult challenges on their way to entrepreneurial success, but they always overcame them. Peter often talks about successes and failures with his sons. “Entrepreneurs, especially in family enterprises, must go through several trials before they stand strong,” believes Peter, who often tells his sons that “life is not always cake.”

## Transparent relationships built on trust form the heart of the company

Peter still puts his heart into his work: “You have to love the work you do! That’s the first rule of being a successful entrepreneur.” This is also the message he gives his sons and employees. “If your work does not bring you satisfaction, it’s better to leave it and go somewhere else,” says the Director. He always tells his sons that they do not have to work in the family business if they do not want to and doesn’t treat them any differently than other employees; everyone is simply ranked as more or less successful. His leadership philosophy is based on the belief that everyone is replaceable, including himself. He also values good relationships and communication very highly: “In our company, everything is built on trust. We keep our word.”



His educational background was in mechanical engineering. However, just a couple of month after starting his first job at Celeia Dairy, he borrowed money to buy his first truck and started his own business.



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A professional and responsible transportation and logistics company with a long tradition and a clear motto: “Everything under control: time, temperature, costs.”



The CEO Peter Pišek and some of the drivers.



“The transport industry needs more opportunities and more understanding. We are not just ‘truck drivers’ as people often assume.”

# Frigotransport Pišek&Hsf in a nutshell:

## development, endurance, fairness, hard work, responsibility.

Nevertheless he also points out that he likes to hear what his sons have to say: "We need to be open to ideas of the next generation." Listening to the younger generation is also important considering time, which - as Peter says - is not on their side: "If you have a large family enterprise, you live with it 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Peter's hard work and diligence were rewarded with the bronze coat of arms of the city of Celje and the Slovenian Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2018. He believes this recognition is the result of the hard and responsible work of the entire family, employees and suppliers.

### The logistics industry faces many challenges

Peter Pišek is not just a successful entrepreneur, he has also taken on many responsibilities in the local community and wider. He is a Municipal Councilor of the Celje Municipality, Vice-President of the Ostrožno Local Community, President of the Transport Section of the Chamber of Crafts and Small Businesses of Slovenia, and Vice-President of the Chamber of Crafts and Small Businesses of Celje. In all his different roles, he tries to find efficient solutions for drivers, transport, warehousing and servicing. "The transportation industry needs more opportunities and more understanding. We are not just 'truck drivers', as people often assume."

Peter wants to overcome the hurdles that hold back the development of this industry. "Our main challenge is that the industry has a pretty bad reputation. Road transportation is associated with drugs and extortion and when on the road, we are often victims of situations we cannot control."

His role in the Chamber of Crafts and Small Businesses allows him to participate in the development of legislation, education and infrastructure. It also gives him the power to point out various challenges facing the transportation industry, such as lack of workforce and the problem of flow of goods along the Balkan corridor. "The drivers are sometimes held up for two days, without sleep, food and basic infrastructure," explains Peter.

### They want to remain a successful, stable and responsible company

"It's important to act responsibly to yourself, your employees, business partners, the environment and also the local community and country," points out Peter, who has successfully dodged the greatest hindrance during his long and successful years as an entrepreneur - that of greed. "The entrepreneur and the employees must not be led by greed, but by realistic goals and hard work. That's crucial," says Peter. In the future, the company wants to become an outstanding provider of logistics solution packages. "To achieve that," says Peter, "one needs carefully selected employees, well-defined customers and good suppliers." The Pišek family has a clear vision for the future. In the next couple of years, the plan to expand their logistics center with secure parking lots for trucks and expansion of storage capacities. But to begin to begin implementing this €4 million investment, they have to wait for the Municipality of Celje to adopt its detailed spatial plan. "Our long-term goal is to remain a successful, stable and responsible company, and to keep investing in development," says Peter of the company's future.

## Peter Pišek

Owner

Company name:

**Frigotransport  
Pišek&Hsf d.o.o.**

Number of employees (2020):

**72**

Net sales revenue (2020):

**€10.2 million**

## Jagros, d.o.o.

**Franc Jager**, Founder

**Marija Jager**, Authorized Representative

**Aleš Jager**, Director, responsible for Appliances, Logistics and Investment

**Boštjan Jager**, Director, responsible for Food and Textiles, Marketing, Finance and HR

**Miha Jager**, Director, responsible for IT, Computer Science and Security

### Common sense and hard work lead to long-term success

**T**he story of Jager Stores began in 1989, when Franc and Marija Jager opened their first store in Tržišče, near Rogaška Slatina. Within 30 years, their small business had grown into the large Slovenian family retail company Jagros d.o.o., with 42 branches, which is known under the brand Jager Stores. Last year, they had €167,6 million revenue and more than €12 million in net profit. Their turnover growth rate is stable, at around 10% per year and was almost 15% last year. Their profits are also growing, last year by 47% compared to the previous year.

The company is now managed by the three brothers, Aleš, Boštjan and Miha Jager, and members of the third generation are also actively involved. Boštjan Jager, Director, responsible for Food, Textiles, Marketing, Finance and HR, says: "When we took over ownership, our responsibilities grew by 850 employees and their families. We put the company first, never ourselves and we are typical family business owners; all the profit goes back into the company and we have never paid it out."

They believe their flexibility, responsiveness and buyer-focus give them their competitive advantage. They cover a wide range of products, from food and textiles, to appliances, construction materials and farming supplies, in a relatively small space. Whenever possible, they offer products made in Slovenia or from Slovenian suppliers and in 2020 they also added an online store to their brick-and-mortar branches.

**"We only take out loans that we can pay back and we try to approach business with common sense."**

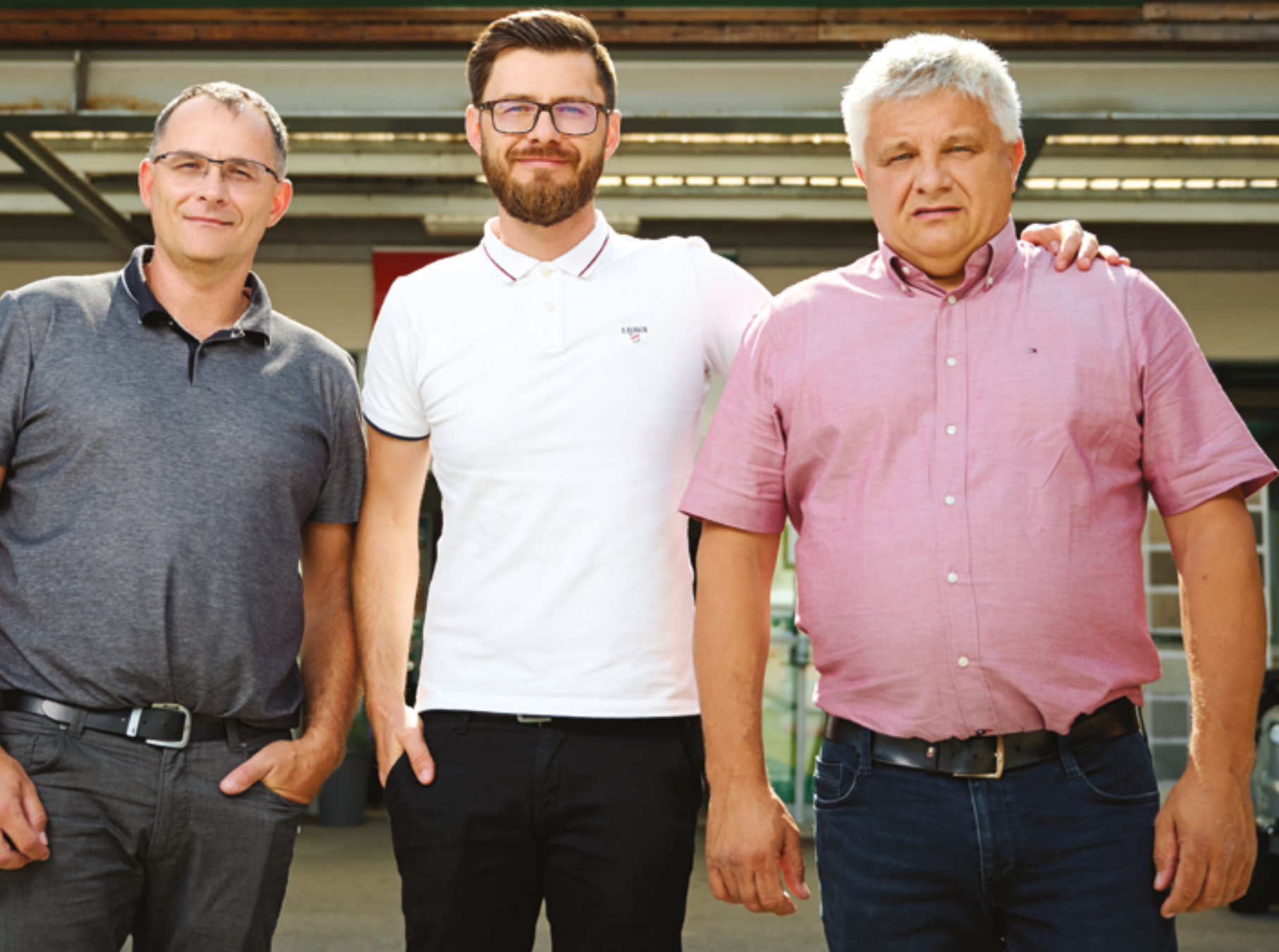
**Aleš Jager**,  
Director, responsible for  
Appliances, Logistics  
and Investments





# JÄGER

## SUPERMARKET





They want to be the best store chain not just in the Stajerska region but in the whole of Slovenia. They will continue to strengthen their business advantages.

## Dreams came true with the first store

Before 1989, when Slovenian citizens were not allowed to open their own companies, Franc Jager worked for Hmezad as an organizer of co-op stores and dreamed of opening his own. In 1989, as soon as it was possible, he registered a company, bought land in Rogaška Slatina and built his first store. The family already had a farm, but Franc firmly believed in his decision.

The beginning of his entrepreneurial career was modest and frugal. Franc gradually expanded his activities, always taking care to ensure costs did not exceed revenue. He always remembered the words of his friends who advised him never take a loan for more than half of the investment, as that is sure to lead to failure sooner or later. The family sticks to this rule to this very day.

Franc believes the most important thing for an entrepreneur is to use their common sense and to be modest. He selected locations for new stores

based on market analysis and his own intuition. When both elements created a success story, it brought him immense satisfaction.

## Gradually taking over the company

More than 20 years ago, Franc gave his sons the first minority shares in the family company, prior to which he was the only owner of the store chain. At that moment they all agreed to go forward with the company and divided the responsibilities. "Both father and mother worked in the stores and perhaps having experience passed down by both gave us our advantage," says the eldest son Aleš Jager, Director, responsible for Appliances, Logistics and Investment. "Mother Marija was our mentor and our glue, our magnet, when things went 'awry'," agree all three sons.

Two years ago, Franc retired and handed the company reins to his sons, while Marija remained as an Authorized Representative. The results of the last two years have confirmed that he made the right decision.

## The sons continue in their father's shoes

The sons started helping on the farm very early on, while the most important thing for Franc was that they got an education and learned to work. Even though a decade separates the eldest Aleš and the youngest Miha, all three work excellently together and they point out that their differences are also their advantage.

The eldest son Aleš completed agricultural school but found no jobs available, so he took the opportunity to start working for his parents, who had just opened their first store. He remembers that while many people were opening stores at that time, the Jagers also stocked construction and agriculture goods, which was their added value.

Boštjan, the middle son, has always had an entrepreneurial spirit and has been part of the family company ever since he was small. He reveals that he learned to count with money at the store. "Father and mother were always very trusting and Aleš and I soon started working independently. Each of us developed further in our strongest fields," says Boštjan.

"There was no 'if you want to' in our family, you simply had to do things," remembers the youngest brother Miha. The topic of his graduate thesis at Gea College was transfer of ownership in a family enterprise. He is now Director, responsible for IT, Computer Science and Security. His older brothers were his mentors and sometimes even surrogate parents. "I really appreciate them and I often ask myself how they would react in a given situation," says Miha about his brothers. "Our youngest brother is the bridge between us and the third generation, who are also starting to work in the company," adds Aleš.

Their greatest challenges today are expanding their activities, investing smartly, and maintaining progress. They constantly monitor the market in search of new opportunities and carefully consider every investment, still

sharing their father's conservative approach to managing the company. "We only take out loans that we can pay back and we try to approach business with common sense," explains Aleš. "The company is always at the top of the priority list and we come second," says Boštjan and adds that they invest all profit back into the company.

## Advantages of a family-owned company

What are the key advantages of a family enterprise? All three brothers agree on the ability to reach agreements quickly, plus mutual trust. They collaborate very democratically and trust each other to do their work well. "We were given and took on responsibility for our work at an early age and when we became owners, this did not change," says Miha. He adds that in his view, the main advantage of a family-owned company is greater personal connection and greater involvement in the company.

"Another major advantage is greater drive and 100% responsiveness," adds Boštjan. "When other employees see how hard the family members work, they are motivated to follow their example," adds father Franc. Of course, as in every family, the Jagers sometimes face disagreements and differences of opinion, but this only strengthens them and prepares them for future changes.

They are planning to remain a family enterprise in the future. "The company is now managed by us, three brothers, and each of us is responsible for different areas. My wife manages the HR team and my brother's daughter Urša already works in retail controlling. My son Nik and daughter Dona also help occasionally and we are one of the few Slovenian family companies with the third generation already actively involved. We have good business results, we are developing and growing and are always looking for new opportunities," says Boštjan. He adds: "We are not forcing anyone, but the doors are open to everyone."



They believe their flexibility, responsiveness and buyer-focus give them their competitive advantage. They also provide a wide range of products, from food and textiles, to appliances, construction materials and farming supplies, in a relatively small space.

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Their strength comes from the experience of two generations and is deeply rooted in the desire to succeed and a clear vision of the future.



The story of Jager Stores began in 1989, when Franc and Marija Jager opened their first store in Tržišče near Rogaška Slatina. Within 30 years, their small business grew into a large Slovenian family retail company which owns 42 stores and had €167,6 million of revenue last year.



They put their employees first, which is why they have created a kind, safe and stable work environment for them.

# Jagros in a nutshell:

responsibility, team spirit, hard work, flexibility, stability.

## Family values are integrated into the business culture

The most effective way to motivate co-workers is a positive approach which sets an example. "Our company values are hard work, solidarity, compassion, team spirit, respect for business agreements and care for employees," says Aleš. He adds: "During the COVID-19 pandemic, Boštjan really had a lot of work. He monitored official statements and news every evening and then notified all 40 stores of any new developments, because we were worried about the entire team."

They put their employees first, which is why they have created a kind, safe and stable work environment for them. The brothers are often present in the stores and are always available to co-workers for daily open communication. "We don't see our employees just as numbers. We treat everyone equally and they appreciate that," says Boštjan. He adds that their employee turnover rate is low, thanks to good relationships and the support they offer. The Jagers believe it is important that employees like their work and approach customers positively, and that is why they are all encouraged towards personal and professional growth. "We like to employ people who grow with us and are committed to the company; we really operate like a big family," adds Aleš.

## Their vision is for high-quality choice

All their business decisions are carefully planned and this will not change in the future. "We are financially stable and not in debt. Our strength is built on the experience of two generations, deeply rooted in the will to succeed and a clear vision of the future." They want to be the best store chain in the Štajerska region and the whole of Slovenia and will continue to strengthen their business advantages. "We want to stay recognizable for our low prices, excellent service, high-quality products, friendly staff and satisfied customers," points out Aleš. They stand out from other stores because they provide a well-rounded range of high-quality products even in smaller towns and villages.

They also have several investments planned: construction of a new logistics warehouse in Hoče, regional expansion and a larger workforce. "We will continue to be a well-organized company, based on our core values of responsibility to our employees and to the natural and social environments we live in," concludes Aleš.

### Boštjan Jager, Aleš Jager, Miha Jager and Marija Jager

Co-owners

Company name: **JAGROS, d.o.o.**

Number of employees (2020): **726**

Net sales revenue (2020): **€167.6 million**

## Kuzma d.o.o.

**Franc Kuzma**, Founder and Director

**Miha Kuzma**, Head of the Gramophone department

**Matjaž Žakelj**, Head of Production

### Every single product is a masterpiece

**T**he Kuzma company from Kranj has been a leader in the field of premium turntables and tonearms for more than 40 years. Every product they make is a masterpiece, earning them a reputation as one of the best premium audio equipment companies in the world. This quality has also brought several awards from the most respected audiophile magazines and is reflected in their prices - Kuzma turntables range from a couple of thousand to tens of thousands of euros.

A photograph of a Kuzma turntable with a black platter and a wooden tonearm, resting on a light-colored wooden stand. The background is a solid light green wall.

“Our concept is that we do not copy the products of our competition. Everyone in the company is self-taught and in love with development.”

**Franc Kuzma**,  
Founder and Director





Kuzma turntables in general weigh between 40 and 50 kilograms, but their XL AIR, their crown jewel, weighs as much as 120 kilograms.

## How to turn love for music into a profitable business

Franc Kuzma has always been a great music enthusiast. In the mid-70s, he founded a Music Lovers Club with his friends to bring together music, concerts, vinyl records, and audio systems enthusiasts. In those days, sound systems were very expensive in Yugoslavia; shiny equipment in the store windows was only available to the few people with access to the right currency.

At that time, Franc was already dreaming of making his own turntable, which for a rock music enthusiast represented the only way to listen. When he began working as an engineer in the acoustics lab of the well-known Iskra company, this dream started to become more concrete. In 1982, he left Iskra and founded his own turntable manufacturing company, thus realizing his dreams.

## Meeting the needs of the demanding Japanese market for more than 40 years

The young entrepreneur's first big successes were the Stabi turntable and Stogi tonearm. The news of excellent sound and high-quality manufacturing quickly spread beyond Yugoslavia's borders and in 1985, the Stabi turntable received an excellent review in the British HI-FI News magazine, which was the go-to music equipment magazine at the time.

In those years, most Hi-Fi products were made in Japan, the USA, or the developed Western European countries and the Stabi turntable was the first audio product made in Yugoslavia to be noticed in the Western press. Its excellent review in the popular British magazine was followed by favorable reviews in most specialized audio magazines across the world and invitations to audio fairs from Tokyo to Las Vegas. In 1985, Franc conquered the Japanese market, where the company sell their products to this day. By the end of the 80s, Kuzma turntables had conquered the entire Western world.



## A dreamer who is not afraid of technological change

As an established turntable manufacturer, Franc went to London in 1990, as he did every year, to exhibit at the largest audio equipment fair in the world. He was in for a shock. Only a year previously, the exhibition halls had been full of vinyl records and turntables, but in 1990 it became clear that vinyl was being retired as a sound carrier. The stores were filled with CDs and the music industry said goodbye to vinyl records practically overnight. Franc realized that he was one of only two turntable manufacturers at the fair.

At that moment, he thought his entrepreneurial days were ending and he was ready to give up the idea of a family company that would connect several generations. His son Miha was 15 at the time. "When CDs started displacing vinyl records, I did not want anyone else in the family to start working for the company. I thought that there might be just enough work for me, or not even that," recalls Franc of those moments of uncertainty.

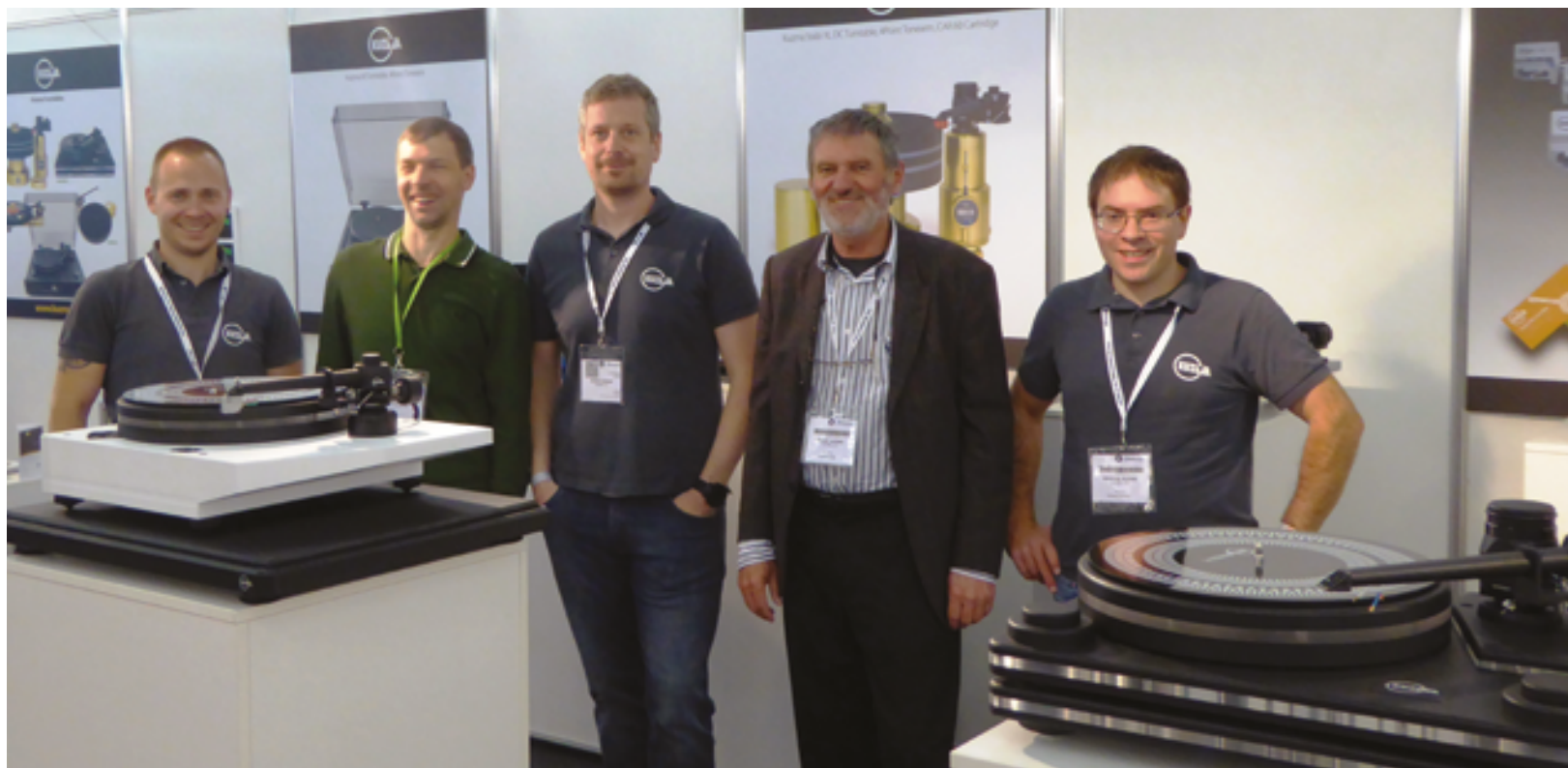
However, he did not give up on his dreams but simply changed the business model. In addition to manufacturing turntables, he became the Slovenian representative for several premium audio brands, which included Martin Logan, Soundlab, Rotel, Focal, Avalon, JPW, Conrad Johnson, Transperent,

Benz, Audiostatic and Muse. To his great delight, vinyl records became trendy again before too long.

## Self-taught and in love with development

The process of making a premium turntable takes around two years. The first is required to make the prototype and the second to place it in stores. "Our concept is that we do not copy the products of our competition. Everyone in the company is self-taught and in love with development. There are no instructions for making a turntable. You need to think, know the laws of physics, develop, try new material, new ideas, and in the end it works. In theory, making a turntable is very simple. In reality, every little screw can impact the sound quality and every tiny detail is very important. You cannot compromise on anything. Just the tonearm is made from around 100 pieces, which means a lot of handicraft, subsets, putting pieces together, coloring, anodizing, processing," says Franc.

An engineer by heart, Franc is a perfectionist and expects the same approach from his employees. He also values good team spirit. "When we were looking for two new employees this year, we selected them so that everyone got on well. Most of our employees are between 20 and 40 years old and make a great team," he explains.



The company from Kranj now has nine employees who make around 1000 turntables per year. This is far from enough to meet demand, which has seen double-digit percentage growth in the last couple of years.



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They discuss all their ideas together as a company. Every employee has the chance to contribute to new products and suggest improvements.

Their customers are music enthusiasts who love classical, rock or jazz music and who listen with greater intensity, with more engagement. They don't just listen to the music, but to the sound.



Just the tonearm is made from around 100 pieces, which means a lot of work by hand, putting pieces together, coloring, anodizing and processing.

## Kuzma in a nutshell:

passion, innovation, perfectionism, enthusiasm, top quality.

### A 120-kilogram masterpiece

As a curiosity, let us mention that Kuzma turntables are pretty heavy. In general, they weigh between 40 and 50 kilograms, but their XL AIR, their crown jewel, weighs as much as 120 kilograms.

Who are the customers who are willing to pay a lot of money for premium analogue turntables? In addition to industry professionals, there are also music enthusiasts with deeper pockets.

“Our customers are music enthusiasts who love classical, rock or jazz music and who listen with greater intensity, with more engagement. They don’t just listen to the music, but to the sound. Younger buyers generally cannot afford our turntables, but I love it when we get feedback from our buyers. Some time ago we received an email from one of our Japanese customers who said: ‘I have your turntable and my wife cannot believe that Japanese traditional music can sound that good,’” says Franc proudly. The perfection of their products is summed up well by a review in the HIFI + magazine: “You never actually own a Kuzma XL AIR. You merely look after it for the next generation.”

### The goal is one million euros in revenue

The company from Kranj now has nine employees who make around 1000 turntables per year. This is far from enough to meet demand, which has seen double-digit percentage growth in the last couple of years. “In the past two years, our revenue increased by between 10% and 15% every year. This year looks even better. We are planning to reach a new milestone: one million euros in revenue. Around half of our revenue comes from turntable sales, the rest from tonearms,” says Franc.

His son Miha Kuzma and son-in-law Matjaž Žakelj also work for the company. Miha makes the turntables, while Matjaž has taken over production. “We talk about all our ideas together, as a company. Every employee has a chance to contribute to every new product and suggest improvements. One development challenge is new materials and finding new employees who have at least basic manual skills,” points out Matjaž.

### Son and son-in-law will take over the company

Franc plans to retire from day-to-day running of the company next year and his wish is for his son and son-in-law to take over the company. Miha admits that it will be difficult to fill his father’s shoes, but he remains optimistic, especially since their sales have been growing in the last couple of years and new markets are opening to them. “My father created a brand that is known and respected across the world, and I don’t want it to disappear. When he retires from everyday business and takes his innovative brain with him, things will definitely become more difficult. We might focus more on evolution, rather than revolution,” says Miha.

This year, the company will open an exhibition space in Slovenia and the growing sales numbers of the past several years have encouraged them to set ambitious goals. “Some of our turntables have been on the market for 25 years. They are our best reference as they spread the news of our quality across the world. Our sales are growing, which means we will seek new employees in the coming years, and our facilities are constantly expanding. It is also very helpful that we are present online and more and more active on social media,” adds Miha.

## Franc Kuzma

Owner

Company name:

**KUZMA d.o.o.**

Number of employees (2020):

**8**

Net sales revenue (2020):

**€920,423**

## Perger 1757 d.o.o.

**Hrabroslav Perger**, Owner

**Lucian Perger**, Director

### Family is our circle of power

**N**ot so long ago, the traditional gift from a boy to a girl was honey bread in the shape of a heart. “This was before mobile phones, so the sweetheart had to be decorated with a love message and a small mirror in which the girl could admire herself,” says Hrabroslav Perger, head of the Perger 1757 family enterprise from Slovenj Gradec. Perger 1757 keeps alive the traditional crafts of honey confectionery, honey breadmaking and chandlery.



“Because we make such specific niche products, we are often paving a new path, creating consumer needs and helping designing buying habits.”

**Lucian Perger**,  
Director



Perger  
1757



"All our ideas are passed from generation to generation. We learn from tradition, and at the same time focus on developing new products with added value and investing in the market, which is a great challenge."

## How Hrabroslav fell into a large cauldron full of scorching hot candy mass

The Pergers have been passing on the secrets of their crafts from generation to generation for 250 years, and they like to point out that family is their circle of power. The business effectively began in 1757 with their great-great-great-grandfather and today the company features its ninth Perger generation. "Seven members of the family work for the company, and there are 12 of us altogether," proudly explains Lucian Perger, who was trusted with the role of Director. The owner is Lucian's father Hrabroslav, who introduced all his children into the business. Hrabroslav is also President of the Art & Crafts Association of Slovenia, which covers traditional crafts, such as pottery, woodcraft, and glassblowing. "All other crafts can be found all across the world, but honey breadmaking can only be found in the countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire," explains Hrabroslav.

The eldest son Boštjan is Chief Technology Officer and Head of Production. He is such an expert that other members of the family call him "the golden hand of the Pergers". Lucian explains: "Father always said that teaching his apprentice to be better than him is the mark of a master craftsman and Boštjan really makes products of premium quality. My sister Ines takes care of the confectionery business and everything related to bonbons and lollipops and I manage the company and make sure that everything keeps running." His girlfriend Zala is also employed in the company, taking care of marketing, and when the next, 10th generation is not in school, they lend a helping hand.

"All our ideas are passed from generation to generation. We learn from tradition, and at the same time focus on developing new products with added value and investing in the market, which is a great challenge. Because we make such specific niche products, we are often paving a new path, creating consumer needs and helping designing buying habits. This means that we often create our own market and shape consumer habits," explains

Lucian. "Our every product has its own story," adds Hrabroslav. For example, he likes to tell visitors how he fell into a large cauldron filled with scorching hot candy mass when he was a child. Luckily, the story has a happy ending. "You need to put your heart into your work, be innovative and be different. Our stories are real; people can feel that," explains Hrabroslav.

## Designer candle by Oskar Kogoj

For two and a half centuries, the Perger family has maintained both ownership of the company and their old recipes for honey cookies, honey bread decorations, energy candles and bio bonbons made from seven different herbs, which are picked in the Pohorje hills by students. "All our products are hand-made down to the last detail. Buyers really appreciate that fact, especially those from abroad," points out Lucian. A couple of years ago, they also opened a museum dedicated to honey confectionery in Slovenj Gradec, which saw around 17,000 visitors annually before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The tourism side of their business is overseen by Hrabroslav, who believes in connecting the craft with tourism.

The Pergers' innovative spirit always leads them to seek new challenges and develop new products. Their energy candle made from 100% natural

beeswax, enriched with honey scent, and designed by the famous Slovenian designer Oskar Kogoj is a great sales hit, but they are best known for their organic honey-dough biscuits, which they export to Austria, Germany and Switzerland. They can even be found at the prestigious KaDeWe department store in Berlin.

## State Protocol Department, Pavarotti, Dalai Lama...

The Pergers like to work with the best. Their collaboration with the famous designer Oskar Kogoj began around 20 years ago, when completely by chance, Hrabroslav walked into the Oskar Kogoj Gallery in Gorica, to buy a gift for his late wife Leonora. The items he saw at the gallery took his breath away and he immediately wanted to meet the master who made them. Two years later, this meeting led to development of the energy candle with a unique spiral design that emits constant spiritual vibrations and which has become a global hit.

"Oskar Kogoj sees in nature something that no one else notices. I asked him to help us because we like to learn from the best. A year later he called me with the inspiring idea for a candle in the shape of a spiral and this was the start of our collaboration. It was incredibly successful since it spread the



The Pergers have also been collaborating with the Protocol Department of the Republic of Slovenia for several years, and many of their products have found their way into museums across the world. The energy candle is a protocolary gift.



The Pergers, who have been passing the secrets of honey confectionery, honeybread-making and chandlery from generation to generation for 250 years, like to point out that family is their circle of power.

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Perger 1757 products have found their way onto the shelves of prestigious department stores in South Korea and Dubai.



Hrabroslav likes to tell visitors the story of when, at the age of four, he fell into a large cauldron filled with scorching hot candy mass. Today, his bonbons are sold in South Korea's most prestigious stores, and opera singer Luciano Pavarotti was also a fan of them.



For two and a half centuries the Perger family has kept both the ownership of the company and the old recipes for honey cookies and honeybread decorations. They are also planning a new facility, which will include the first sugar-free all-honey candy shop in the world.



# Perger 1757 in a nutshell: persistence, innovation, collaboration with the best, healthy food, family tradition.

word of our candles across the world. We were visited by TV teams from Austria and Germany, and the National Geographic television team stayed with us for 10 days. They shot for hours every day to make a minute-and-a-half long video about our candle. Since then we have made more than a hundred different products in collaboration with Oskar Kogoj," says Hrabroslav.

## Wedding candle for Donald and Melania Trump

Perger products have also travelled to other continents. Around a decade ago, the mother of Slovenian model Melania Trump ordered a wedding candle for her future son-in-law, Donald Trump. The Dalai Lama is among their notable guests, but the most memorable visitor for Hrabroslav was the opera singer Luciano Pavarotti, who is one of his favorites to listen to. "Pavarotti fell in love with our Triglav candle, which weighs 35 kilograms. He stayed for four hours and tried our honey-dough biscuits, bonbons, and honey wine. Before he left, we packed him four boxes of honey-dough biscuits and a couple of smaller candles," says Hrabroslav.

The Pergers have also collaborated with the State Protocol Department of the Republic of Slovenia for several years, and many of their products have found their way into museums across the world. Their standing honey bread horse won first prize at the ethnography museum in Osaka, Japan, where they later held an exhibition of their products, as they also did in Los Angeles, USA. Their products are depicted on Slovenian stamps and can be seen in several Slovenian and foreign television shows, documentaries and movies, such as *Cvetje v jeseni*, *Tantadruj* and *Maškarada*.

## When COVID-19 strikes

The first wave of the pandemic last spring came as a shock to the Perger family, as half of their activities - the entire tourism side of the business - closed practically overnight. Their tourist shops and the Perger gallery and museum had to close their doors.

But this did not dampen their entrepreneurial spirit, as they put all their energy into online sales channels. "Online sales, which helped us recover the losses caused by coronavirus, increased by 400% last year and we had to return the government's financial support. Now we are trying to get back to where we were before the crisis. We are doing well for now, but we can see that tourism will take a long time to recover," says Lucian.

One achievement during the pandemic year which they are very proud of is their entry into such demanding and far-flung markets as South Korea and the United Arab Emirates, where hand-made products are highly appreciated. "The most prestigious department stores in South Korea sell our bonbons and honey-dough biscuits. We are also concluding agreements for energy candles and negotiating sales in Singapore and Vietnam. The contract is already signed," says Lucian proudly.

## The first sugar-free candy shop in the world

The Perger family is about to begin an important investment in a new facility that will combine production with tourism. This will be a center of experiences, where visitors can see how their products are made and there will be an apiary on the roof. One part of the center will be the first honey candy shop in the world where all the candies are made only with natural honey and without sugar. The center will be the perfect place either to just drink coffee with honey or to spend an entire day with your family.

The Pergers firmly believe in their vision of this outstanding tourist experience, which is why they have dared to tackle such a large project. They usually develop their new lines five years in advance and are currently working on products for people who are blind or visually impaired.

## Hrabroslav Perger

Owner

Company name: **PERGER 1757 d.o.o.**

Number of employees (2020): **5**

Net sales revenue (2020): **€266,554**

# PODKRIŽNIK GROUP

**Iztok Podkrižnik**, Founder and Director

**Petra Podkrižnik**, Authorized Representative and Head of Accounting

**Jure Podkrižnik**, Assistant Director, Head of Strategic Projects

**Jošt Podkrižnik**, Student

## Architects of intelligent drive solutions

**T**he success story of the Podkrižnik company began in the town of Ljubno ob Savinji. In almost three and a half decades since then, the company has become one of the European leaders in the field of special drive technology, uniting development, manufacturing, retail and a range of technological solutions. Their competitive advantages include many years of experience in drive solutions, the fact that their activities range from research to mass production, their innovative spirit and the ability to respond quickly to customers' wishes.

Their Slovenian company, Podkrižnik d.o.o., currently employs 205 people and their German-based company, ORA Drive, which bought the Bosch-Rexroth manufacturing location in May 2018, employs 100 workers. Last year, they achieved €42 million in revenue and profit of €3.4 million.

In 2015, development, manufacturing and management were moved to Nazarje, where they continue with R&D, manufacturing of high-precision components, semi-manufactured products, actuators and systemic solutions. In the past few years, they have also started successfully developing e-mobility and nautical technologies. They penetrated the nautical market with their E'dyn brand (Electric Dynamic Nautics) by developing smart e-mobility solutions for nautical vehicles. The family also owns the Charming Slovenia brand, under which they opened a herbal glamping resort in Ljubno ob Savinji six years ago, and a forest glamping resort by lake Blaguš last year.

Their philosophy is simple. "We have ambitious people, incredible will, excellent knowledge, state-of-the-art technology and the power to do even the impossible," says the founder of the company, Izток Podkrižnik.

**"We have ambitious people, incredible will, excellent knowledge, state-of-the-art technology and the power to do even the impossible."**

**Iztok Podkrižnik,**  
Founder and Director





In almost three decades the company has become one of the European leaders in the field of special drive technology.

## Package solutions for various industries

The company brings together specialists in the field of drive technologies, mechatronic systems, hydraulics, and volume manufacturing of high-precision special and drive components. They offer their customers complete package solutions, from concept to mass production.

Thanks to constant development and new investment, the company keeps growing and expanding into new drive technology markets and they have become systemic partners to large global corporations in different industries. Podkrižnik products are sold throughout several European markets, all the way to Russia, but they are aiming for global exposure with

their new products and systemic solutions. "Our complex technological projects create high added value, which serves as the basis for constant growth and development of the company in educational, organizational and economic spheres," says Iztok.

Rapid development of new products, excellent know-how and unique technologies keep them one step ahead of the competition: "We quickly see what would be optimal for the product the customer envisions. We also suggest comprehensive solutions, so they don't spend unnecessary time on that single aspect, which allows them to place new products on the market more quickly."

## Complex products and passion for innovation

The founder and Director Iztok Podkrižnik is a gun-maker by profession. At the start of his career he learned the art of gun-making and specialized in unique hunting weapons but his entrepreneurial desire led him into industry. In 1991 he got the opportunity to research processing of certain difficult materials for a well-known company, as the "conventional" technology at the time was not capable. At the age of just over 20 he went abroad to visit the manufacturers of such equipment. When it became apparent that buying and developing the equipment would be too expensive, he instead decided to bring together a team of engineers. In one year, they managed to produce a unique gearing milling machine with a much shorter processing time and at a much lower price than that of the Swiss and German machines. "My aim was always to make something new and not just follow something we already knew. If you develop state-of-the-art technologies and want to make complex products, you must always be one step ahead of everyone else," believes Iztok.

Today, he would no longer do something so risky. As he says: "When you are young, you think you are invincible. You simply say to yourself: either you are going to do this thing, or you are not but today I always carefully consider things before making a decision."

This start was followed by a period of manufacturing high-precision metal and plastic components. Then, more than a decade ago, they expanded their activities by establishing an R&D department for drive technologies.

## The company is safe in the hands of the family

When we ask Iztok about the advantages of a family company, he says there are several. "The most important things are a strong will and passion for progress. If the company is to develop and progress from one generation to another, a lot of sacrifices and responsibilities are required from family members who work in the company, which is not easy. But this way a micro company can develop into a medium-sized or large one," says Iztok. He adds: "There is more trust from partners and customers and more stability, which leads to better partnerships."

Currently the first and second Podkrižnik generations are actively involved in the company. Iztok's wife Petra has been in charge of accounting for years and has recently also taken on controlling, training of employees and the organizational culture of the company. The company also has its own academy for personnel development. "We would not be as successful today if we did not offer additional education to our employees," she says. She adds that they have the right people in the right positions, who perform their tasks responsibly and want to see good results.

The eldest son Jure has an MSc in engineering from the prestigious TUM University in Munich and has been actively involved with the company for the past four years. He is responsible for strategic development and acts as his father's right hand. He also manages their German company ORA Drive and the projects developed within the mother company. Younger son Jošt has a business degree from the University of Ljubljana and is heading



The company also has its own academy for personnel development. They say that they would not be as successful today if they did not offer additional education to their employees.

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If you develop state-of-the-art technology and want to produce complex products, you must always be one step ahead of everyone else.



Iztok strongly believes that employees should be trusted and have freedom in their work and thinking, as this is the only way good ideas can be born.



"Work, family, respect, passion, honesty and curiosity are values we live with at home and in the company," says Petra.



The sons became familiar with the company at a young age. "I always took them with me, and by the end of elementary school, they were familiar with more or less all the processes, from manufacturing to sales," explains Iztok.

# PODKRIŽNIK GROUP in a nutshell:

## development, speed, innovation, passion, endurance.

for post-graduate studies in Switzerland. After completing his studies and internship abroad, he will also join the family company.

The sons became familiar with the company at a young age. "I always took them with me, and by the end of elementary school, they were familiar with more or less all the processes, from manufacturing to sales," explains Iztok. Jure, who wants to become an entrepreneur, adds: "I really look up to my father. I learned a lot from him. I was curious and he was happy to share his knowledge and experiences. Without this open communication and his trust in me, I would not be who I am today."

He shares many of his father's views on many aspects, which makes for smooth collaboration in creating a future for the family business. There is a lot of mutual trust and respect. "As a member of the second generation I am aware of my responsibility for the family company. Further developing our story gives me even more satisfaction," adds Jure.

### Good communication between employees is key to progress

Iztok is aware that clear communication and respect are key to a team's success. Even as a young entrepreneur, he knew how to organize tasks and encourage employees to feel responsible for their work. "Persistence and passion for work, determination to see things through and fairness to yourself and the employees are the fundamentals that allow you to build a successful company," says Iztok. He strongly believes that employees should be trusted and have freedom in their work and thinking, as this is the only way good ideas can be born.

Everybody in the company works as a team. "Work, family, respect, passion, honesty and curiosity are values we live with at home and in the company," says Petra. "We like order and stability, which is why we have clearly defined processes, vision and strategy."

Clear strategy and the chance to develop products that will mark the future of e-mobility and robotics bring young talent to the company. "We have several Masters and Doctors of Science and engineers among our employees. I am very proud to have such excellent teams in all areas, from production to development and the lab," says Iztok.

Even though he is still interested in development, he is also open to ideas of the younger generations. "Years of work and experience on one hand and on the other the naïveté and enthusiasm of the young, their different view of the world. This is what leads to an excellent product."

And what does the Podkrižnik family plan for their future? "Our goals are further development, production of innovative products with high added value, ensuring long-term stability of business, and remaining a socially responsible company," summarizes the founder.

## Iztok and Petra Podkrižnik

Co-owners

Company name: **PODKRIŽNIK GROUP**

Number of employees (2020): **300**

Net sales revenue (2020): **€42 million**

## ROLTEK d.o.o.

**Janez Kosec**, Founder, director and owner

**Brigita Kosec**, Finance and co-owner

**Janez Kosec, jr.**, Head of Technical Department

**Barbka Kosec**, Back office and Marketing

### An innovative approach setting trends in the field of roller shutters

**T**wo generations of the Kosec family, who have written the success story of ROLTEK together, have roller shutters in their blood. ROLTEK is a leading manufacturer of roller shutters and venetian blinds with their own production facilities in Slovenia. Their care for the environment and desire for a better tomorrow guide their constant development. Today the family and around 100 ROLTEK employees follow their vision to meet the desires of even the most demanding customers with a sustainable and socially responsible approach both in Slovenia and abroad. Last year, ROLTEK achieved €10.8 million of revenue, which is a 20% improvement on the previous year.



**“The goal is not only growth; we want to become a trendsetter for Central Europe, offering innovative products, servicing, and focusing on our consumer, our partner.”**

**Janez Kosec, jr.,**  
Head of Technical  
Department







Two generations of the Kosec family who write the success story of ROLTEK together have roller shutter in their blood. ROLTEK is a leading manufacturer of roller shutters and venetian blinds with its own production facilities in Slovenia.

## Born and bred with entrepreneurial spirit

The founder Janez Kosec grew up with entrepreneurial spirit and roller shutters. He began working for the family company after completing mechanical engineering education. In 1995, he decided to pave his own path, and he and his wife founded ROLTEK. From the very beginning, Janez wanted a company with a completely different philosophy and strategic focus on foreign markets. They focused on the Austrian market where Janez started selling door-to-door with the support of his wife, who knew German. The company grew quickly and expanded in Dob pri Domžalah. "Our guiding philosophy was always to make high-quality products at a good price and to provide good services," says Janez.

Janez, the entrepreneur, never had any doubt about starting his own company: "I was born and bred with an entrepreneurial spirit. My father taught us our work ethic and showed us that you don't come far without work," he says. His wife and co-owner Brigita, who also comes from an entrepreneurial family and takes care of finance in the company, confirms: "We never doubted our success. Our goal was to make sure that everything we did, we did well, and that we only did what we knew how to do."

## The children were included from the very beginning

There was also no doubt about involving their daughter Barbka and son Janez, jr. It happened spontaneously: "It was all combined. At first, the company and our living space were in the same house, and later everything was tailored to ROLTEK, so the children were always present." When they represented their company at different fairs, they took the children with them. "They wandered around the fairs and we put our business cards in their pockets just in case and told them to show the cards if they got lost," remembers Brigita.

Both children went to high school abroad and completed an international baccalaureate in Oxford. Janez, jr., finished his BSc and MSc in automobile engineering at the University of Warwick. He says he learned a lot from this experience and that it broadened his horizons, since it put him in contact with industry and large corporations.

During their study years abroad, both children remained connected to the company since they worked for ROLTEK during summer breaks. After obtaining their degrees, they came back home and became actively involved with the business. Janez, jr., remembers: "We were always involved; we saw how things were done and when you see a company grow, you are drawn to it."

Barbka studied international hospitality management and science in Switzerland. At the beginning she found it hard to imagine how her knowledge could benefit an engineering-focused company like ROLTEK, but she soon realized she had a lot to contribute. She found her calling in talent development, marketing, and working with people. Years of swimming practice also honed her persistence: "During my years of practicing swimming, I learned that you cannot do well without persistent work. I learned discipline, which I can now apply to the business world."

Her biggest challenge at the beginning was that her image of the company did not match reality. An example is the question of company values, which were not clearly defined in the past, but which they used to find new employees who share similar values: "We built the foundation so that all future employees can recognize themselves in our values before even coming to work for us." Signs in the company spaces remind the employees of these values every day. "Barbka took the values and advantages Janez and I integrated into the company from the very beginning as self-evident; she made them more visible and highlighted them to our co-workers," says Brigita in praise of her daughter.

## The best workers are already part of the company

"We really appreciate talent that grows within the company and sometimes we have to help people recognize what they can do themselves. We know each other and we know our employees, which is why we can spot their potential and develop it," say the family. Most of the new recruits come to the company on the recommendation of existing employees. They like to work with young people, especially if they are interested in staying with the company long term. However, they are noticing a lack of knowledge in people who come to them straight out of school. This is why they are even more focused on building good relationships with people already working for ROLTEK.

The company provides several benefits not usually offered by other firms. Barbka explains that many of these activities have been part of the company culture since the very beginning, but the employees' view of them has changed over the years in accordance with changing trends in the HR field. However, the family's conviction that they must treat employees the same as family members has been part of their philosophy from the very beginning.



"The goal is not just growth, but we want to be a trendsetter in Central Europe, with innovative products and service that puts the customer, our partner, at the forefront."



They are proud to make products that are good in every way: good for the environment, good for people and which help to save energy.

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They are proud to make products that are good in every way: good for the environment, good for people and which help to save energy.



The Kosec family also point out, that there is not much mass production in their field. Most of the time, production is adapted to the customer, which prevents actual robotization of the process.

# ROLTEK in a nutshell: innovation, sustainability, persistence, partnership, development.

They are very proud of the fact that despite the seasonal nature of their work, everybody works in one shift. "We consider the social aspect and biorhythms and make health a priority," they say in explanation of their decision.

## Digitization winds blew in with the second generation

When Janez, jr. started working for the company in 2016, he acted like a new broom. "I had a feeling that we had only been maintaining our position before, and I knew we could do more," he says. The company entered the digital era, created a department to develop new products, and started changing their processes. Digitization also brought them better access to customers.

They are also familiar with robotization, in the form of dedicated machines, of which the company owns several. All new investments and machines they invest in are connected to a central communication system, which transfers data to production facilities practically in real-time, allowing them to respond instantly. This is especially useful for urgent orders and prevents mistakes that could arise from manual processing. Automated cutting machines ensure repeatable and accurate cuts. But the Kosec family also point out that there is not much mass production in their field. Most of the time, production is adapted to the individual customer, which prevents robotization of the process in practice.

And what are their goals for the future? "The goal is not only growth; we want to become a trendsetter for Central Europe, offering innovative products, servicing, and focusing on our consumer, our partner." Today's market demands innovative products, competitiveness and the right production technology that prevents human errors.

The Kosec family plan to focus on further innovations, having recognized the need for development on the Slovenian market and a desire for new products not made by other companies. "ROLTEK's trend is to be innovative and make high-quality products." They also focus on forming equal partnerships with their co-workers, suppliers, and customers: "One of our core values is genuine, open contact with people."

## Constant growth brings new changes

ROLTEK's constant progress stalled only during the 2013 financial crisis and last year they reported almost 20% growth. This leads to the need for new employees who must be onboarded and trained. However, they are constantly aware how quickly things can change in their field. Their

workload varies seasonally, which means they have to be agile and respond quickly to market changes.

Most of their customers are window manufacturers and around 20% are direct consumers. Their foreign markets are Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Germany and Switzerland, and quite a lot of their products are also exported directly by window-manufacturing companies.

## Sustainability was self-evident

Sustainability, which is now valued by all socially responsible companies, has been part of ROLTEK from the very beginning. It was self-evident to the Kosec family that the products they make should be sustainable and when consumers choose their products, they in turn act sustainably. "I am proud that we make products which are good in every way: good for energy savings, good for the environment and good for the people. They improve living conditions," sums up Barbka. Social responsibility and support for the local environment are also dear to their hearts; every year they donate to people in need and have been supporting the local soccer club NK ROLTEK Dob and the Studenec local summer theater for decades.

## Janez in Brigita Kosec

Co-owners

Company name: **ROLTEK d.o.o.**

Number of employees (2020): **97**

Net sales revenue (2020): **€10.8 million**

## Scan, d.o.o., Preddvor

**Slavko Žižek**, Director

**Mojca Velkavrh Žižek**, Authorized Representative

**Martin Žižek**, Service and repair specialist

**Jernej Žižek**, Head of Sales

### Scan: selling and servicing state-of-the-art equipment

**E**very one of us has looked through a microscope at one time or another, driven by the curiosity to see something that is invisible to the naked eye. Scan from Preddvor pri Kranju has been selling and repairing electron microscopes and other laboratory equipment in the former Yugoslav region for 31 years. They sell and represent world-renowned manufacturers of electron microscopes, spectrometers, vacuum and other laboratory equipment. The family company currently employs nine people and earns around €1.7 million in revenue.

The equipment they sell is used by research institutes and companies in different industries, who have their own R&D and control labs. They also offer comprehensive training and servicing support to the customers who buy their state-of-the-art instruments. Scan was founded in 1990 by Slavko Žižek and today the second generation of the family is actively involved in the company. Their main values are integrity, responsibility and honesty and their ambitions for the future are to remain a leading company with service staff trained in electron microscopy, vacuum and cryotechnologies.



**“We are building the best customer support team for the best equipment in the world.”**

**Slavko Žižek,**  
Founder and Director





In the future, the sons (on the picture) will take over the reins and continue writing the family success story. "We have no doubt that the boys will successfully take the company forward. It will be easier for them than it was for us in the beginning, when we sometimes made mistakes," explain the parents happily.

## Initial doubts and persistence through hard times

As a young electro-engineering graduate, Slavko got a job at the Institute of Electronics and Vacuum Technology. "They were looking for someone who could work with the well-known Japanese company, Jeol. They chose Slavko without a second thought, since they recognized his potential," recalls his wife Mojca.

Slavko began his career by servicing the Japanese equipment across all regions of Yugoslavia. In the 90s, driven by the flourishing computing industry, several engineers began leaving the Institute, including Slavko. However, Jeol wanted to continue working with him and with their encouragement he opened his own company.

The first year was hard; they had almost no sales and business came largely from repair and maintenance work. Slavko worked with two strong brands - Jeol and Oxford Instruments - but the market was very unpredictable at

the time and a year later it completely collapsed due to the Balkan wars. Despite the difficult times, Slavko continued repairing electron microscopes: "I was the only one repairing and maintaining electron microscopes in the former Yugoslav region. There was a lot of demand for these microscopes, which are needed in several industries to inspect sample surfaces, for quality control, in research labs, to inspect pathological tissues, viruses and bacteria." They established strong relationships with clients and maintained close ties. "We issued several invoices, but there was no money because of the war," explains Mojca, who still worked as a high-school IT teacher at the time.

Despite all the uncertainty, Slavko and Mojca believed in their entrepreneurial venture. They were backed by excellent business partners and had a competitive advantage as the first company offering such services in the former Yugoslavian market. In time they found another strong partner in the field of vacuum technology, the German company Pfeiffer Vacuum.



## Confidence in what they do

Their reputation for sales, plus their excellent repair and maintenance services, ensured continuous development of the company and Slavko received increasing orders. When he could no longer manage the business on his own, Mojca joined him in 1993 and later they employed another repair specialist and a business assistant. "My husband managed the company, which meant that I was already kind of involved, so I simply helped out," says Mojca, who quickly found her place in the company, though she sometimes still misses teaching.

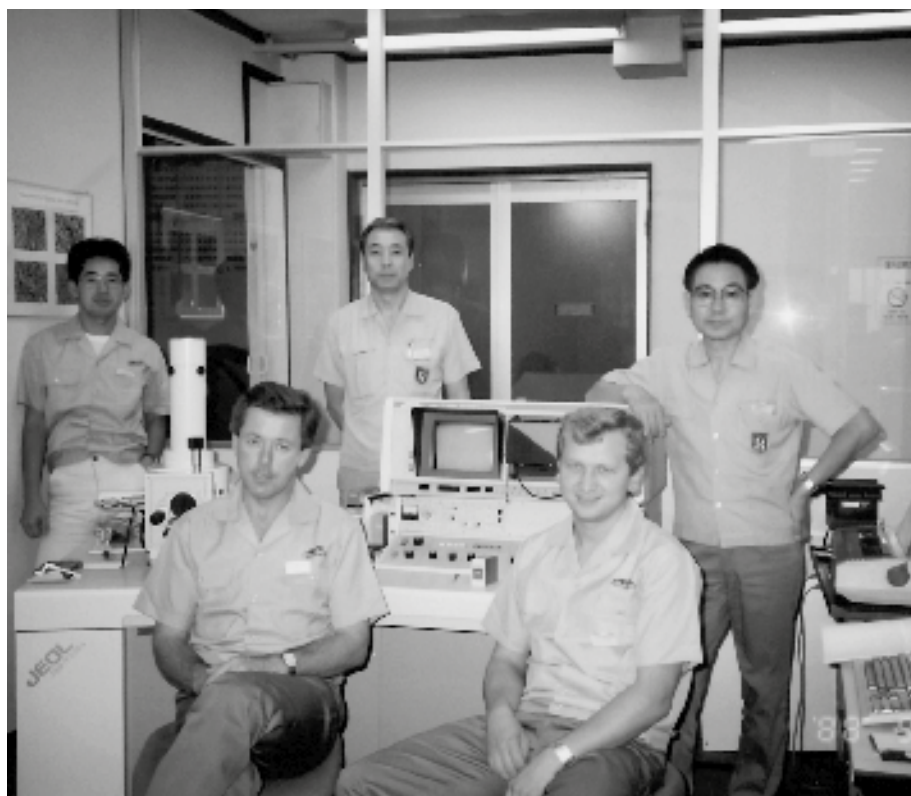
Their son Jernej, a mechanical engineer by education, joined Scan seven years ago. "We had a lot of work. We had to increase sales in our vacuum program, which is why we involved Jernej, who was interested in it," says Mojca. Jernej's guiding philosophy is that the best foundation for good sales is a good maintenance and repair service and excellent technical knowledge of the product: "You have to be confident in what you sell."

Three years later, Martin also joined, although he admits that he did not want to work for the family company at first. "I always wanted to travel and

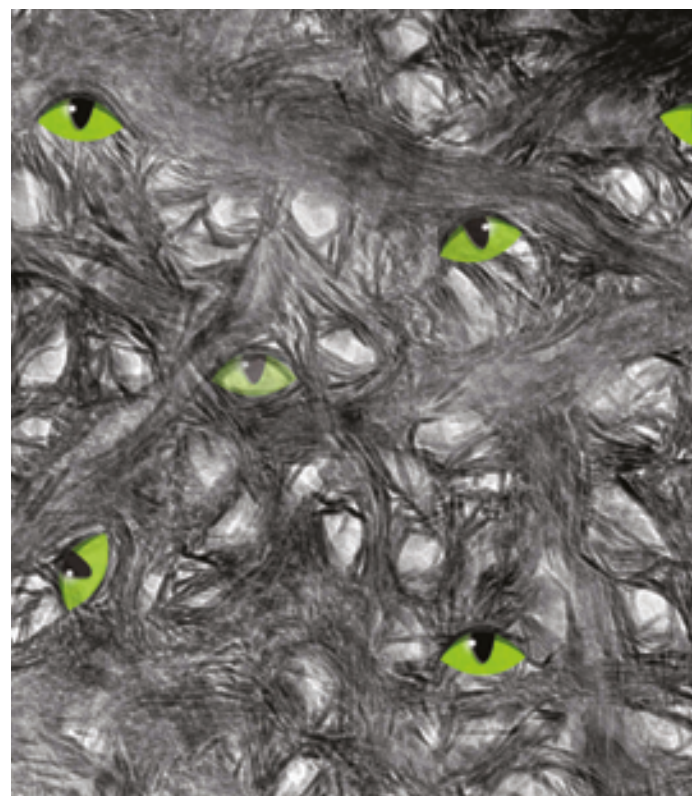
gain experience abroad, but when I finished studying my parents needed help and because I like to help, I changed my career plans," explains Martin. Maintenance and repair work is very diverse and today he enjoys it very much: "I like that the work is very varied, I always learn something new. There is no such thing as too much knowledge, which is why you must keep learning."

## A family of volunteers

In addition to Jernej and Martin, the Žižeks have two other children. Their third child was born with cerebral palsy, which is why Mojca has put her heart into volunteering in this field for years. "I've been the President of the Regional Association for Cerebral Palsy and I've been helping with various projects for more than 15 years. We help families with children with cerebral palsy by organizing lectures for the parents, to help them get through this experience, as well as therapies and vacation camps for children," explains Mojca, who finds personal satisfaction in helping others. All family members volunteer for the association, and they also offer financial assistance.



As a young electro-engineering graduate, Slavko got a job at the Institute of Electronics and Vacuum Technology. "They were looking for someone who could work with the well-known Japanese company, Jeol. They chose Slavko without a second thought, since they recognized his potential," recalls his wife Mojca.



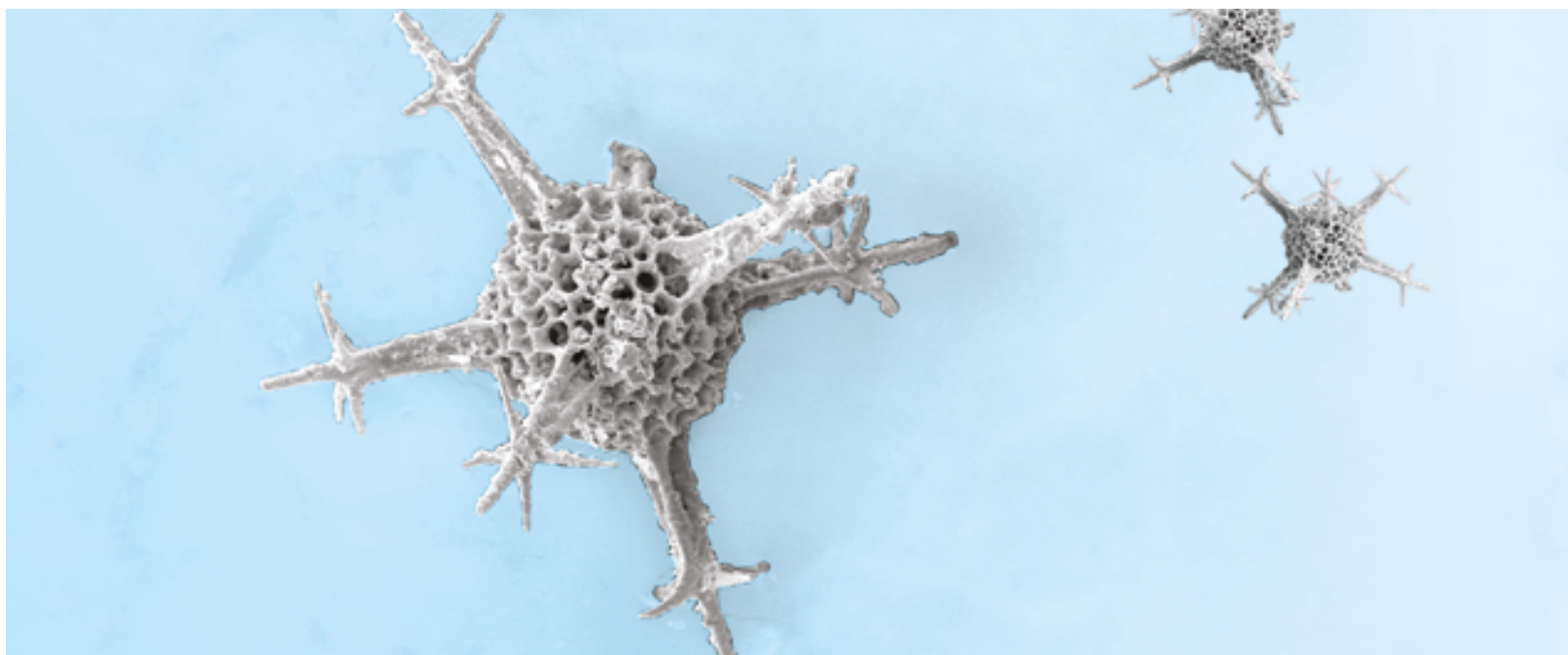
The equipment they sell is used by research institutes and companies in different industries, who have their own R&D and control labs. "Cat's eyes" is a color-corrected photograph of dentin, taken by dr. Nina Daneu, 'Jožef Štefan' Institute.



Slavko began his career by servicing the Japanese equipment across all regions of Yugoslavia. In the 90s, driven by the flourishing computing industry, several engineers began leaving the Institute, including Slavko. However, Jeol wanted to continue working with him and with their encouragement he opened his own company.

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In addition to selling state-of-the-art instruments, Scan also offers their customers all the necessary training and servicing of equipment, which leads to excellent results.



We are crossing the limits that seemed unreachable even a hundred years ago: the resolution of the best commercially available STEM microscopes is higher than 50 pm, which means they can detect and analyze the chemical makeup of atoms in materials. “December” is a color-corrected photograph of radiolarium found in Trias limestone on Prisojnik (Slovenia), taken by dr. Špela Goričan, ZRC SAZU.

## Scan in a nutshell:

integrity, good communication, honesty, respect, responsibility.

### Working with state-of-the-art technologies

The specialized nature of work in Scan means that every new employee needs additional training. "It takes a while before they can work independently. The most important characteristics are persistence, patience and desire for new knowledge. We are building the best customer support team for the best equipment in the world," explains Slavko. "Our former employees sometimes thank us for all the knowledge they gained while working with us. We really appreciate that," adds Mojca.

"Our work is very diverse, and our employees work very independently. We appreciate people who can think for themselves and organize their own work, but who are also team-oriented and like to keep learning," says Slavko of the characteristics of their employees. "In our field you work with the latest technologies. I started repairing electron microscopes when they still had electron tubes, then there were transistors and microprocessors, and now everything is computer controlled. The next thing is development of AI," explains Slavko. Martin adds: "We are working with state-of-the-art equipment. Being able to repair equipment most people don't even know exists is a special challenge." The Žižeks say that they do need new people, but also point out how difficult it is to find good technical talent these days. "The most important thing is that they are eager for challenges but it depends on their individual working habits and how much they are prepared to sacrifice," says Jernej, who made well-being in the family company his priority.

### They appreciate integrity, responsibility, and open communication

Interpersonal relationships and communication skills are highly valued in the company. They have a professional relationship with all employees and do not pay attention to family ties.

"Slavko encourages everyone to attend training related not only to the technical part of our work, but also to relationships within the company, such as workshops on communication and values," explains Mojca. "Repair and maintenance services require more than just good work. You must also know how to communicate, both with customers and within the company," confirms Martin.

They act respectfully and responsibly to everyone they encounter as part of their work: customers, employees, and everyone else. "It means a lot to us that people feel responsible for their work. One thing that bothers me is when people try to shift their responsibility to someone else. You have to stand behind your work and take responsibility for it," points out Mojca. Good working relationships, a good working environment and conditions and mutual respect – the first step of which is respect for yourself – are their priorities.

### Healthy growth of the company in the hands of the sons

The Žižeks are aware that the field of electron microscopy offers many opportunities for further development, which is why their aims are healthy growth and gradual expansion of their activities. "We also have some ideas for our own products, but we always have so many things going on that we simply do not have time for product development," says Martin.

What will the future of Scan look like? "We want to expand our maintenance and repair network and put our own representative in every country of the former Yugoslav region. But this requires a certain capacity of instruments and, first and foremost, it must be financially viable," says Slavko. Jernej sees further potential in offering comprehensive solutions, adding: "To reach a breakthrough and make a step forward, we must either have our own products or expand even further."

In the future, the sons will take over the reins and continue writing the family success story. "We have no doubt that the boys will successfully take the company forward. It will be easier for them than it was for us in the beginning, when we sometimes made mistakes," explain the parents happily.

## Slavko Žižek

Owner

Company name: **SCAN, d.o.o., Preddvor**

Number of employees (2020): **8**

Net sales revenue (2020): **€1.7 million**

## Tinex, d.o.o.

**Marija Čebašek**, Co-owner

**Andreja Jeraj**, Co-owner, Head of Controlling

**Uroš Frantar**, Director

### Trusting a co-worker to lead the company

**F**ew family companies can say their management functions are so well separated from ownership that no leading roles are taken by the family or even extended family. Tinex from Šenčur is one such company. In three decades, it has become a successful medium-sized seller of bearings, seals, linear and drive technologies, and even opened its own manufacturing facilities. Most of the credit for this success goes to the late founder of the company, Štefan Čebašek, who started out as a small construction material retailer. Today, Tinex employs 70 people and its annual revenue is nearing the milestone of €20 million. After Štefan unexpectedly passed away, the company tradition has been successfully continued by his wife Marija Čebašek and daughter Andreja Jeraj.

**“We are one of the few companies that have management completely separated from ownership. Uroš worked in the company even before my father’s death and we work together very well.”**

**Andreja Jeraj**,  
Co-owner and Head  
of Controlling





Today, Tinex has 70 employees and the revenue keeps growing. Last year, the company had almost €18 million of turnover with €1.2 million of net profit. Their future goals are ambitions.

## Renowned foreign partners opened many doors

The story of Tinex began in 1990 with its founders and friends, Štefan Čebašek and Tine Dermastja. First, they opened a construction store in Kranj, but the early years were not very successful. In 1993, Štefan changed direction and opened a specialist store with the aim of becoming the leading seller of bearings and seals in Slovenia.

His first breakthrough came in 1994, when the young company signed a partnership agreement with the German Schaffler Group and became an official representative for its FAG bearings in Slovenia. This well-known German partner opened several doors to new partnerships. Just a year later, Tinex signed an agreement with Freudenberg, a German manufacturer of seals, followed by agreements with INA, Merkel, KGM and Ziller, all leading European manufacturers of specialized bearing products.

## Štefan's goodbye instead of 25-year anniversary celebration

All these partnerships were bearing fruit, so Štefan decided to further develop and expand company activities. In 2005, he founded TINEX industrijska diagnostika d.o.o., which provided customers with a new service: systematic monitoring and industrial equipment diagnostics. Today, the company is one of the leading specialists in Slovenia and the markets of the former Yugoslavia.

In 2009, Tinex opened an online store, but Štefan's vision did not stop there. Two years later, he established a center for cutting linear components and belts, which significantly improved their delivery time for both products. After another two years, Tinex started manufacturing its own turned seals and in 2011 it reached the magical milestone of €10 million in revenue. The workforce kept growing so that in 2013, the company had 41 employees at three locations.

In 2014, they started building a €7 million plant in the Šenčur business and industrial district to combine all their activities under one roof. This would have been the cherry on top of the company's 25th anniversary cake, had an insidious illness not sabotaged Štefan's plans and taken him from his family all too soon. After Štefan's death, the ownership of the company passed to his wife Marija Čebašek and his daughter Andreja Jeraj.

## Andreja stepped into her father's shoes

Štefan's death was a great shock for Marija, and it brought many concerns. They had to decide practically overnight whether to keep the company in the family and who to put in charge of it. In the hospital, Štefan decided the role of Director should be filled by Uroš Frantar, who had led several projects for the company since 2008. He was responsible for expansion of the sales catalogue, implementation of the manufacturing processes, and for building a new business unit. "I'm not afraid of challenges. I believed in our story, I trusted the people in our team, I knew how much potential there was, and I did not worry about the burden this would bring to me," explains Uroš Frantar, company Director.

"I did not know much about managing a company. Štefan had very good business intuition as well as courage. Not every entrepreneur has that. If you are courageous, you can succeed in business, but you can also fail. I hoped Štefan would get better, but that unfortunately didn't happen," recalls Marija.

Daughter Andreja also came to help, though she did not know at first how difficult it would be to fill her father's shoes. "I did not want to follow in my father's footsteps. Entrepreneurial life demands everything from you, and I wanted to focus on my family. But then fate decided differently," says Andreja about her first steps.

## The most important things in business are trust and communication

Andreja, who graduated in economics, started by managing exports. Today she is responsible for controlling, employee training and development of organizational culture. She likes working with people and is glad that Štefan took care of his successor at the head of the company. "We are one of the few companies who have management completely separated from ownership. Uroš worked in the company even before my father's death and we work very well together. We meet every day for coffee to discuss operational matters and we make all big investment decisions together. The most important things in business are trust and communication. If you don't trust your co-workers, you feel the constant need for control, and vice versa," says Andreja. This arrangement allows her still to spend time with her family and her two teenage children, who are just about to finish elementary school.



The story of Tinex began in 1990 with its founders and friends, Štefan Čebašek and Tine Dermastja. In 1993, Štefan changed direction and opened a specialized store with the aim of becoming the leading bearings and seals seller in the country.



In 2011, they established a center for cutting linear components and belts, which significantly improved their delivery time for both products.



Establishing their own manufacturing facilities allows them to be more flexible and respond to their clients' requests more quickly.

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Last year, Tinex created almost €18 million revenue, with €1.2 million in net profit. Their goal is to increase revenue 30% by 2025.



“The entire history is recorded; our storage management is very carefully thought out. We know exactly where everything is. For example, there are currently 42,000 different articles in our warehouse.”



# Tinex in a nutshell: quality, comprehensive approach, agility, professionalism, innovation.

## Next goal: €20 million in revenue

Today, Tinex has 70 employees and revenue keeps growing. Last year, the company had almost €18 million turnover with €1.2 million in net profit. Their future goals are ambitious. "Our aim is to increase our revenue 30% by 2025. Every year, we record 10% to 20% growth. Last year, our revenue decreased slightly, but this year looks very good," says Andreja.

The company keeps growing thanks to the expansion of their sales program, which they adjust every year to meet the needs of their customers. The company also became a franchise manufacturer for Freudenberg, a leading global seals manufacturer. "This was a great success for us. In addition to manufacturing hydraulic seals for the mother company in Germany, we started manufacturing for the French market this year. While this project brings in a relatively small percentage of our revenue, it allows us more flexibility and brings greater added value," points out Uroš. Last year, Tinex and Freudenberg celebrated 25 years of partnership.

## Their competitive advantages are stored stocks and maintenance services for large customers

According to Uroš Frantar, Tinex's success is based on several different activities, but one of the most important factors is responsiveness. He points out: "We are not interested in short stories. We always try to find complete solutions and create long-term partnerships with our customers."

Another competitive advantage Tinex has is that all their services, including storage and manufacturing, are housed in the same location. "This allows us greater flexibility. We can offer our customers 24/7 support. Large buyers cannot afford any deadlocks, as even a day with no manufacturing can result in enormous losses. Our customers recognize us as a reliable partner. We do not just sell them products, we sell solutions," says Andreja.

One of Tinex's strengths is also digitization. They have several tools that help them make decisions when it comes to supply and sales. Uroš says: "The entire history is recorded; our storage management is very carefully thought out. We know exactly where everything is. For example, there are currently 42,000 different articles in our warehouse."

Most of their revenue still comes from the Slovenian market, but foreign markets are increasingly important and offer many opportunities for expansion. Every year, Tinex adds a new supplier or a new representation agreement to their portfolio, which currently includes around 60 different brands.

## Andreja Jeraj and Marija Čebašek

Co-owners

Company name: **TINEX, d.o.o.**

Number of employees (2020): **63**

Net sales revenue (2020): **€18.1 million**

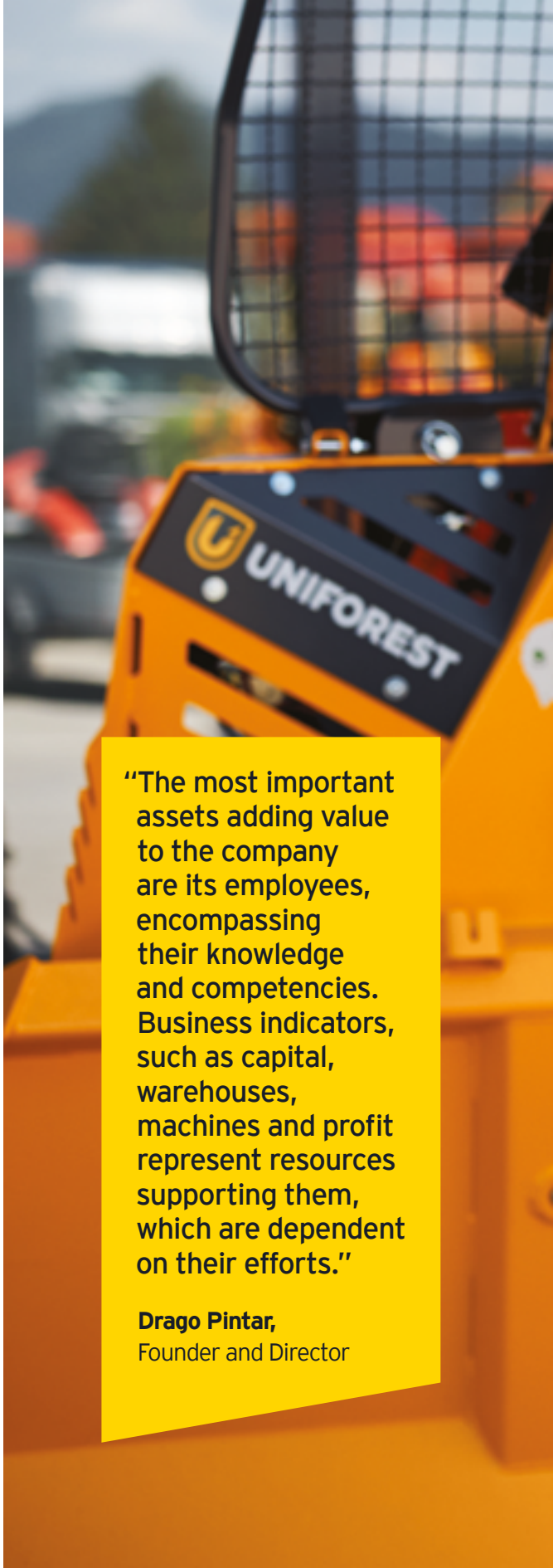
## Uniforest, d.o.o.

**Drago Pintar**, Founder and Director

**Anja Pintar**, Supply, digitization and sustainability projects

### Decisive sustainable steps forward

**U**niforest is known world-renowned as an innovative manufacturer of high-quality forestry equipment. Their product development strategy prioritizes safety, ease of use, unique design and environmental sustainability. They are constantly searching for innovative solutions, which they officially patent. The Uniforest brand is protected in almost 40 countries and has 22 active patents, two of which are European, with four more waiting for approval. "The most important assets adding value to the company are its employees, encompassing their knowledge and competencies. Business indicators, such as capital, warehouses, machines and profit represent resources supporting them, which are dependent on their efforts," says Drago Pintar, Director of Uniforest, family company from Latkova vas near Prebold, who started his entrepreneurial career at the age of 35.



**"The most important assets adding value to the company are its employees, encompassing their knowledge and competencies. Business indicators, such as capital, warehouses, machines and profit represent resources supporting them, which are dependent on their efforts."**

**Drago Pintar**,  
Founder and Director



UNIFORE  
TITAN40/2  
PREMIUM



In 1995 Uniforest started manufacturing forestry winches, and their product range has expanded every year. They were aware that a machine must also look functional and attractive, which is why they started collaborating with Slovenian industrial designer Ernest Bevc.

## Safety, ergonomy, and aesthetic

“Even though I come from a farming family, I have a degree in mechanical engineering. I even flirted with the idea of architecture when I was young,” says Drago about the beginnings of his story. He worked at the family farm, but his career began at a retail company that sold on the Yugoslav market and had partners from abroad. Encouraged by a German businessman, he decided to organize manufacturing in Slovenia and his first order came from this partner. This is how Drago founded Uniforest.

In 1995 Uniforest started by producing forestry winches and further on, their product range has expanded every year. They were aware that a machine must also look functional and attractive, which is why they started collaborating with Slovenian industrial designer Ernest Bevc. “We had a distinctive methods approach to development and manufacturing that differed from established methods. Our first priority has always been safety, closely followed by production of user friendly, functional and ergonomic machines, as well as making them look attractive,” says Drago.

When he looks back to the beginnings of his entrepreneurial path, he has to admit that he and his family, co-workers and often friends and partners from abroad have created wonderful solutions. Support of family members was an important factor contributing to success. Drago’s father was very engaged at the beginning, together with Drago’s wife, who is still actively involved in all larger business challenges and decisions. “I see more and more clearly that things are on the right track. I was always a realist, but after years of experience I feel like people don’t know how to celebrate success. As we constantly move forward, we don’t pay enough attention to everything we already achieved.”

He recalls his first taste of success: “When we looked at our European competitors after the first couple of years, we realized that we could easily be a match for them and we were also noticed. We always took into consideration any feedback by the distributors, who are also often family companies with their own stories and interesting lives.”

## Both clients and employees demand sustainability

"I am proud of the work we have done, and our employees deserve most of the credit for it," says Drago. Every Uniforest product meets high safety standards and is carefully planned and designed by an interdisciplinary team of highly educated, experienced, and dedicated engineers. Their products have received several awards and recognitions, including the German Design Award twice, and they have left the International Fair of Agriculture and Food with the AGRA Award every year since 2009.

The company has designed a new sustainable business strategy and set goals and indicators for the upcoming period, which will be marked predominantly by rapid technological development and global climate change. As part of this approach they successfully completed the Academy of Sustainable Business Strategy transformation with the Slovenian SPIRIT agency in 2020. Within the scope of one of their programs, the SPIRIT agency co-funds implementation of sustainability into strategic and operative processes. The main goal of Uniforest is to ensure user safety during work, but at the same time they want to protect the environment and society, and thus also the economy.

They say that 975 of the components of their machines can already be recycled and they only use biodegradable oils. "Hydraulic oils are standard in the industry, but we use biodegradable oils which do not damage the environment in the event of spills. We are also testing low-temperature painting to reduce the negative effect on the environment even further," explains Drago, who believes that customers increasingly expect such solutions.

They plan all their innovative solutions in such a way that does not harm water resources in the areas where their machines are used. They also control the use of energy, materials and waste by trying to use as many circular economy materials and raw materials as possible. Within the company, their efforts include the use of sustainable packaging and tools, updating the production process to reduce Carbon Dioxide waste, and using only biodegradable and environmentally friendly cleaning products.

Why do they take this sustainable strategy so seriously? "Well, you know that the younger generations expect that," says Drago. "Experience, in combination with youthful enthusiasm and a long-term vision can bring good business results, if only we listen to each other carefully and hear each other well."



We encourage all employees to make useful suggestions, whether they are related to technological solutions, construction or business process change, or something completely new.



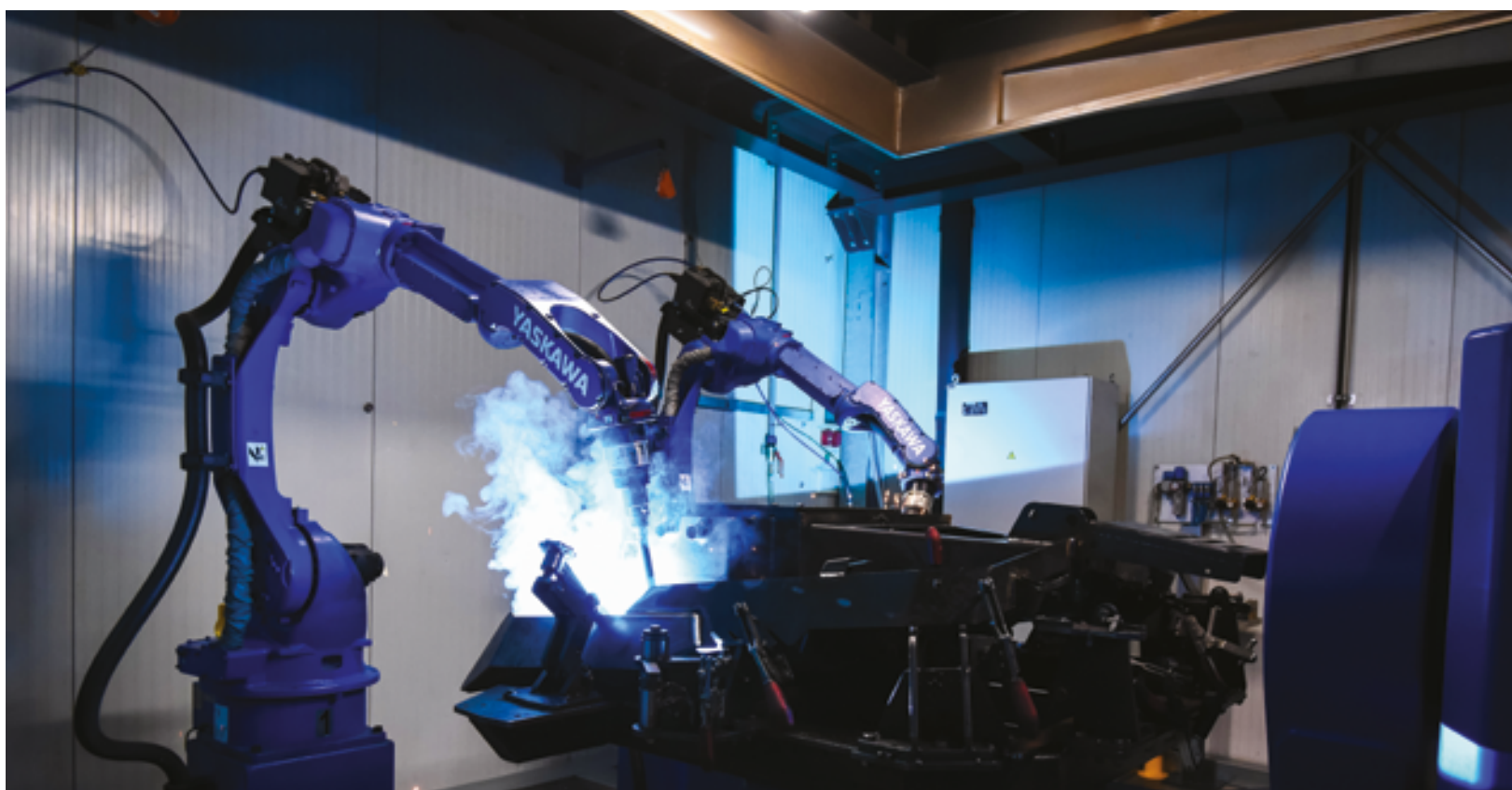
The company has designed a new, sustainable business strategy and set the goals and indicators for the upcoming period, which will be marked mostly by rapid technological development, global climate change and other developmental trends.

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Safety, sustainability and ergonomic machinery design are important advantages for development in international markets.



Drago Pintar, Director, displays the German Design Award for the winning product in the industrial category: Scorpion premium timber grabs.



Technological development of manufacturing must keep up with the times, to ensure high quality machines and safer, ergonomic working conditions for employees.

# Uniforest in a nutshell:

## care for clients, environment, society, employees and economy.

### Young people are an important part of success

There are a lot of young people in Uniforest, including the founder's daughter, Anja Pintar and they are happy that they attract excellent young talent. Drago also regularly meets with the teams. "We have very interesting meetings. The young are capable of very direct critique, they say: 'We have to improve this, this is a problem, this does not work,'" says the founder.

Uniforest is his second child, as confirmed also by his daughter. "Working for Uniforest is very interesting, so I don't mind if the company comes up in conversation even on Sunday. Wherever we went on holiday, we always visited an existing or potential partner. I remember we drove across the whole of Germany visiting clients and had holidays at the same time," says Anja about the life of a family business. "This actually gave me a lot. I felt that I was part of the family company. When I was little, our house was near the production and I soon knew every employee and they knew me," she adds.

As a student and after completing her studies, Anja worked in different positions in the company and now she works in supply. "Supply is a very interesting area today, as getting materials is becoming more and more of a challenge," says Anja. She also leads the process of digitization with a team of co-workers and participates in sustainable development, which means that she is also involved in production and resource use planning. Uniforest was one of the first companies to win the Digital Transformation Tender offered by SPIRIT Slovenija.

The thing she admires the most about her father is his relationship with the employees: "He realizes that each person is his or her own unit and he is always ready to talk. Even though we are growing and are no longer a small company, each employee can still come to him and talk to him about anything. He pays a lot of attention to the opinions of the younger generation. He knows that the young are our future, which is very important for team spirit."

### Increased influence in Asia

Uniforest does not publish "classic" job ads, deciding rather on a different approach and they often collaborate with vocational schools. "In addition to practical learning for high-school and college students, we have many young people who come to us for internships, as part of their programs. Most of our new employees begin right after they complete

their schooling," explains Drago. They also work with faculties. "We have a registered research group, because we know how crucial development is."

"We encourage employees to make useful suggestions, whether they are related to technological solutions, construction or business process change, or something completely new. It is not just about product development, we try to keep ahead of the competition in every aspect," says Anja of the company's innovative spirit.

In addition to Slovenia, their most important markets today are Germany, Austria, France, Italy, and the USA. They are also interested in more exotic markets, such as Bhutan, South Korea, Japan, Ecuador and Chile. Together with SPIRIT they attended this year's Expo in Dubai, with the aim of increasing their influence in Asian markets and scoping out African markets. In 2020, they had around €20 million turnover and €1.1 million profit. Anja points out that their goal for the future is first and foremost to stay a healthy company in all aspects, with respect to employee wellbeing, relationships with customers and business performance, and also when it comes to their impact on society and the environment.

## Drago Pintar

Owner

Company name: **UNIFOREST, d.o.o.**

Number of employees (2020): **75**

Net sales revenue (2020): **€19.8 million**

## ZELINKA d.o.o.

**Martin Zelinka**, Founder

**Luka Zelinka**, Director and owner

**Jurij Zelinka**, Director of Zelinka LS, d.o.o.

**Leo Zelinka**, Sales

### Bringing computers to our offices and homes

**Z**ELINKA & sinovi is a company that sells integrated computer equipment in Slovenia and abroad. For more than 30 years they have been an importer and partner for leading hardware and software manufacturers such as Lenovo, 3M, IBM, ELO Touch, Targus and Overland-Tandberg. The family company, ZELINKA & sinovi Zastopanje in trgovina d.o.o., was founded by Martin Zelinka in 1988, when Slovenia was still part of Yugoslavia. Martin retired in 2012 and his mission is continued by his sons, Luka and Jurij, and his grandson Leo. The younger son Jurij was part of ZELINKA & sinovi until 2021, when part of the company became its own entity, Zelinka LS d.o.o., and he took over its ownership. ZELINKA & sinovi has had an AAA credit rating every year since establishment, which is true of only 1.75% of Slovenian companies.







**"You have to be very flexible to work in our field and our company; sometimes even a business graduate must fix a lightbulb."**

**Martin Zelinka,**  
Founder



Martin Zelinka founded the family business in 1988, when Slovenia was still part of the former Yugoslavia.

## Success written in the stars

Their business strategy based on fairness, persistence, honesty and loyalty has created one of the most successful Slovenian companies in the field of IT retail, realizing the vision of its founder Martin Zelinka when he established the company at the age of 41. "In socialism, you could only work for salary. Even if you worked more than you had to, your payment was the same. When it became possible to open your own company, even before Slovenia became independent, I immediately took the chance. I believed that if you started out on your own with the intention of working all day doing what you knew, then you had to succeed. But if you open a company simply because

you lose your job, because you don't know your business, you will fail sooner or later," explains Martin.

When founding the company 30 years ago, Martin read a horoscope by chance that said that the company he founded should keep growing for eight years. "I was afraid of what would happen in year nine, but look, we are still growing," he laughs. In 2020, they increased net sales revenue by €2 million, bringing them to almost €13 million and the Slovenian market supplies 90% of their revenue. They also increased their profit by half a million, to €1.2 million. Despite this growth, they remain firmly grounded. "You must not be greedy and overly ambitious; your growth has to be smart," says Martin.

## Unbroken entrepreneurial line

ZELINKA & sinovi, founded by Martin as soon as legally possible, successfully passed to the next generation in 2012. “Many entrepreneurs, but also farmers, have a problem because their sons don’t want to take over the family business. My strategy was to not force them. I encouraged them to focus on school. If they passed all their classes, they could work with computers during the summer,” says Martin. When he retired, both sons took over the company. Today, Luka manages Zelinka & sinovi, and the younger son Jurij manages the company Zelinka LS (Library Systems) that emerged from the mother company. Zelinka LS mainly focuses on planning and selling library IT systems, magnetic media carriers and touch screens. The companies enjoy fraternal collaboration and continue to help each other.

## Avoiding risks

Luka says he felt an immense responsibility when he took over the company: “Before I could go to my father with a problem and we solved it together. Now I’m the one people come to.” He adopted his father’s philosophy of never entering risky business agreements and inherited his sense of

fairness. “We always did what we agreed to, even if it did not bring us any profit in the end. I firmly believe that one must stick to what was agreed, even if something else might bring more benefits. A promise you give is more important than a written contract.”

The company currently employs 20 people, with some additional staff through contracts and student work. However, they are convinced, says Martin, that the knowledge students gain at Slovenian universities is only partially useful. “Education is not everything; when they start working, they start learning in practice. Sometimes education is not as important as openness to new knowledge, flexibility, readiness to help and ability to collaborate with others. You have to be very flexible to work in our field and our company; sometimes even a business graduate must fix a lightbulb,” explains Martin.

Leo Zelinka, the founder’s grandson, has been working for the company for three years and began as a student. First, he worked in the warehouse, next in repair and maintenance and then in accounting. He learned accounting from his mother Mateja, who took over finance after her mother-in-law, Martin’s wife Nada retired. “I believe you have to know all the processes if you want good development. You cannot tell others what to do, if you don’t know what it’s about,” says Leo, who now works in sales.



For more than 30 years, they have been an importer and partner for leading hardware and software manufacturers, such as Lenovo, 3M, IBM, ELO Touch, Targus and Overland-Tandberg.



Even though their IT business is still growing, they believe they have to adapt, keep their eyes open and be ready to grab any opportunity. This way they can respond quickly and start selling new products or services.



Today, technology moves with incredible speed, and the field they operate in is changing daily.

“

If you set out on your own to work all day doing what you know, you must succeed.



Today, Luka manages Zelinka & sinovi, and his younger brother Jurij manages the company Zelinka LS (Library Systems) that emerged from the mother company. Zelinka LS mostly focuses on planning and selling library IT systems.

# ZELINKA & sinovi in a nutshell:

## fairness, persistence, flexibility, loyalty, entrepreneurial spirit.

"I'm very happy I had the opportunity to start working early and to learn serious things, not everybody has that," explains Leo modestly. "Today, things are set up differently. Especially now, in the era of cryptocurrency, many of my peers want to get rich quickly, or are funded by their parents. I don't agree with such things. I'm convinced that you can make money if you work, and if you don't work, any 'gifted' money will quickly disappear."

### The future is in services, not products

Their plans for this year fit their business model; they want to increase sales and establish a risk-awareness culture. Because the market is so dynamic and unpredictable, they want to control negative factors that could influence their performance. They believe that setting up a culture of risk awareness will give the company more control, allowing them to make decisions more quickly and helping them to recognize market conditions.

Luka explains that they shifted from gaining a large percentage of their revenue from selling paper and consumables, as a classical office supply store, to offering more services. "We moved almost completely away from that. We sell printing as a service and when it comes to IT solutions, we not only sell them but also implement them."

### Only if you have goods in the warehouse can you meet customer demand

Today, technology moves with incredible speed, and the field they operate in is changing daily. Even though their IT business is still growing, Luka believes they must adapt effectively, keep their eyes open and be ready to grab any opportunity. This way they can respond quickly and start selling new products or services. Many companies are moving their operations to the cloud, and cloud services compete with hardware sellers, but Luka remains optimistic: "Not everything can be moved to the cloud. Our business is drastically changing, that's true. But not all predictions come true. I'm sure we won't run out of work."

Currently, their greatest challenge is a lack of supply. "One of our main suppliers had three times as many orders as planned in the first quarter of 2021. They could not supply as much as two thirds of our orders. This is our largest problem right now," says Luka, describing the situation. As an example, he adds that they could only now supply computers to an organization that placed an order last October. "We lost some contracts

because of this. We try to avoid such situations by increasing our stocks. We are ordering today what we plan to sell six months ahead. Today you can meet customer demand and sell things only if you already have things in stock." This year's growth will be limited because of this situation, adds Luka. He also believes this period will be followed by a crisis, as the situation is too much like a balloon that must burst at some point.

## Luka Zelinka

Owner

Company name:

**ZELINKA d.o.o.**

Number of employees (2020):

**14**

Net sales revenue (2020):

**€12.9 million**

# Family Business Professionalization Guidebook

In 2021, EY Slovenia has added new knowledge solutions aimed at supporting family businesses, and the families behind them, on their growth and development journeys. Based on recent research and findings related to family businesses<sup>1</sup>, we have introduced a reference guidebook, *“Professionalization in Family Business”*, plus an accompanying handbook, *“Family Business: Individual Growth and Development Handbook”*.

<sup>1</sup> *Professionalizing the Business Family: The Five Pillars of Competent, Committed, and Sustainable Ownership*, Binz Astrachan, Claudia; Waldkirch, Matthias; Michiels, Anneleen; Pieper, Torsten & Bernhard, Fabian (2020).



# Family Business Growth and Development Handbook

**B**oth publications complement and extend our approach to the process of succession in family businesses, typically captured in family charters for organizational and culture change. We hope that Slovenian family businesses will find these newest contributions useful in addressing their needs. Our drive is to build an approach which is research-based, structured and relevant to knowledge and self-development in family business.



Please turn to EY Slovenia  
for more information.

# Family Business Services

## Helping you succeed for generations

### Why choose EY?

- ▶ We serve **75%** of **500** of the world's largest family businesses (familybusinessindex.com).
- ▶ We have advised generations of the world's most entrepreneurial, innovation-oriented companies and understand the complex issues that they face.
- ▶ We understand the difficulties of balancing the concerns of the family and the intricacies of the business.
- ▶ We know what it takes to address the dual challenge of securing the long-term success of the company and managing the risks of growth.
- ▶ EY's tailored services offer a wide range of professional business services aimed specifically at the unique requirements of family businesses.

### Our approach

More than 80% of the world's businesses are family owned – they are the driving force of the world economy. This is consistent with the findings of our research, which EY Slovenia has prepared in cooperation with the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana. The research confirmed that 83% of companies in Slovenia have family control over their strategic direction. Family businesses, in general, are better placed to ride the turbulence of today's volatile financial markets. Yet we know that just 30% of family businesses make it through the second generation and only 13% survive the third. Each family business is unique, but with over 90 years of experience and a professional network spanning 140 countries, we know that many share similar advantages and face common challenges.

### Our Growth DNA Model for family business

Our unique "Growth DNA of a family business" model addresses every facet of your personal and business agenda. It aligns our personalized range of business services to address your specific needs from capital management, sustaining growth, effective tax management and balancing risk, to culture and CSR. And it forms the foundation for the planning of ownership and management succession.

### The EY Global Family Business Center of Excellence

The EY Global Family Business Center of Excellence is a powerful, online resource. It gives you access to our insights, experience and people, allowing you to connect and learn from fellow family business leaders around the world.

### EY Slovenia and family businesses

EY Slovenia cooperates closely with the EY Global Center of Excellence. Through our local program we connect and present Slovenian family businesses. With the support of the Center we also link them to the global stage through dedicated events and the EY Award of Excellence for Family Businesses. In addition, we have also begun to actively support businesses in succession planning from organizational, tax, legal and other perspectives, as well as various dimensions of development and international growth.

Visit our new website [ey.com/en\\_si/family-enterprise](https://ey.com/en_si/family-enterprise).





**EY's Growth DNA model of Family Businesses highlights the interlinked nature of the eight characteristics of successful family businesses**

# EY Growth Navigator™

## Accelerate your journey to market leadership

When most businesses think about strategy, they think about how to focus people, systems and processes on delivering customer value and ultimately growth. However talking to, and working with, clients through their business cycle coupled with our own research has shown us that, while this strategy is successful for some, focusing upon a broader set of activities can help deliver accelerated growth. That's why we've developed EY Growth Navigator™.

EY Growth Navigator™ is a unique way for you to think beyond the typical approaches to growth and consider seven critical drivers for business success and accelerated growth. It is an interactive experience that allows you and your leadership team to assess your company, gain valuable insights from leading practices and identify strategic priorities for growth.

Connecting your knowledge of your business with our knowledge and experience in the market can help deliver accelerated growth. EY Growth Navigator™ uses our research and 30 years' experience of working with hundreds of the most dynamic companies and growth leaders.

At the end of your EY Growth Navigator™ session with your EY advisor, you will have a set of actions, prioritized according to your strategic needs, to help you take the necessary steps to achieve the next level of success.



# SPIRIT Slovenia

## Effective planning for ownership transfer is the key to success

**SPIRIT Slovenia encourages timely preparation for transfer of ownership in Slovenian family enterprises, focusing on building the competencies of successors.**

The majority of Slovenian businesses are family enterprises, which play an important role in developing the economy. Common characteristics of the most successful Slovenian family enterprises are their innovative approach, good family relations, growth, focus on local development, care for employees, plus a regional and international reach. These companies contribute significantly towards maintaining expectations of strong and sustainable economic growth. A notable feature separating family enterprises from other organizations is their approach to business strategy development, which combines family, business and ownership interests.

SPIRIT Slovenia (“the Agency”) offers a range of activities and services for family-owned businesses. We encourage timely recognition of upcoming challenges, effective preparation and a rapid response. Challenges facing family businesses include establishing a management structure, professionalism, succession and issues affecting company growth. The Agency invests considerable energy in activities related to succession, as most businesses will face this challenge sooner or later.

Transfer of ownership is one of the phases in a company’s life cycle that presents difficulties for most organizations. Therefore, we established the National Service for Transfer of Ownership, SPIRIT Slovenia, in 2019. Our activities include networking, supporting events to make entrepreneurs

aware of timely preparation for ownership transfer and co-funding events facilitating exchange of experience and transfer of competencies between entrepreneurs and their successors. SPIRIT Slovenia also has authorized advisors to counsel and guide entrepreneurs who are training a successor, preparing for transfer of ownership or undergoing the process and wish to take advantage of the voucher financial support system.

To support activities co-funded by vouchers for transfer of ownership, we have established a database of professional service providers and a catalogue of training available to successors. The voucher program offers financial support for activities related to all types of ownership transfer and addresses challenges specific to family enterprises transferring ownership between generations. For comprehensive support, family enterprises can turn to our Agency or seek personal support within the SPOT system, various entrepreneurship incubators or in technology parks.

We are happy to encourage and promote the success of Slovenian family enterprises, in collaboration with EY Slovenia, which puts the best Slovenian family businesses on the world map of successful family companies. SPIRIT Slovenia aims to increase the visibility of Slovenian family business on the global stage and is proud to support its promotion in this publication.



[www.podjetniski-portal.si/programi/druzinsko-podjetnistvo](http://www.podjetniski-portal.si/programi/druzinsko-podjetnistvo)

# Last year's highlights



**01** Mojca Emeršič holding brand new Family Business 2020 books. **02** Online introduction of the Family Business Slovenia 2020 book. **03** Sharing the joy of the 2020's book on social media. **04** Intra lighting, the winner of the EY Award of Excellence for Family Businesses in 2021. **05** Upon receiving the award, we conducted a longer interview with the Furlan family, which runs the Intra lighting company, with a comment by Mojca Emeršič on the topic of Slovenian family entrepreneurship. Individual country winners are also presented to the international public on global EY websites.



## Marketing that inspires

In a highly competitive environment, it is unrealistic to expect a good product or service to sell on its own merit. The Slovenian market is small and it is no coincidence that most of the dynamically growing family businesses deal in exports. They quickly outgrow the home playing field and move up, like teams entering the European Champions League.



### Marketing as growth promotor

However, managing the international market is certainly not child's play and here, players are trained by experienced professionals. Marketing is one important aspect of the game and international marketing in particular is not just about the excellence of your product; it includes a combination of different factors. Efficient marketing takes a close look at your customers, your characteristics, market demand and your competition to bring added value to your company. Excellent marketing works in close collaboration with the development team and is actively involved with the product and its added value. Its aim is to make you irreplaceable to your clients.

### Your marketing ally and partner

Mediade is your marketing partner. We are passionate about developing marketing strategies, approaches and tools that put your products and services on the map. We are communication specialists who make sure your messages reach the right people at the right time: your customers, your partners and your employees. We pay close attention to the last of these, as they are the key to your success. When employees understand the company goals and are actively involved in their implementation, growth is inevitable.

### Sharing values of family companies

We transform unique ideas into exceptional execution that is guaranteed to reach your expectations. We share the high standards of family companies and our services and products are based on business excellence and ethical values.

### Working for the ambitious

Mediade's clients are companies of different sizes and seniority, operating in different fields. What unites them is their ambition for growth and development that allows them to overtake their competition.

We are here to make your product, your innovation, or your team shine like diamonds - with marketing that inspires.

# Family Business Slovenia 2021

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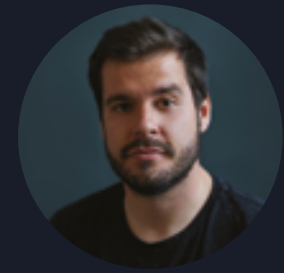
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Jani Ugrin is a freelance photographer currently based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. His work is focused on various areas of photography; however, people are the common denominators. He works in the fields of commercial, corporate, music and portrait photography, cooperating with various agencies and companies, both in Slovenia and abroad.







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Working across assurance, consulting, law, strategy, tax and transactions, EY teams ask better questions to find new answers for the complex issues facing our world today.

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