

L'OFFICIEL

BALTIC

AIR BALTIC, GAMECHANGER AUDIO, LAT EKO FOOD, UPB, PRIMEKSS, AMORALLE, SPORT REVOLUTION, VIZULO
LAUMA FABRICS, PAA, GLEAR, RIPO FABRIKA, JZ MICROPHONES, SONARWORKS, UAVFACTORY, BRAIN GAMES

E

B

B



MAGNETIC
LATVIA

EXPORT AND
INNOVATION
AWARD





MAGNETIC
LATVIA

WWW.MAGNETICLATVIA.LV



Andris Ozols, LIAA director

RECONNECTING WITH ONE'S «HOMO»

If we fit the Earth's 4.5-billion-year history into the length of just one year so that the beginning of the planet's existence is January 1 and this very instance we are about to raise a glass of champagne to celebrate the last seconds of the year, we will realize that Man has showed up in the big picture just 23 minutes ago.

Indeed, Homo Sapiens arrived into this world on December 31 shortly before midnight, but look how much he has been able to achieve: walking through the generations and assuming a vertical position, Man accumulated enough knowledge and know-how to subdue the world.

Life was good and slow before the 19th century. Probably also boring. To have some fun, Man ventured into one industrial revolution after another and by 2019, he had surrounded himself with a mix of complex technologies. Rumour has it they will soon question the very relevance of their creator and squeeze him out of the picture.

In his overwhelming pursuit of optimization, automation, efficiency, smartness and achievements, Homo Sapiens, however, has lost the purpose. Standing on the verge of the powerful Industrialization 4.0, he is confused about where the road will take him and what will become of him, forgetting that the joy is in the journey itself.

And what a journey awaits! Exactly that kind which calls for a little breather just before you take the leap of faith. So, 23 minutes into busy work, let's sit back, reflect on the achieved and find joy in the unknown. The transformation from good to great our better selves – Homo Evolutis – are bringing upon this planet can wait a little. In the meantime, just reconnect with your «homo».

PUBLISHER SIA PREMIUM MEDIA

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

ANNA ORLOVA

anna.orlova@premium-media.lv

MEMBER OF THE BOARD

ALEKSANDRA NOVINSKA

aleksandra.novinska@lofficielbaltics.com

L'OFFICIEL BALTIC x MAGNETIC LATVIA

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

LĪGA ZEMTURE

DESIGN

SARMĪTE JĒKABSONE, GINTA ŠTRĀLA

CONTRIBUTING TEAM

MARIANNA HODAŠA, KARINA EVANS, JEKATERINA KIMA,
DAGNIJA LEITĀNE, JĀNIS LINDE, ĒRIKA ŠMELKOVA,
ULLA VAITE

PHOTOGRAPHERS

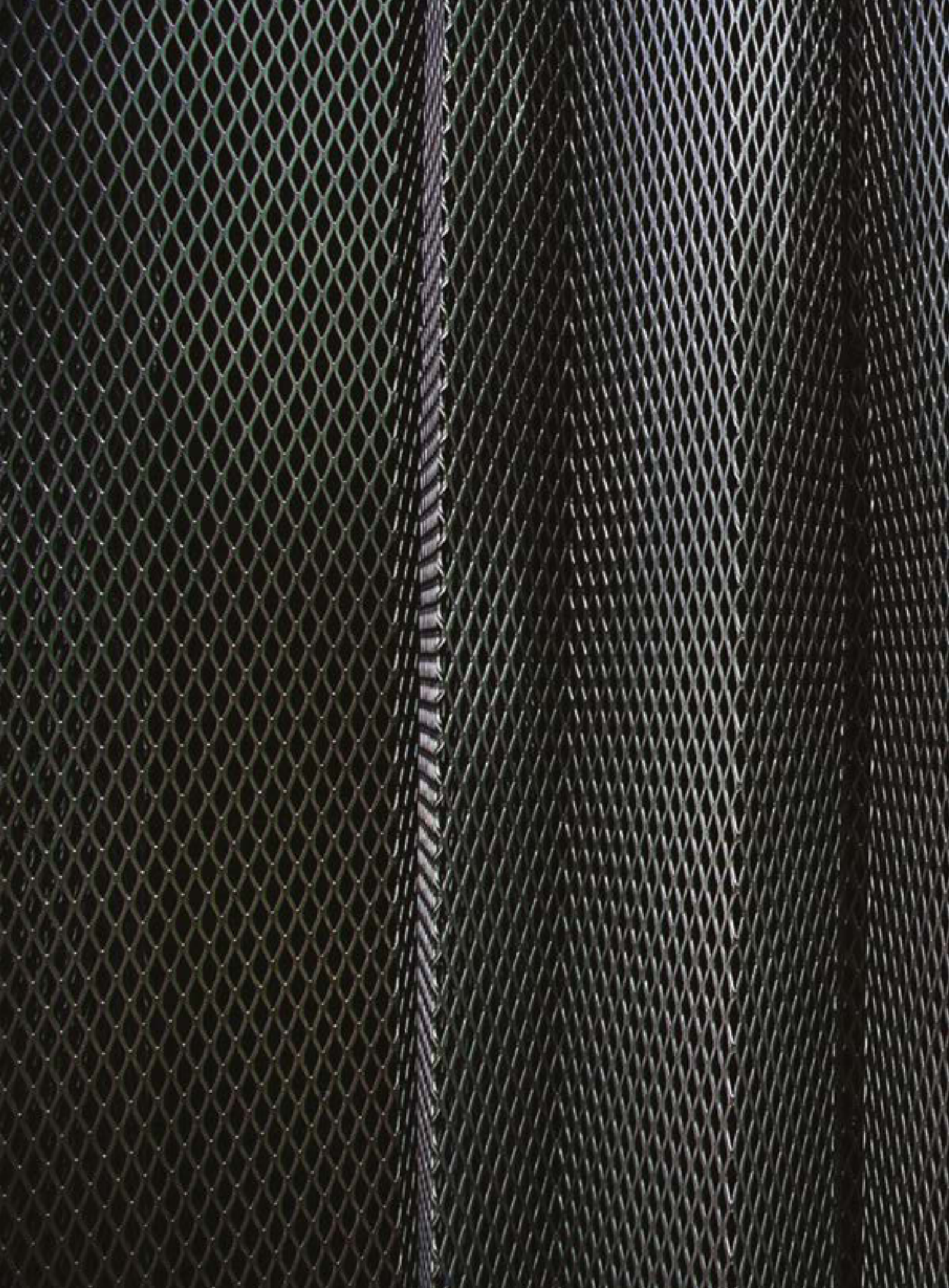
KRISTIANA PINNE

Printed by

POLIGR ĀFIJAS GRUPA MŪKUSALA

All rights reserved. The Baltic edition in the English language of «L'OFFICIEL Baltic Magnetic Latvia» is published by Premium Media Ltd. under an exclusive license granted by LEJ. «L'Officiel» is a registered trademark of LEJ. The rights for reproduction, including reproduction on electronic media, of editorial and publication material appearing in the «L'Officiel» are exclusively owned by LEJ. Total or partial reproduction, on any media, in any language, without prior written consent of LEJ is strictly forbidden. LEJ is a limited liability company, with a share capital of 606.000 EUR, organized and existing under the laws of France, whose registered office is located at 5, rue Bachaumont, 75002 Paris, France, registered at the trade registry of Paris, under number RCS B 331 532 176 and represented by Madame Marie-José Susskind-Jalou acting as Director.

Address: 9 Lauvas street, Riga, LV-1003, Latvia. Phone: +371 23881233.
info@lofficielbaltics.com, www.lofficielbaltics.com





Liga Zenture, L'Officiel Magnetic Editor-in-Chief

Achievements of other people inspire me. I am genuinely pleased about the success of other people. This cycle of energy exchange is enormously powerful because the energy conservation law connects us into a single and strong link. The more we will be proud of what happens around us, the more we will succeed ourselves.

Moreover, we indeed have a lot to be proud of! We have so many successful and innovative people who have step by step from an idea and dreams created companies, which carry Latvia's name around the world.

This year, the Export and Innovation Award, established by the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, in cooperation with the Ministry of Economics, celebrates its 15th anniversary. And we can see that there have been so many inspiring success stories over the course of these fifteen years.

Gamechanger Audio produces pedals for creating previously unseen audio effects, whose circle of fans involves such famous musicians as Roger Waters (Pink Floyd) and Rolling Stones.

Thousands of recording studios already relay on Latvian company's Sonarworks sound calibration software as Lady Gaga, Deftones, Maroon 5, Taylor Swift and many others. Primeks concrete production covers almost 15 million square metres of floors in the USA, Canada, South Africa, India, Scandinavia, and other countries.

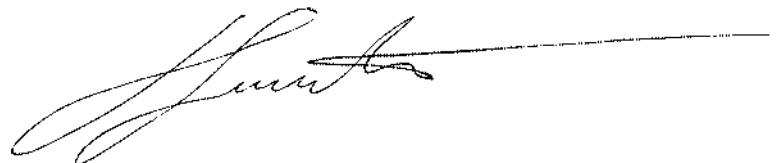
UPB mechanical engineering products now can be found in all continents of the world except Antarctica.

UAVFactory's brand, Penguin, which is an unmanned aircraft manufacturer, is successfully competing in the segment with giants like Boeing.

Vizulo, an indoor and outdoor lighting manufacturer illuminates not only recognizable buildings and monuments in Latvia, but also Porsche building in the Netherlands.

And these are only some of success stories I would like to share with you in this special L'Officiel Magnetic magazine to inspire, to be proud, achieve high goals and realize that our positive thoughts sent into space will not only help these people to grow but also to achieve something for yourself that you have only dared to dream of.

Let us all succeed together!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lauris', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| There is a global look to airBaltic | 18 |
| JZ Microphones – let your soul sing | 24 |
| AMORALLE or Feminity does not age | 26 |
| Sonarworks: thanks to Latvia the world can hear music better | 32 |
| Latvian «penguin» | 34 |
| Lat Eko Food – true taste and quality | 37 |
| From Jersika with love | 42 |
| PAA`S formula for success | 44 |
| Ripo Fabrika: change is the key to success | 46 |
| Primekss: a solid know-how | 48 |
| Sport Revolution – a smart pass | 54 |
| Business philosophy and ambitions of UPB | 58 |
| VIZULO: lights from Latvia | 64 |
| Brain Games: factors of worldwide success | 66 |
| Latvians who have changed the world of music | 68 |
| Lauma Fabrics – a convincing handwriting | 74 |
| Latvia is a fast adopter of change and innovation | 78 |
| LIAA. From Latvia to the world | 84 |
| Export and Innovation Award | 94 |



L'OFFICIEL MAGNETIC

MAGNETISM

**You might wonder about it,
but it does work.
Latvia attracts, strongly.**



Physicists define magnetism as the capacity to attract. For everyone else, magnetism manifests as the desire to have a link with Latvia, whether that be through business, culture, recreation, entertainment or personal relationships. What is more, Latvia is also able to connect seemingly polar opposites.

Latvia may be small. But that makes everything closer.

We don't have a huge population, but there is no shortage of talent.

Not so many orators, but many movers and shakers.

No great mountains, but great minds.

Latvia is known for our world-renowned musicians, and equally for our renowned quantum physicists.

Latvians may be hesitant huggers, but never shy away from hard work.

Hence, we have both the oldest oak trees and the latest technology.

We have lots of storks – and a surprising number of robots.

Some think Latvians are predictable. We call it well-disciplined.

Responsible, reliable, qualified partners, fluent in several languages.

We keep our promises. We abide by decisions, and act on them.

That too is Latvia's attraction. Or, as they say elsewhere – magnetism.

THE STORY OF MAGNETIC LATVIA

Before I was given a name, when I did not yet exist anywhere and I was everywhere, when the sea was endless like life and everyone spoke one language, I noticed myself right in the centre of Earth – amongst forests of blue firs, warm slices of bread, strong hands and sharp minds, in a place where minds meet, ideas are born, determination and spite are hardened, pride is cultivated, creativity is limitless, excellence and talent is developed.

I saw myself in the strength of spirit, the wisdom of the heart and the depth of the mind.

In Latvia.

Magnetic and magnetizing.

Latvia is in the freedom of a soaring eagle, in the unfurled braid of hair and in the stripes of a skirt, in responsibility, friendship, collaboration, in the brisk morning mist which, like smouldering clubs, rolls over the fragrant warm haystacks, in the bitterness of dandelions and the severity of the swamps, in the dance of a snowstorm, in the blackness of blackberries, the bitterness of the mountain ash, the stateliness of the pine, the athletic build of a husband and the slenderness of a wife.

Spoiled, nursed and cherished. Lost and found.

Crushed and strewn beyond many horizons.

Far, very far from its roots, it has sprouted offspring and opened new blossoms. Sonorous. Secretive.

Lively. Breathtaking, inspiring, soothing, dynamic, unique, beating to the rhythm of the world, strength-giving. The only one. Ours.



METALWORKING

They are the men who «bring silence to song», rip it open, smash the guitar into the floor and leave, without so much as a word being spoken! Those are men! Roads and highways tremble in their presence!

But there are also others! Those whose eyes are as sharp as a laser! Those who are elegant and delicate, with flair and a century of experience, who hone a thread on the smallest of screws. Those, without whom all clocks and trains would stop, doors would not hold on their hinges and rings on fingers. Without them, airplanes would not fly and men in tuxedos would not escort their ladies in fancy limousines. Perhaps a small shred of metal has always been in our blood? A blacksmith resides in the ancestry of every Latvian. The right person in the right place. The blacksmith's old forge, passed down from his father, drew in all the little boys and men from the town like a magnet! The blacksmith was a magician, in whose hands metal melted like wax and who, smiling into his beard, knew that the soul of a horseshoe was the colour of amber.

This is known as well by the many men who, everyday, solder, weld, turn and mill, who do their work in silence. Responsible. Careful. Reliable. And still there is a desire to watch them work, even if it is through the keyhole! They are so mysterious, magical and magnetizing!

WOOD INDUSTRY

In Latvia, every stump and tree has a story – woody, deep and alluring!

The stump has nursed, cultivated and returned wood to man, to be released outside the edges of the old forests. The most ambitious ones cross innumerable seas, endure miles and miles of magnetic storms, but – what can you make with wood? Every rough sawn log, elegant bed or cubic metre of pseudo-durable plywood has earned the right to carry the allure of Latvia's woods into the world – over seas, oceans and plains on trains, ships and airplanes.

Our woods are growing and developing, people are planting and craftsmen are creating. One can easily get lost in our pine forests, birch groves and masterful work – they draw you in! Every log cabin, looking out at aurora polaris in the north, every wooden rocking horse and every thunderbolt in an 800-year-old oak tree is a testament to our forests' magnetic strength.



FOOD

Storks always return home.

To the place where their nests are built in the tallest trees, where their offspring were born and learned to fly. This place pulls them back like a magnet – to the just-plowed field of potatoes, to the bogs filled with cranberries, to the humming bees along the edge of the forest, the blue eyes of the lakes and the moss green pine forest!

Here, the sun is cooler than in the south, here shadows are longer, here in the mist of sunrise you can see your breath.

Here everything has its own taste. Real. Here the bread is cut in thick slices and honey is spread on it in nine layers.

Here children, running barefoot along the edge of a field, draw rosy-cheeked carrots from the earth, bead strawberries on a blade of grass, whilst in autumn, on their way to school, they pick apples from their grandfather's orchard.

Here in the forests, 303 edible species of mushroom grow, here healthy means delicious and ecological means local.

We know how to combine our culinary traditions with modern scientific achievements, how to coax Latvia's natural flavours into little jars, boxes and bottles without losing any of their authenticity, enabling the finest gourmands in the world to bring them to their tables.

TEXTILES

They say that silk threads are as strong as steel, linen breathes and worsted wool lives three lives.

But what is the nature of amber thread? Yes, yes, the same amber which is raised in pine trees and fostered in the waves of the sea, carrying within it a thousand years of strength, endurance and harshness, yet still beaming in the glistening, velvet-soft sunlight. Amber thread, created by Latvia's scientists, has gone into the world in scarves, blankets, tablecloths, mittens and socks – each containing a piece of the sun.

Just as part of the earth's treasures lie in the sand, which is then reborn in the hands of Latvia's craftsmen! The threads can be skined, cut, woven, wound, braided and bent. Then, if they turn into glass fibres, they will warm, protect and safeguard reflections!

To be able to reflect in such reflections is the longing of the most delicate lace, buttons, ribbons, clasps, hooks and eyes, which combined to become wedding gowns, business suits, lingerie and nightdresses – exciting women and melting men's hearts around the world.

Yes, we are just that magnetizing and genuine! And a little crazy, because everything we touch becomes real and unforgettable!



EXPORT AND INNOVATION AWARD 2019

When the borders have become too narrow and progress has been achieved. When ideas are too good not to be turned into new products. The aim of the Export and Innovation Award competition is to praise brave and capable entrepreneurs in Latvia. It celebrates those who provide serious competition in the domestic and foreign markets and are ahead of their time, surprising the world with innovation and quality, and creating products and services with a fascinating design. Because this is where the strength of Latvia lies.

This year marks the 15th anniversary that LIAA has been organising the Export and Innovation Award competition in cooperation with the Ministry of Economics, and its aim is to praise and honour Latvian merchants who have achieved good results in the production of new and exportable products, providing the local market with high quality domestic products, implementing innovations and developing industrial design. The main task of the competition is to demonstrate that Latvian entrepreneurs are able to create exportable and innovative products, and that participation in the competition helps companies to increase their visibility in the local market. A company that has achieved good export results, developed an innovative product or whose product is a serious competitor for import products can become an example for other Latvian companies.

Companies registered in Latvia who export goods, offer a product in the Latvian market that can replace a foreign product, have created an innovative product and/or have developed an industrial design for the product, may qualify for the Award.

- NOMINATIONS FOR THE COMPETITION**
- Best Exporter in large/medium partnership group**
 - Best Exporter in small partnership group**
 - Import Substitute Product**
 - Innovative Product**
 - Industrial Design**
 - Leading Exporter**

Companies may apply for participation in the competition in several categories simultaneously. It is possible to submit several products for product rating categories by filling out a separate form for each.

Competition participants are rated in two rounds. In the first round, the jury rates the information provided by the entrepreneurs in the application forms. In the second round, the jury visits the companies in person. Competition winners are announced at an exclusive ceremony.

The 1st and 2nd prize winners in each category of the competition receive a cash prize (3000 EUR and 1500 EUR) to pay for business trips, for example, to participate in visits of state officials abroad as part of a delegation of merchants, at trade shows and trade missions organised by LIAA, or individual business trips. 3rd place winners receive paid advertising space in one of LIAA's editions. The winners of the first three places also get the right to use the Export and Innovation Award winner's label in their marketing materials and on the product packaging.

The jury selects the nominees for the title «Leading Exporter» from among the largest exporters in Latvia, based on export data and contribution to sustainable growth.

The President is a patron of the competition and presents the «Leading Exporter» award at the award ceremony.

Website of the competition:
<https://eib.liaa.gov.lv/>



” Every year the Export and Innovation Award shows us how creative, hard-working and successful Latvia is. Here, in a focused and specific manner, we can see that we have a future and everything is possible. The Award is an inspiration for those who turn ideas into work, an example for those who are still contemplating, and homework for the Jury – to spend the following year as ambassadors for these businesses, showing with examples why we believe in the growth of our country.”

IEVA SILIŅA,

member of the Jury,

Chairperson of the Board of the

Association of Latvian Young Scientists,

External Science and Education Policy

Adviser to the President of Latvia

” Appreciation by the state is very important for local entrepreneurs. It motivates them, it demonstrates the country's success in new technologies, shows its dynamics and the tools at its disposal that really work. We have opportunities for development instead of just selling our labour abroad.”

ANDREJS BROKS,
member of the Jury
and the Latvian Designer's Society

airBaltic CEO Martin Gauss:

«There is a global look to airBaltic»

Latvian national airline airBaltic is about to retire from the Boeing 737 fleet and completely transfer to the modern Airbus A220-300 fleet. It will give the company opportunities to launch new direct flights from Riga to new destinations, like Ethiopia and India. Magnetic Latvia talked to Martin Gauss, CEO of airBaltic, about the airline's future, domestic flights in Latvia and airBaltic's possible side businesses.

Text by Jānis Linde





Airbus A220 special design, dedicated to the centenary of Latvia.

You just came from the Paris Air Show exhibition where you represented your Airbus A220-300 aircraft. How did the exhibition go, did anything impress you?

This year's Paris Air Show, where we displayed our Airbus A220-300 aircraft, was the seventh occasion, when we showed airBaltic aircraft at an international air show. And it was the one where we got the most recognition for being an Airbus customer. There was a very high interest in the aircraft which has changed over the years. During the Air Show Airbus also introduced a new aircraft type, the A321XLR, which was something interesting for our industry. The combination of that new aircraft – our aircraft type acquiring extended range and airBaltic being presented as the only Airbus A220-300 gave us very good exposure to the world. Because there was a different look to airBaltic, as we are the local national carrier, but now there's a global look to what airBaltic does. And that global look is different, it's really positive. It's helping us a lot because we're not only flying out of Latvia, we're working in different markets. The Paris Air Show was a big success for us, and Airbus was really positive about our appearance there.

You're about to start using only Airbus aircraft and retire from the Boeing fleet. How did you manage to do it one year earlier than you planned? Is it somehow related to the latest Boeing security problems?

It is not related to the Boeing Max problems at all. We see that the Airbus has significantly higher savings than expected.

The fuel saving is 22%. For example, on a route from Riga to London with an Airbus A220-300 we save about 1200 dollars, compared to a Boeing 737. This cash saving, in particular, made us take a decision to retire the Boeing fleet earlier and only have the Airbus flying since the coming years. We're still having two Boeing flying next year because they are leased, so they'll be flying only until next summer, but we will be selling all other Boeings that we own this year.

Two terrible tragedies with Boeing aircraft in Indonesia and Ethiopia became a challenge for the whole aviation industry. Why do you think in 2019 we are still facing such incidents caused by human mistakes, and what are the best solutions to avoid them?

It is very tragic what happened. And it led to all the aircraft in the program of a special new version of the Boeing 737 Max being grounded. So the worldwide fleet is grounded, that is new and unique to the world. That shouldn't have happened, I agree. The engineering team knows how to avoid these kind of things and I think the world will learn a big lesson from it. We don't know exactly when that aircraft will be back in service, maybe by the end of this year. Hundreds of these aircraft have been ordered, and they are needed in the world market, but this aircraft can only return to the skies when it's safe, that's why it's taking so long. I am not on the investigation team, it is up to them to find out what happened. In terms of future development, we have today the most modern aircraft Airbus A220 with a brand new engine technology. But that's not the end of the development. For sure, we will see



«On a route from Riga to London with A220-300 we save about 1200 dollars, comparing to Boeing 737»

electric engines in 20-30 years. So there's always new development coming, and we will be learning from the past.

You mentioned some advantages of the Airbus compared to other aircraft, can you name a few more?

This aircraft is the greenest jet in this size; it has carbon wings, so it's really light. It was designed in the 2000s, not in the 1960s like the Boeing 737. And it has been built with all the know-how available today. It has the newest engine technology, so it not only saves fuel but also NOX – 50%, CO2 emissions – 20%. Inside the cabin, there are only five seats in a row instead of six, so it has a wider aisle and more space for everybody. It has the largest baggage storage area

among all the aircraft of that size. It has the most light inside the cabin because of the bigger windows. The cabin pressure that is needed to make the air breathable on board is also higher, which gives us more comfort, and it is the quietest aircraft available in the world. So it has many new features. For us, it comes with a lower cost; it can now fly much further – the range extension of an extra hour flight time was announced at the Air Show. This will make it possible for us to reach cities like Delhi or Addis Ababa from Riga.

If I understand correctly, when you agreed to buying Bombardier aircraft, the Bombardier company had certain financial problems and you managed to get a lower price?



(From left to right): Erlend Sveinung Vevelstad, airBaltic Captain; Kristīne Jēkabsons-Nazarova, airBaltic Senior Cabin Crew; Gerhard Ramcke, airBaltic Captain; Diāna Larionova, airBaltic Senior Cabin Crew; Gatis Stanga, airBaltic Senior Cabin Crew.

«The local pilot is very happy:
he becomes a pilot,
sets up a family, buys a dog,
builds a house and stays here»

The price was influenced by the situation when Bombardier wanted to sell the aircraft at the time. So they gave us a more attractive price than they would have given us at another time. But the price alone is not the main criteria to buy an aircraft, because the price over a lifetime is a very small portion. If you look 20 years further, you use the aircraft and you have a price of 90 million. If you divide it by the cost of the aircraft per month, it's nothing compared to when you use the aircraft. Therefore the ownership cost, the price of the aircraft is an important criterion, but it's not the only one. Yes, at that time we got a really good contract because of different circumstances. And one of the reasons to take that aircraft was the combination of factors. Today we know that the decision at that time was right because the A319 Neo is

not coming, both the Boeing 737 Max and the Neo are heavier, which means that they burn more fuel.

airBaltic have launched the Pilot Academy in Liepāja, what was the purpose of that? Does this mean that airBaltic will have more local Latvian pilots?

Yes, the intention is that today about half of our pilots are international and half of them are Baltic. Our goal is to have an additional 100 pilots by 2020-2021. 100 co-pilots coming out of the school who ideally come from the Baltics and then after five years, they become captains. With this output over the years, we will increase the proportion of local pilots compared to foreigners. We are doing this because of the change

of pilots – when somebody leaves the company, it is really significant. The local pilot is very happy, he becomes a pilot, sets up a family, buys a dog, builds a house and stays here, whereas the foreigner says I want to have a dog and to build a house, but somewhere else closer to home. So we are interested in having Baltic pilots in our academy.

So foreign pilots are not falling in love with Latvia and staying here for long?

Some do. We have some pilots who come and stay. We have them from all European countries. Many of them have decided that «this is my country and I want to have my home here». They bring their family, their dog and build a house here. And they are very happy, but in the past a lot of pilots joined us, stayed here for a couple of years and then went somewhere else. To reduce the number of such pilots we have set up the airBaltic Pilot Academy.

You have been working with Liepāja airport for a few years now, what can you say about its development?

I like Liepāja a lot. I like that city, I like that airport. I like the ambition that they have to be an international airport. It would be my wish that we could fly every morning and every evening, double daily to Liepāja, because I believe that it's a really good route and it will strengthen the region. The business case for that is not working yet, but we're working on it. I have a really big interest. Our flying school is there, it's a new airport, so it should be used. But of course, it should also work from a business point of view. So if they are building a terminal, it's a good step; maybe they could also attract other airlines to fly to Liepāja, which could help.

And what do you think about domestic traffic inside Latvia in general? Does it have any future?

Some airports did not get a second life, for example, Ventspils or Daugavpils.

I have visited twelve of your big cities and I have done it all by car. It was a really interesting experience because going to some cities would be really good if there was a plane flying to it, but wherever I went and thought about a plane there was nowhere no airfield. There is one other city that I see from the economic development of Latvia, which is Daugavpils. The airport connectivity there would make sense. But their airport is not certified, and to do that it is a big thing. I am a very strong believer in infrastructure, I have been working in this field for nearly 30 years. The number one thing that Latvia needs is a high-speed train connection; that is coming – Rail Baltica will be here in the next 10 years. And I believe the country should also develop domestic flying because today we have very modern technologies and in the future electric flying is coming. We need to develop regions, but it needs to have economic sense. People don't like it if the state spends money on infrastructure that isn't needed.

Some time ago airBaltic had side businesses, such as taxis and bicycles. What's your vision for this kind of activity?

I stopped it all. Because when I came here there was too much focus on side businesses that were not profitable. Today, the company is very stable and we need to build our brand, so we're looking for an opportunity to strengthen the brand. But we will only invest in something if it's returning the money we put in. We are not a typical sponsor who takes a sports club and sponsors it because we don't see the return, and we won't do that. I made that very clear when I came. I think it was a mistake to give up the bikes... Maybe we will work with electric scooters, but they have to come in very big numbers, so it would have a positive impact.



JZ MICROPHONES - LET YOUR SOUL SING

«At a global level we can be considered a small company, but we have a strong product, meaning that there is a lot of work to do to bring it out to the world,» says Andris Ēvelis, board member of JZ Microphones. Using its own unique technology, the Latvian company creates microphones of excellent quality and sophisticated design, so it's no wonder that they are chosen by the most demanding recording studios and legendary music stars. Text by Ērika Šmeļkova



Although the JZ Microphones brand was launched in 2007, the team has been familiar with microphones for over 30 years. It all started with repairing microphones, thus allowing them to explore and get familiar with the technology. That was followed with the collaboration of several brands (Blue, Violet Design) until JZ Microphones was launched. And their success was assured.

How is it possible that your products are able to compete with the industry giants that invest millions in their products and employ the brightest minds?

Our experience in the industry and, let's say, the Latvian aspiration, allows us to produce high quality products. The very fact that the production is carried out here in Latvia using specially selected electronic components of the highest quality opens up a lot of doors for us.

What important facts and events characterize your business?

We have been producing high quality handmade studio microphones for 12 years now and our secret is the unique Golden Drop Capsule technology. JZ Microphones products can be found almost all over the world, for example by producers such as Rafa Sardina, Thom Russo, Sylvia Massy, Marc Urselli, Rob Chiarelli, Andy Gill, Romesh Dodangoda. Our main markets are the USA, Europe, China, Japan and Korea.

What is the innovation or discovery of the company that you are most proud of?

I really love design. I believe that our unique design plays a major role in our success, but what we stand for is the unique Golden Drop Capsule technology. Each of our microphone capsules has a gold «dot» overlay that provides more «sensitivity» and a «more accurate» sound than the microphones of our competitors.

For a long time in the pro audio industry all microphones looked like «metal tubes»; this allowed us to walk our path to a completely different design. However, it is not the case that a specific microphone design just delights your eyes – almost every element has its own functional meaning. The flat microphone mesh provides a more direct contact between the sound source and the capsule; the large holes in the housing allow the microphone to «vibrate» less when in contact with the sound stream; various types of «holders» reduce the vibration from the microphone stand.

Although we have created our own signature, the design has no boundaries – we regularly experiment with new colours, curves, etc.

Are there any trends in design, style or fashion in your industry?

Most manufacturers still use cylindrical bodies, making it difficult to judge current trends. I want to emphasize

something else – now several manufacturers have released microphones that can offer the user several sounds at the same time by using special software. If traditionally the microphone is capable of producing only one tone that is industrially designed and cannot be changed, then the technology now makes it possible to synthesize the sound in a special program. It is similar to Instagram filters for pictures.

Have you received any unusual compliments regarding your work?

It is amazing when a world-class producer declares that he has replaced his \$5800 legendary microphone with our product. Last year, our friend,

the producer Marc Urselli, recorded Bono (U2) with our Black Hole microphone, and AKON have recently chosen to work with our Vintage 67 microphone.

What is the ideal sound for you?

I believe that the original sound without any distortion or shade change is perfect. We are famous for our Black Hole series, which does not «colour» the sound at all and provides a super-clean signal. The only question is, are all producers and engineers looking for a clean sound? Definitely no. Like each of us has a different voice timbre, each artist needs a slightly different microphone to highlight the voice features and muffle the defects.

What would be the compositions you would take with you into space, what would be your gold sample?

Since I work a lot with the creation of music, this is not an easy question! When making my gold sample, I would definitely take the discography of Hans Zimmer (compositions from the movies) with me, and I would also add my favorite childhood group, The Beatles, and maybe something more up-to-date like Imagine Dragons, Lady Gaga and Khalid (this is my newest discovery). But if we're talking about going into space, I would have to take an acoustic guitar with me – just to sing some pieces, and create something. Then my soul would be «fed».



L'OFFICIEL MAGNETIC



The internationally-renowned Latvian brand Amoralle, with its delicate feminine and elegantly seductive image, has opened the doors of and succeeded in the exquisitely bright, but essentially fierce, world market of fashion. Company founder and designer, Inese Ozola, believes there is no universal formula to guarantee success. The motto of her success story is to follow her passion, do what she believes in, and make the best possible choices every day.

Text by Ērika Šmeļkova



AMORALLE or Femininity does not age

When thinking of Inese Ozola in relation to the famous quote of Yves Saint Laurent «Fashions fade, style is eternal», one can surely say that «the style of Amoralle is eternal».

Early in the morning on a working day when you open the office door you will be greeted by a gentle, fragile, very attractive woman wearing a gown of her own brand – a long-flowing silhouette dress and a velvet jacket. The Amoralle office girls are also the perfect embodiment of femininity and can make you forget that somebody still needs to work hard and do some serious business. But all this vividness that makes other people's eyes look at the generally reserved image of Latvians in the North began in 2008 with a small Sock box store. Here, women were able to buy socks, tights and stockings, which impressed with artistic imagination and became a significant detail and accent of the wardrobe. Inese herself was surprised by the courage she took to make a radical change in her profession and lifestyle. After leaving law school and teaching at university, she said goodbye to business suits and followed her passion into the fashion industry. Having decided to hold her first fashion show, Inese realized that models wearing only stockings and socks would look good on the catwalk and sell well. This is how a body of a transparent material with a cross on the front to make it look right was developed. Inese is now laughing that this bodysuit has become almost iconic for her brand and is still in high demand. Currently, Amoralle offers feminine, body-shaped, easy-to-combine and wearable outfits that every woman is encouraged to wear, both at home and abroad. Made with sophisticated French lace, premium velvet silk and exclusive mohair and silk knitwear.

It is believed that there are creative fashion designers in Latvia, but the fashion business is not worth getting into.

I do not agree. On the contrary, Latvia has a number of favourable preconditions. Not only do we have ideas, but we also have good craft traditions and skills, and an educated workforce. Latvia enjoys a favourable geographical position, crossing transit routes and having a good business reputation.

However, the fashion business is specific, with powerful brands, almost monsters, at the forefront. How does one find their place in it?

The fashion business is peculiar, highly variable, complex, but at the same time predictable, which makes it interesting. Nowadays, people no longer buy simple clothes, they are attracted to a story, a lifestyle or a movement. On the one hand the fashion business is fraught with excitement, but on the other you do what you believe in by bringing together like-minded people. It is interesting to see how things change. For example, the «Who made my clothes» movement is current right now. People no longer care that garment manufacturers enslave women and children in poor countries. The change will also introduce environmental concerns. Today, the fashion business is one of the most





«One has to follow one's passion
and strive to make the best
possible choice every day»



«People no longer buy simple clothes, they are attracted to a story, a lifestyle or a movement»



polluting on the planet, and the so-called fast fashion is likely to be in competition with high-quality products that are suitable for several seasons.

What personalities, brands, stories and experiences inspire you?

I am interested in what others are doing, I enjoy reading books on the fashion history. I have come to the conclusion that there is no such formula for success. One has to follow one's passion and strive to make the best possible choice every day. No one really talks about failed strategies. Nowadays, there are so many interesting examples that show how to build a popular brand in a short period of time. In the era of social media we are close to the customer wherever they are located in the world, and I really like it. It truly inspires!

You export your products to different regions. Do you adapt them to national specifics?

We make costumes that fit our beliefs about femininity, so we are actually selling femininity and then finding the market. Our home apparel has become popular in the United Arab Emirates, UK, Australia, Germany, France, Saudi Arabia, Netherlands, Russia, USA, and other countries.

What is your style of leadership? Is there an iron lady behind the outer tenderness?

I think my management style is in line with the brand image and it is accepted by business partners. I have a wonderful team. I live with the conviction that every person's talents need to be strengthened, and with the feeling that, over time, things can change; you can get tired of things you like right now and then one needs to change position. It must also be assumed that not all collections will be successful – fashion statistics confirm that only 70% of them are.

What elements and materials are included in each Amoralle collection?

Silk, due the way it floats and creates the most inspiring feeling. Silk is a truly magical material and is recognized by all women. I also really like lace.

Have you finally got the answer to what women really want?

Women are always looking for inspiration. It is interesting that they are the ones who provide it themselves, but at the same time they are constantly seeking inspiration.

SONARWORKS: THANKS TO LATVIA THE WORLD CAN HEAR MUSIC BETTER

The inventions of the Latvian company Sonarworks prove the fact that in our country people love music and know how to listen to it. Moreover, Latvians are providing the rest of the world with the chance to enjoy high-quality sound. Sonarworks has developed software that can bring the best possible sound for each individual no matter what speakers or headphones the person is using. Thousands of recording studios around the world already rely on Sonarworks sound calibration software for their work, including sound engineers who record Beyonce, R.E.M., Lady Gaga, Deftones, Maroon 5, Taylor Swift, Faith No More, etc. Co-founder Mārtiņš Popelis believes that the key to the success of the company is a team that shares a passion for their work.

Text by Marianna Hodash



How was the idea of creating a «sound improving» company hatched?

The idea originated around 2010-2011. At that moment, Helmut Bems, co-founder of Sonarworks, several other like-minded people, and myself felt that doing business in Latvia's domestic market was becoming a boring and unpromising affair. It seemed to us that work on export markets had a much greater potential. We quickly realized that we wanted to build a business based on technology, one that would be able to grow into something on a global scale.

The range of research included a variety of ideas – from ship fleet management software to an eco food ingredient info system. Then we met engineer Kaspars Sprogis, who had developed the technology for measur-

ing and adjusting the sound of speakers. Helmut and I liked this idea very much, because audio technology and music seemed like an interesting area. We looked at it more closely and about a year later the plan was ready, and venture capital investors, Imprimatur Capital, were ready to commit. So in December 2012, Sonarworks was founded.

What products does Sonarworks produce today?

Software which improves the sound quality of headphones, speakers, car speakers and other sound devices. Our goal has always been to offer people the chance to enjoy the highest sound quality possible. In the process of looking for solutions we realized that people may have completely different preferences in matters of «a good

sound». Some like a sound with physically-tangible bass notes, while others prefer not to hear the «back massaging» bass, but have pronounced nuances of percussion instruments. Numerous device manufacturers base their products on the idea of one best sound for everyone. We want to change this approach, offering the best sound for every individual, no matter what sound device they choose. That is why we have introduced the feature of sound personalization in our mobile application and continue to develop it.

What difficulties did you face on the way to the company's success?

Initially, it was difficult to convince recording studio engineers that our product could make their work easier, faster and more productive. Using our product, an engineer can save up to 2-3 hours on the production of one track, which in our modern world is a lot. In the USA, we were lucky to come across experienced sound engineers who appreciated our contribution to their work and were ready to support us publicly by recommending us to their colleagues. So, little by little, looking for new consumers and convincing them with our practice, we became one of the most popular brands in the music production world.

What are the basic internal principles of your company?

Truthfulness, the ability to experiment and learn, teamwork and ambition are important to us. We believe in these principles and practice them, rather than just stick posters with meaningless words on the walls of the kitchen. When you make a revolution in the world of audio recordings you inevitably often have to face the unknown, for it is impossible to be prepared for everything. In such a context, truthfulness is very important to be able to learn about unexpected issues as soon as possible. Moreover, individual superstars perform poorly in hectic, unknown environments; teamwork is much more important, that's what we try to maintain and develop. Finally, from the very beginning, Sonarworks was conceived as an ambitious adventure. Therefore, we hired people with global ambitions in our team. This formula still works perfectly well.



Where are your products exported?

Our main markets are the USA and Asia and our main buyers in Europe are in the United Kingdom and Germany. Almost from the first day, Sonarworks' activities were 99.99% export oriented. We plan to keep that going.

How did you find your partners? Was it easy to adapt to foreign markets?

The initial circle of contacts was created through participation in exhibitions and with the help of like-minded friends. At the beginning of our journey we received support from the LIAA creative industries incubator, and later used LIAA support when visiting international exhibitions. Now we are inter-

ested in getting support in the development of new technologies.

Are there any prospects for local enterprises that create new technologies?

Absolutely. The main thing we lack in Latvia for the development of technological enterprises is a global and inspiring innovation commercialization success story coming from Latvia, something like Skype. When the first Latvian technological company's turnover exceeds that of Latvenergo, development will be much more rapid. I hope it works out for Sonarworks. Our goal is to become a modern day Dolby, the well-known audio technology brand that is found in billions of sound devices worldwide. We are working on this relentlessly every day.

LATVIAN «PENGUIN»

The UAVFACTORY brand, Penguin unmanned aircraft manufacturers, is now well known all over the world. The Latvian company, which has customers in the USA, Canada, Australia, Indonesia, and the Middle East, is successfully competing in its segment with giants like Boeing. The visionary founder of the UAVFACTORY, Konstantīns Popiks, introduced us to his company. Text by Marianna Hodash



a demand for the product when the first aircraft was sold to a customer in Australia in 2008, I founded the company, he invested small funds in its development. A rapid turnover growth began only 3 years ago, after almost 10 years since we started working on the prototype. It took us 100 times more work than we had expected.

How did your collaboration with Australian customers go?

We were delivering a semi-finished product – empty airplanes without the «filling» to Australia. These were not drones, but simply very inexpensive and high-quality cases which could be filled with electronics at the client's request. But this scheme allowed us to actually finance a further development of the company.

Where, apart from the police and the army, can your device be used?

Wherever it is necessary to conduct observation, including a hidden one. Operator companies that monitor pipelines and oil rigs, enterprises dealing with flights over water and fishing can become our customers. In the future, the applicability scope of the UAV will be even greater.

What else have the UAVFACTORY developers been doing all these years?

We have been constantly working to improve the technology of the device itself and its components. It is important to understand that Penguin, though it flies in an offline mode, is essentially a robot and if something goes wrong for a split second it will fall and

How did the idea of making unmanned aerial vehicles come to your mind?

In 2006, I was studying at university to be an aircraft designer. At that time the commercial industry of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) was in its infancy, and the military version existed on a small scale. I thought that drones were actually a very simple thing, the creation of which did not require huge costs. My friends and I started designing the first device at our own expense – a prototype that could be easily sold at the design stage. It was literally all happening in the garage, where we went after our day job and often spent the night. We worked like real fanatics.

Serious technology with a funny name. What lies behind the name 'Penguin'?

In over 120 years of aviation, all the names of birds had already been attributed to other aircraft. Therefore, we decided to be creative and name the device after a flightless bird. Also, its appearance resembled a penguin.

What kind of buyers were you targeting?

The first buyer was to be the Latvian army. A year after the development started, we successfully participated in manoeuvres, but unfortunately the deal was not sealed. I can easily understand the logic of the military, investing money in a raw product is a questionable enterprise. By the way, today the Latvian army has our UAVs in its arsenal and has a progressive view of their usage. After that, I managed to catch the interest of an investor who was watching our activity and realized that there was



just burn, unlike, let's say, a computer that can turn itself off. That's why we had to achieve the highest level of reliability.

In 2012, we set the world record of an unmanned aircraft occurrence in the air – 54 hours. For 6 years, no one could beat it. This year we are going to set another record.

In an innovative company a lot of processes are not visible from the outside. Until you release an aircraft with a new modification, an average person will not notice it. However, we have spent two years introducing changes, for example, in the inside of the camera, in order to improve the picture quality seven-fold; this is a breakthrough, a great achievement.

A very successful example is the sale of infrared cameras for unmanned devices. The entire technology is ours. The product is complex and expensive, but we are also competitive in this segment, and the returns from the cameras are very good.

In matters of new technology development the support

of government structures is important. How is it going for you?

The LIAA directly participated in the co-financing of our most complex developments – for example, they co-financed the purchase of expensive equipment. Being a small company, we could not afford to participate in exhibitions. One exhibition stand can cost up to tens of thousands of euros, and we have used the exhibition co-financing program of the LIAA. Thanks to the cooperation of the agency, we developed the technology, put it into operation, and sold the product. This is a fully direct effect.

You are successfully selling your products all over the world. Are you interested in the Baltic market?

It's an important market with a very interesting potential, the Baltic countries need more efficient solutions and a human resource economy. There is a need for border and ship monitoring, the first successful examples of the use of UAVs in commercial industries

may be seen in a year's time. We have been participating in military manoeuvres and air shows for several years now; this is an excellent marketing tool.

How would you describe the perfect employee for your company?

Our work is difficult because we are creating new things and, in fact, we are constantly learning. Working with development, even now we are dealing with things that we still do not fully understand. In such conditions, we need people who can «exist in the ocean of ideas» and constantly change together with us. We always welcome such employees to our company.

Please share your personal principles of work motivation.

Only those who truly want success achieve it. One has to be ready to invest all one's resources and strength in the business. Want to be the best engineer in the world? Design better, faster. Make it easy what others usually make difficult. And don't stop. Didn't work out 100 times? It will the 101st!



Lat Eko Food – true taste and quality

The largest manufacturer of biological fruit and vegetable processing products in Latvia – the company, Lat Eko Food, has been created in true care about children's health and family wellbeing. Currently, being proud of her achievements, Egija Martinsone, the chairperson of the board, can reveal her formula for success – these are biologically grown local products, innovative technologies and an environmentally-friendly, sustainable business. The value added and the secret component is a pinch of love.

Text by Ērika Šmeļkova



Egija Martinšone's son, Rūdolfs, is now studying in the 4th grade, but when he was born Egija had a great deal of trouble feeding him – he reluctantly ate the baby food available back then. It was then that Egija started to prepare food from biologically-grown products, and soon after she decided that other babies in Latvia also deserved to eat healthily. As a result, the company Lat Eko Food was established in 2010, and now the factory in Ādaži region send their products to almost all the continents. It can surely be said that this is the future business, because the philosophy of Lat Eko Food is based on taking care of not only human, but also environmental health.

What illusions in business did you have to say goodbye to, and have you got any positive insights?

The illusion that everything is simple and easy. The most important thing is determination and perseverance, because in the process of realizing an idea, as well as in everyday work, many problems and obstacles are often encountered. Initially, it seemed like a good idea and a clear vision is enough to keep things going smoothly, but when starting to realize the ideas, we faced new challenges and unexpected situations that required a great deal of determination. If you want to do something, you will always find a way to do it, if you don't – you'll find arguments.

A foreign expert advised Latvia to position itself as a producer of organic food. What do you think about that?

Latvia is a green country with great potential for organic food production, but the sector is not yet fully developed – it is in its infancy. Public interest in organic and quality food has increased in recent years. People are paying more attention to what they eat and choose products for everyday use more carefully. Food growers and producers are also taking this into account by offering a wider range of organic products. There are many farms that are ready to start organic farming, and this is a very positive indicator for gaining international recognition as a producer of quality organic food.

How is the cooperation with local producers going?

Cooperation with Latvian farms is improving. It takes a long time to build a successful partnership, and since this is our tenth production season our cooperation is getting better and more promising year after year. However, we all have a lot to learn in order to be aware of what we are producing, and we need to be very keen to do it. We cooperate with domestic and foreign suppliers. We buy most fruits and vegetables from local farmers and exotic raw materials from other countries. It is very important to choose a stable and reliable partner and become one yourself.

Everyone complains about labour shortages; how do you motivate your employees?

New challenges, opportunities for growth, a positive workplace atmosphere, and employee appreciation are key motivating factors. Of course, remuneration is also important. Today's technology enables more and more automated processes to be introduced in production, but human resources are needed anyway. We strive to create a work environment where people feel well, are interested and feel valued. Our employees are the best we could wish for; together we feel like a big family and a strong team that can go all the way.

Which of your products are the most popular?

«Rūdofs» BIO, whose story began with the production of baby food. Products for children have gained a lot of popularity, but in recent years we have been offering products for the whole family – smoothies, ketchups, jams, vegetable and fruit creams. We are the largest producer of 100% organic fruit and vegetable products in Latvia and we are particularly proud of the excellent quality and excellent taste of our products, which have been appreciated by customers not only in Latvia, but also in other European countries and around the world like China, Canada, Singapore, South Korea, Dubai, Qatar and Russia. The «Rūdofs» BIO ketchups are very popular – they have a classic and spicy taste, and do not contain artificial flavourings, preservatives, starch and gluten. The flavour is enriched with natural spices and herbs; ketchup lovers are excited. People who pay special attention to nutrition and physical fitness are very fond of «Rūdofs» BIO smoothies. They do not contain added sugar or dairy products and do not contain gluten. Smoothies are chosen as a substitute for a light meal and are very convenient for busy days or for use before or after physical activity. This is a great way to take a daily dose of fruit quickly and conveniently. Rūdofs' latest products – sugar-free fruit creams, which are a healthy alternative to jam, and vegetable creams that perfectly refresh breakfast sandwiches, make them healthier, more colourful and varied.

What innovations do you have in mind?

Every year we work on developing new and innovative products, and we are currently working on several new projects. In the nearest future we plan to expand our adult selection. We develop new products with a strong focus on adding value. In each of our products we try to combine healthy and delicious tastes, while preserving the natural values of the ingredients.

Are there any innovations in the field of advanced equipment and technology?

We are constantly investing in company development, new equipment and technology to optimize the production process. We are very pleased to have the opportunity to use EU funds in cooperation with various institutions – this is a great support for the faster development and growth of young entrepreneurs.

Who are your teachers in business? Are there any influencers who inspire you?

There are many inspiring and successful people to learn from. I met my business teachers while working at Jelgava

Business Incubator. Later, I came across inspirational personalities who gave useful advice in life and in business. It's great that there are people who know and want to share their experience and knowledge. I like to get to know biographies of prominent personalities and to draw useful insights there. The last book I read was Steve Jobs's biography, and from this book I have learned many valuable insights into what needs to be done and what is not in order to succeed in business. I am currently reading the autobiography of Ion Mask, and it is unique that there are so many energetic, intelligent and miraculous people in the world to get inspired by. It is interesting to look through the prism of each well-known success story hero's path to the goal.

Please tell us about people's eating habits regarding your products? Does each country have its own national characteristics and traditions that influence choices?

We offer international products that are popular all over the world and sometimes they seem to be better known outside of Latvia, such as fruit and vegetable creams that are very popular in Scandinavia and elsewhere. The majority of Latvian people prefer traditional flavours and familiar products. We take Latvian habits into consideration and offer products for both traditional value lovers and those who like to experiment. As I said, it is very positive that the demand for organic food is increasing; this makes me happy. We also take part in various international exhibitions, both inside and outside Europe, where we gain valuable experience of the country's eating culture, habits and tastes. We definitely respect this when starting a business with a foreign company and often adjust the taste and packaging to the wishes of the customer.

Climate change is a hot topic right now. Does it also affect your business?

We have not been affected by climate change, but it could have a profound impact on farmers, businesses and many sectors of the economy in the future. In this case, I would like to think positively and do everything in our power to protect nature and not provoke extreme phenomena. In our work we strive to find the best possible solutions to protect the environment.

What, in the context of your business, can people do individually and what can government and non-governmental organizations do to promote the environment and promote sustainable and responsible business?

One individual is not enough to be able to create positive change, it is a task for the whole world. Businesses need to think about using green energy and minimizing environmental pollution. As we try to take care of the protection of natural resources we use 100% green electricity from renewable resources, actively work to develop waste-free management, reduce and sort waste, try to use environmentally-friendly materials and packaging, we try not to pollute water or air with our production, we work actively to save water and electricity, move to electronic document circulation and storage, and keep our area clean and tidy at all times. It is necessary to reduce, reuse and recycle as much as possible. You have

to live green and start with yourself, then there is a great hope that others will follow. It is positive that nowadays zero-waste philosophy has gained great popularity in Latvia as well. This is a step that anyone can take for the sake of protecting the environment. My 10-year-old son, Rūdofs, has a strong desire to take care of pollution in nature and is actively working to help maintain the environment in order to get rid of plastic and other materials that are harmful to the environment. He is deeply concerned about the polluted seas and oceans where the inhabitants suffer from human irresponsibility, and he dreams of his future in the field of environmental protection. Our children are aware that they will have to live in this polluted environment left by their parents. So let's think now, until it's not too late, because our children and grandchildren deserve a happy life on this green planet!

Please tell us about your dietary experience.

What are your eating habits? What does your son choose?

I have always thought about consuming quality and healthy food. People often say «You are what you eat,» and I fully agree with this. Eating habits are reflected in our health, so it is important to prioritize healthy food and lifestyles. The source of my body's energy is important to me and I try to refrain from doing anything that could harm it. It helps to maintain the best possible quality of life because I cannot afford low quality in my life. I choose organic products in my diet and lately I have been paying special attention to the products that are best for me – the healthiest and the richest in nutrients. If you want to live a long, happy life with the right quality, you have to overcome your ego and take care of your body and health, not your gastronomic pleasures. Rūdofs, on the other hand, has been fastidious since childhood, and he only wants to eat meals cooked from his favourite products. This is how the business idea started – thanks to my son Rūdofs, who chose his mother's best meal made of the best products. My son sees our nutritional philosophy and increasingly refuses to eat snacks, which are usually very popular with children, in favour of a healthier diet.

Why do you think that people in each country should primarily choose local products?

Pediatricians recommend the use of foods of the appropriate geographical area, especially for children, to avoid a variety of allergies and body reactions. Our body has historically adapted to our region's environment and diet, so products that are atypical of the region and unfamiliar to the body can cause a response in the autoimmune system, causing a number of conditions that are sometimes difficult to diagnose. The same thing, but even worse, is when we eat junk food, because not everyone can eat everything, for example, some may have gluten or lactose intolerance. Worse still, we consume foods with preservatives, flavour enhancers and colourings or genetically modified foods. The best choice is to use locally sourced and organic products that are best suited to our body.

Do you also prefer environmentally-friendly products in other areas, such as cosmetics and clothing?

I pay attention to quality because the market does not always offer the opportunity to buy products of the same quality and completely environmentally-friendly. If possible, I try to buy environmentally friendly products for both domestic and personal use, and I am also considering purchasing an electric car in the future.

How do you create advertisements for your products? What is your sales trump?

Public interest in organic and quality food has increased in recent years. People are paying more attention to what they eat and choosing products more carefully. «Rūdofs» BIO offers healthy products with natural flavours made exclusively from organically grown ingredients. Our goal is to make products that we use in our daily diet healthier, without adding artificial additives, preserving the natural value of the product and the organic ingredients. This is our main trump card – quality in terms of product composition, packaging and design, and communication with the consumer. The best advertising is good product reviews that people share with each other. We care about people's health and quality of life, and many appreciate it.

How is Rūdofs doing, what is he interested in, what are his hobbies? Maybe he's already helping his mum?

Rūdofs is currently in 4th grade and has grown with the company. Initially, he was inspired by the organic baby food line, but now he is keen on testing new products and helping out in a variety of small jobs at the plant. Rūdofs represents a creative new generation with a different perspective on life and things; he is worried about global environmental change and pollution, and he is an active advocate of the environment and animals. At the same time, he also enjoys the discoveries of modern technology, and in his spare time he works diligently with drone-making, technology and drumming. Rūdofs has enrolled in Waldorfs pedagogical program and frequently asks questions that are difficult to answer. I look very hopefully at our young generation and I am sure it will bring great changes in the future.

How do you balance between work, leisure and family responsibilities? What are your hobbies, interests?

The main thing is to like what you do. Then there is a completely different feeling after doing the work, implementing the project or creating the product that is in demand. Satisfaction with good reviews and success is huge, so you can close your eyes after a busy day. You have to find time for yourself and your non-business interests, be able to restart and move on with new inspiration. I rest my mind during long walks along the sea with my family and both of our dogs, or while biking together, as well as on longer trips. Of course, I also have my own things that I love to do in my spare time, such as playing tennis, yoga, reading books, meditation practices and also learning valuable spiritual lessons, as long as good teachers are available. I'll soon make another dream come true – I will start singing in a choir; This is something I have wanted for a long time. I don't have a lot of free time, but with a lot of planning and prioritization I can do a lot.



FROM JERSIKA WITH LOVE

One of the latest local success stories is the company GLEAR from Jersika Parish. The product of the company – healthy chips made without being cooked in oil – only entered the domestic market in 2016, but has already taken more than 1% of it. The company's products are now recognized on the shelves of foreign stores with its award-winning design. Artis Paegle, a board member of the company, reveals what he sees as the key to the success of Jersika Chips and why it's not just about money.

Text by Dagnija Leitāne



How did you arrive at the idea for Jersika's chips?

The idea was born twenty years ago at a food fair. I saw a device baking round rice balls. Then I thought, why not use this machine to bake chips from potato microspheres? They explode at 200°C, similar to popcorn, and then they are pressed and baked. All of the know-how is hidden in cylinders which have a special coating; these push the chips into the press and, unlike other snacks, does not require the use of heated oil when baking. During the process, a pleasant smell of baked potatoes appears. This is followed by the application of flavours with a small mist of oil which is not heated and is therefore much healthier. My favourite taste is the classic sour cream onion.

How did you find your niche, is it a success story or a thorough market analysis?

I am a food technologist and have spent most of my working life working in the food industry. I always wanted to come up with something healthy and delicious, because often healthy products are not the most delicious ones. If you want something that really can be swallowed, you often have to use ingredients that are not the best for your health. When I got this machine, I started researching the market;

the first impulse was to produce something delicious and at the same time healthy, the rest came naturally.

Your product is relatively new but is already taking over the local and neighbouring markets. What do you see as the key to your success?

I think our success is based on two factors. One is the design; the other is the wholesomeness of the product. Our chips have significantly less calories than others.

The plant is located in Jersika. What influenced the choice of location?

I come from Kurzeme myself, and I planned to launch the project on that side of Latvia. But the business was already quite active there, so I did not get approval for the project. Then I decided to go to a region where business is less intensive. I came to Latgale. From an economic point of view, I am looking for a place as close as possible to Riga with the largest consumer market. We approached the local parish municipalities with the idea of building a factory and we were offered places. It is now located in Jersika Parish, about 7 kilometres out of Līvāni, which also became the name of the brand.

How was the product's multiple award-winning design created?

We have three people on the management team. One of our troops had previously cooperated with an advertising agency. The design and title emerged from some of our discussions. I believe that professionals should definitely be involved because what you think is fantastic may not really work. While going through a brainstorming session with people who give you a fresh look from the outside, you realize the best solution.

How do you stand out from the rest of the supply in such a saturated market?

Of course, the most important thing is the product. Nevertheless, buyers first and foremost buy with their eyes. We see something first and then start researching the product. The item should be able to stand out on the long and wide store shelf. Another key to success is that the packaging is pleasing to touch and also different in size and material.

How do you determine if a product is successful?

The experience of our trio helps a lot. We also take into account people's feedback on social media and tastings. This is also how we determine our further directions, and what tastes to add to our assortment.

Have there been times when you thought that it would have been better to keep it just as an idea?

No doubt there have been moments, but we just have to overcome them. If you are a beginner you have to go to the end and take every opportunity, so you have nothing to blame yourself for later. You have to try everything that depends on you. We do this with our hearts, and not because of the money. When we started, banks were more interested in the real estate business. Without the European funds and the Rural Support Service, nothing would have happened. Of course, local business investment has also helped. Every day is a battle, but this is typical for the food industry. It's a perpetual treadmill.

What is your best business advice?

If you have an idea, I suggest you look at it from the sidelines. If the idea is related to a product, you need to think as



the average consumer and look at it from a customer's perspective. Would you buy and use this product? There will always be pessimists who say that nothing will work because the market is already full. If you have weighed up an idea many times and continue to believe in it, you should give it a go. If you don't try, you'll never learn.

What achievements are you proud of?

We are extremely proud that our products can be found in major retail stores and are recognized and praised by people. This helps us to forget all our problems and dark moments.

PAA'S FORMULA FOR SUCCESS - HUMAN, ELEGANT, SMART AND ALTERNATIVE

When Pēteris Treicis persuaded his friends – a physicist, a carpenter and a doctor – to get into the production of baths 25 years ago, he didn't realise how complicated this process and business was. He now says jokingly: «Ignorance, in combination with enthusiasm, has great power». Now their company PAA proudly carries Latvia's name in the world, its products have won many international awards. Pēteris Treicis, the head of PAA, reveals the formula for the success of his company.

Text by Ērika Šmeļkova



What significant facts characterize PAA?

PAA is a manufacturer of baths, washbasins and shower trays in Latvia, which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. About two thirds of its production is exported to more than 15 countries (major markets are Lithuania, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Russia, and Sweden). PAA products are manufactured in four technologies - from glass reinforced polyester (GRP), acrylic, stone mass and SilkSTONE – a material patented by the company. Around 100 people are employed in our factory in Ķekava District and the showroom in the VEF block.

What is the formula for the success of your company?

We have formulated the core values of the company as HESA (from the first

letters of the English words «human», «elegant», «smart» and «alternative»). I think the fact that we are human, striving for elegance, looking for ingenious solutions and wanting to be different has helped us to withstand the years of crisis that hit the industry and our company very hard.

Are there any design and fashion trends in your business, and what is the most constant and the most changing aspect in this field?

Yes, definitely, because bathroom furnishings, as an integral part of interior and architecture, are subject to fashion and not isolated from the influence of different stylistic trends. In general, however, the bathroom is a rather conservative room in which the avant-garde is not an end in itself. Here, the

atmosphere and the amenities necessary for bathing rituals are essential, these are a constant factor.

One of the most variable values in the bathroom is the colour, and its combinations. At the moment, silent, neutral gray colours, as well as matte, silky textures are trending. However, it is worth mentioning that sales data still confirm the dominance of white baths, washbasins and shower trays.

How would you describe the style of your products? Are you adapting to the tastes and traditions of different countries, regions?

PAA is characterized by easy-to-understand elegance and sustainable, honest design. We are against over-designing, because the bathroom is essentially an intimate space that needs

to be inviting and silent, not screaming or impersonal. The company's forte are custom solutions: bathtubs from the VARIO collection with customizable surface lengths and corners, as well as the Made-to-measure product concept made of the new SilkSTONE material, the demand for which is increasing by the month. I believe that some of the seemingly local peculiarities are our own stereotypes. For example, the company's production is widely available in Ukraine, and although it may seem that they prefer bright colours, it's quite the opposite – Ukrainians choose smoky, ascetic tones. And before we started exporting to Russia, I didn't think that the customers of this country would be the most demanding regarding the smallest nuances. Another thing is the specifics of the housing stock and the traditions of construction in each country. For instance, in many Scandinavian cities with high real estate value, most buildings are historic, with almost every bathroom being different. For us, as manufacturers, this means that the option of a custom bath length and shape of the washbasin and shower tray will be topical. While at the beginning of the 2000s the potential customers of PAA were attracted by colourful bathroom solutions – for example, the 2005 export catalogue had the slogan «Let's dare to be different!» Nowadays, functionality prevails over design in the bathroom and the colours are mostly characterized by Scandinavian calmness.

What are the trends in bath technology? Maybe soon it will be possible to print baths and washbasins with a 3D printer?

Our order data show that the demand for acrylic baths is decreasing, while the popularity of the company's proprietary homogeneous stone material SilkSTONE is on the rise. Our customers fancy it in combination with both black metal and solid wood, and without additions by equipping the entire bathroom in a single style with a SilkSTONE bath, washbasin and shower tray. This is because this surface has a nearly suggestive attraction – a warm silkiness, which to some extent is reminiscent of the nobility of the sculptures of the ancient world. The material is monolithic – it has the same



thickness throughout and therefore long lasting, easy to renew and environmentally friendly. These baths hold heat for a long time, so they consume less heat energy. In addition, SilkSTONE is the ideal material for customization and easy modifications. Thanks to the Made-to-measure product concept, customers discover their bathroom anew, because the space is used as rationally as possible to satisfy the expectations of the customer. In terms of 3D printing, it may indeed become the technology of

the future, but these solutions are very expensive at the moment.

Steve Jobs once said that design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works. What do you think?

Of course, he was right! Likewise, in the bathroom the most important thing is how you feel – like at home or as a stranger, and how handy everything is for your bathing ritual. And practical things are harmonious and beautiful.

CHANGE IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

In 1993, a group of Canadian-Latvian friends and relatives came up with the idea of importing a product unknown at that time – bitumen roofing – into the local market. This is how Ripo was launched; it has now become one of the most recognized furniture, garage door, and balcony manufacturers in Latvia. The company, whose cabinet systems, kitchens, gates for private and industrial properties, railing systems and glazing can be found in almost every home of your friends and acquaintances, is now looking at new export markets. Elvis Sakārnis, chairman of the board, continues talking about the growth of Ripo Fabrika. Text by Dagnija Leitāne



What was the beginning of Ripo?

Ripo was one of the first companies in Latvia to start selling well-known products such as bitumen roofing materials and OSB boards. Initially, there were no grandiose business plans, it was a different time and they were not necessary. Gradually, the company, which only imports and sells products in Latvia, also started to produce. To-

day, Ripo has developed a range of products mainly focusing on the ones developed and produced by the company itself.

When did you realise that the company had potential?

The growth was not as gradual as expected when viewed from a modern perspective. Everything developed quite naturally and was based on the fact that we were not afraid to take risks and go in new directions, thus gaining experience. Our courage to start and work was one of the cornerstones of growth. The most important indicator is the customer, whose positive feedback and satisfaction with the product quality allowed us to increase sales.

Is the local building-material market open for innovation?

Yes, but presenting a new product some time ago was certainly a lot easier, as it was the era of change. Customers were very open as new products continuously came onto the market. Nowadays, it gets more and more difficult to impress a customer with something truly innovative.

Do you have any trouble working with your friends every day?

From the first days, Ripo was made up of a group of friends and relatives, making it partly a family business. Over the years, we have developed the ability to separate work from our daily routine, which may seem daunting, but we have also learned to respect each other's wishes, divide responsibilities, and thus complement each other.

What are the biggest challenges the company has faced?

Any challenge is also an experience to learn from. They have been very different from time to time. The last ten years have dramatically changed trade and our daily lives as such. The speed and manner in which you communicate with a customer is a challenge that prevents you from resting on your laurels. You need to be able to keep your finger on the pulse of change to understand what's going on in the world of technology, production processes, and in the communication with people.

How did you recover from the crisis that hit the construction market in 2008?

It was a fateful year for many companies. In the business world it was like the beginning of a new century, a turning point for many processes. Fortunately, we were not yet involved in large-scale projects, focusing more on retail clients. Of course, we also received financial blows, but the consequences were not as severe as they were for others. The crisis has taught us the need to observe what is happening in other sectors in order to forecast market trends and always provide for a less optimistic plan «B».

What do you see as the secret to your success?

The biggest success is probably meeting the fellow Ripo team. Every company is based on a team that develops its products. We are really fortunate with our employees, colleagues and friends as we move forward and grow together.

Do Latvians have a distinct vision of design?

Latvia is quite advanced in the speed at which we are adopting global design trends and innovations in both urban and private construction and interior design. We are now actively following how new features can be added to design elements. For example, we have integrated solar panels in new railing products, thus giving railing systems a different role as green energy producers. This is how interaction with other industries takes place. You have to have a wide, sometimes even crazy vision, to put together things you were not able to blend together before. The ability to be diverse and innovative is highly valued, especially in export markets.

How was the balcony railing design, which received the Export and Innovation Award, created?

The design of aluminium railing systems that we have developed over the years began with the idea of sketching on a white sheet something that was visually appealing while being handy and easy to mount. In my opinion, the fact that the product is not only aes-



thetically pleasing but also convenient and functional to use is the guiding motive of a good industrial design. This product has been improved many times over the years and it is a pleasure to receive such a high recognition.

What are the growth plans for the company?

We have been exporting for quite some time now. Initially, our flagship in export markets, which also managed to find customers in the Baltics and Scandinavia, was furniture. Currently we are focusing on finding new export partners for railing systems and glazing. We are already operating in Scandinavia – Norway and Sweden, as well as France. This year, we were also given the opportunity to participate in the largest construction exhibition

in Europe, BAU in Munich, where we met potential customers from many other European countries. We want to expand our range of products with innovative solutions that fit modern trends and green energy slogans. It is even more important for us to hear the wishes of our customers, because we have the opportunity to supplement our product according to the customer's needs, since both the exhibition of aluminium profiles and components and the production itself take place in the company.

What is the best business advice you have ever received?

Always be reliable in any situation. Be a reliable supplier, partner and customer. Sometimes it is difficult, but for me this is the most important principle.



Primekss: a solid know-how

Jānis Ošlejs, the founder of the Latvian company Primekss, can talk about concrete for hours with the passion of a man talking about his beloved woman. He is, without exaggeration, in love with concrete, and with good reason. His Latvian company's know-how, the technology of concrete flooring for industrial premises, has conquered a good share of the world market in the last 10 years. Almost 15 million square metres of Primekss production cover floors in the USA, Canada, South Africa, Israel, India, Germany, Scandinavia and other countries. Neither the company nor its head are going to stop there.

Text by Karina Evans



As far as I know, Primekss started with the production of epoxy floors ...

When I was a student I used to make money selling industrial chocolate to coat ice creams, but it was obvious the business would not last, so I decided to do something more serious. I noticed that the floors of many premises of the food industry had become unfit for purpose. That's when we started buying raw materials in Finland and making epoxy floors. Everything went fine for six months.

And then?

And then I started receiving phone calls with people saying: «Jānis, can you stop by? Your expensive floors are cracking and separating from the concrete.» After I went to a couple of places I realized that it wasn't our floors that were the problem, but the concrete itself. I contacted the concrete contractors, but they just shrugged their shoulders and showed me their certificates showing floors were produced in accordance with norms.

It was clear that there was no other way to solve this than to produce the concrete floors ourselves. We didn't know where to start, but then we heard about a conference being held in Germany dedicated to concrete floors, where a

famous scientist from Belgium, Xavier Destree, the developer of the fiber-reinforced concrete production technology, was going to speak.

As a result, Primekss was the first company to bring this technology to the Baltic countries, and then to Scandinavia.

How is fiber-reinforced concrete different from the concrete that has been around since ancient Rome?

Our concrete is actually more similar to the ancient Roman type than to the modern one. The architect and scientist Vitruvius, who lived in the 1st century BC and whose works Leonardo da Vinci studied and even named his drawing of the canonical human proportions after, has described numerous construction technologies in his essays. Among his works was the *Opus Cementi*, which described production of concrete; thanks to the incredible durability of this concrete, the Pantheon, Colosseum and aqueducts, built over 1900 years ago, have survived to this day.

Unfortunately, Vitruvius' opus described the technology without details, and the ancient Roman technology was forgotten after the fall of Rome. However, we know the main principles, that the Romans used fibers, such as horse tail, as well as

special additives to prevent concrete from cracking, which was the key to its durability.

The comeback of concrete did not happen until the first half of the 19th century. In 1824, an Englishman, Joseph Aspdin, patented a mixture of cement clinker, gypsum and various additives and named it «Portland cement» after Portland island. The British began exporting their cement to Europe, and in the 1840s it fell into the hands of a French gardener Joseph Monier, who was trying to strengthen his cement planters with iron wire to prevent them from falling apart after cracking. Monier invented reinforced concrete by accident, without which modern construction is unimaginable.

The Romans did all they could think of to prevent concrete from cracking, whilst Monier's followers are holding cracked concrete together with steel reinforcement and so do not care so much about cracking. Thus Roman aqueducts and bridges last thousands of years, whilst modern bridges need to be rebuilt after mere few decades.

Attention to cracking and thus durability is what differs the Roman approach that Primekss follows.

What is fiber?

Fiber is a thin – less than a millimeter in diameter – wire made of very strong steel. Its bent ends adhere firmly to concrete and take on the arising stress. The result is a reinforcement that evenly reinforces concrete in all planes, increasing its durability, impact resistibility and minimizes the formation of shrinkage cracks.

Such 'Fiber-permeated' concrete becomes a composite material. Fibrotechnology is used in many industries – for example, the new Airbus A380 airliners have composite wings, manufactured with the use of carbon and epoxy fiber. Yachts are made of composite materials; they are also widely used in the manufacture of automobiles.

Is fiber the only secret of Primekss concrete?

Of course not. In addition to using high dosage rates of fibers, we began to improve the chemical composition of concrete. We formed a group of scientists from Latvia, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Finland, with the aim of developing concrete that would not crack and so would be stronger. The LIAA was very helpful, supporting us with a large grant from EUREKA, which let us conduct the basic research. And then later, when all we had was a patent but no physical machinery for production, the LIAA helped us again by allocating funds for the purchase of equipment. I am very grateful to them for believing in us and giving Primekss the opportunity to create this Latvian invention.

Who was the first customer to order your concrete?

A small general contractor from the Finnish logistics town of Kouvola. He believed in us and we installed a floor for warehouse there, and he was very pleased with it – it still stands there great! After that we won more projects in Finland, then neighboring countries, though in every country we had to go



through the process of convincing customers just from the start again. We went to next door Sweden, but initially they were not convinced by the fact that we had successfully done something so very close by, in Finland. In every country, the question, «Do you have references in our country?» is asked time and again. And it always takes a lot of time and energy to persuade the first pioneer in every country and state.

Do you conduct construction abroad or just sell technology?

We do both. Firstly, we are still subcontractors ourselves – we place concrete in Scandinavia, the Baltic States and Israel, using our workforce. In other countries of the world, we are licensing local subcontractors, giving them the opportunity to use our technology, supplying raw materials and the know-how.

Our services consist of structural engineers designing the structures using the unique properties of our materials, concrete engineers developing concrete mix designs and running hundreds of tests yearly and our industry-leading quality control system using our online platform.

We are now working almost all over the world. Last week, I came from South Africa where we are successfully established. In the USA our licensees are in 13 states, and we are present in India, Russia, Germany and many other countries. In each country the cement, sand and gravel are different, but we must produce concrete of the same high quality. Thinking that concrete is a simple matter is wrong. It is just as difficult as mixing and baking the perfect pancake.

In which country is 'mixing the dough' the most difficult?

Each country has its own problems, sometimes unexpected ones. For example, India is running out of sand, and a sand mafia has emerged there who bribe the police to turn a blind eye on sand extraction in areas where it's prohibited. It's difficult, but interesting to work in India. We have worked with the Daimler company there, a producer of trucks and buses in the country, the famous German company Bosch, and Hero, an Indian company that manufactures motorcycles among others. They appreciate our ability to produce stable quality everywhere, in any country, under any conditions and with suppliers with very varied levels of technological discipline. They also appreciate the environmental aspect of our technology. We save 40% of CO₂ emissions produced by concrete floors, which is a lot, since the concrete is the biggest industrial CO₂ polluter, responsible for 7% of global CO₂ emissions.

I know that you have other clients that you could boast of ...

Volvo – we worked with them in Gothenburg and in the Chinese city of Chengdu, where the holding was building a plant for the production of the S90 sedan. For the past ten years we have been the only company in Northern Europe to whom IKEA has entrusted to make its floors. Another one of our clients is Magna from Detroit, a huge company that produces parts for General Motors, Ford and other automotive giants. We made floors for the Polaris company from Minneapolis,

producer of snowmobiles and jet skis. We are working with the logistics company DSV and the JYSK distribution network, internationally. The list is endless; overall, 15 million square metres of our floors have been laid in different countries.

What other countries do you intend to 'conquer'?

We are now focusing on the United States – we are present there in only 13 states, but we want to be in 40 main markets there. We want to work in the UK – I think that after Brexit the United Kingdom, due to the complication of the import procedures, will need more warehouses, therefore, more floors. We want to expand our activities in the Middle East, relying on our extremely successful experience in Israel – our floors there are now the most popular ones.

Are there any other development vectors, besides the geographical ones?

We are also dealing with foundations, for example, we are collaborating with the Ikano Group, an IKEA affiliate that constructs 5-7-story buildings. We are constantly improving our concrete technology in a laboratory supervised by Dr Rolands Cepuritis, who defended his doctor's thesis on concrete at NTNU (the Norwegian University of Science and Technology) in Trondheim.

We are also training people to work with our concrete in other countries. I cannot give exact orders to specialists from South Africa on what to do in each particular situation. But we can teach them the technology and the art of leadership enabling them to make independent and correct decisions.

In what direction, in your opinion, should the Latvian economy develop?

I think that the government should, above all others, support export producers. Firstly, the market size of Latvia and the world are incomparable, and companies entering the world market have a chance to scale really large. Secondly, exporting poor quality products *a priori* will not work – in conditions of intense competition, no one will buy them. So, by providing support to those who have already made their way abroad, the government will automatically support the best producers who have a shot at becoming large business.

What, in your opinion, is the key to the success of Primekss?

It rests on three pillars. We have always tried to see opportunities in problems. In fact, we started with this – poor concrete under epoxy floors was our problem and it turned out to be our best chance. I still believe that problems should always be viewed from a different angle, one should see opportunities behind them. It is only creative people that see the solutions, so our business strategy must have great people, they are more important than technology. We try to find the best people around the world, train and educate them, and then give them a chance to work independently in an interesting and dynamic team. Our third trump card is the ability to keep going and not stop. Difficulties and crises have always happened and always will. Faced with them, one can give up and do nothing, or one can grow and go to a new level. Primekss definitely opts for the second way.



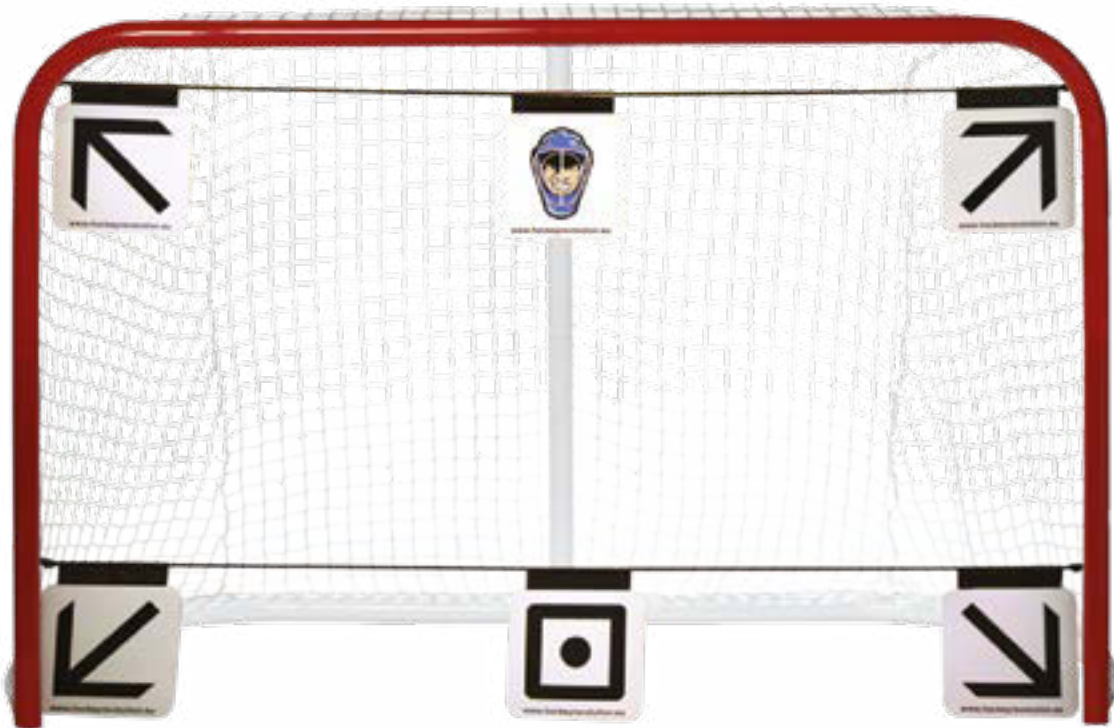


SPORT REVOLUTION – A SMART PASS

It is safe to say that the Sport Revolution company is in the world business championship league. Their hockey training aids, manufactured in Latvia, are used by world-renowned athletes to improve their skills. Meanwhile, the innovation of My Floorball Passer has made the company the leading floorball aids manufacturer in the industry. Jānis Leitāns, the co-owner of Sport Revolution, talks about his team's formula for success and his future perspective.

Text by Ērika Šmeļkova

Nowadays, when people are beginning to wonder more and more about what the limits of human abilities in sports are, different devices that improve athletes' technique and physical abilities play an increasingly important role. One of these tools is training equipment, and world-famous brands employ the best experts for their invention just to offer something new. One must have a special talent and vision to get into this Olympus of competition. Sport Revolution, which manufactures 27 different products – aids for hockey, field hockey and floorball, and now also removable sports surfaces –, exports them to 27 countries. These include European, US and Canadian markets, where hockey is extremely popular. The aids are designed for both professionals and beginners. In addition to recognition at international exhibitions, the latest Sport Revolution trophies include the Export and Innovation Award «Best Small Exporter».



How did you manage to create a kind of revolution in the training aids business?

We invest great resources in innovations that we try to turn into new products with the idea of being a step ahead of our competitors. Probably the most important aspect is the fact that co-owner Pēters Sutta and I are both former hockey players. We use professional experience to create new training aids that help different levels of players develop their individual skills. Not only do they improve results, but also the skills that help to avoid collisions and injuries during the game.

You have a number of patents, tell us more about what goes on behind the scenes in the creative process?

We try to involve the employees of the company in the process of product development as they know the production possibilities best. We also gather feedback from our customers – this allows us to find out the latest developments, trends and reviews

from players and coaches. After an event at the International Sports Exhibition (ISPO), where we saw a copy of our product at the Chinese stall, we are now trying to protect our innovations so that this situation does not happen again.

What is the designing process like, how important are the materials and what are the trends in this respect?

Most of our customers are young players who want modern designs. Since Sport Revolution products are for professional use, the load on the training aids is excessive and the materials must be extremely durable and of good quality to be able to serve well. And we provide it all.

Which of your products are currently most in demand?

My Floorball Passer is very popular as it is the only floorball passer in the world. This is one of our most successful innovations, enabling us to be the leading company in the floorball industry. Importantly, Sport Revolution

products can be used with our mobile training apps – a unique added value. Our training methodology is also used by professional NHL coaches.

Which of your own products do you prefer to use yourselves?

One of our staff trains new hockey players and uses our training aids in the process. Many world-famous athletes use our training aids, but Latvian athletes include Kaspars Daugaviņš, Artūrs Kulda, and Miks Indrašis. This summer, our training aids were used in training camps organized by Harijs Vītoliņš and Oskars Bārtulis.

Are you not afraid of the prospect that it will soon be possible to print almost anything on a 3D printer?

We are not afraid of new technologies; I could even say that they inspire us. We are an advanced brand with the ambitious goal of becoming the leading training aids manufacturer and training experts company not only in floorball, but also in ice hockey and field hockey.

” Being a jury member in different competitions has not only been great fun, but also educational at the same time. I do a lot of research on the Latvian economy at a high level – GDP, inflation, unemployment. Also, I closely follow the development of these sectors – changes in their share, product portfolios. It is important to know all of this, but at the same time you need to understand how these numbers come about. The creation of added value depends on very complex and interesting processes at the company level, as well as the ability to create products, manage production, and persuade customers. Generalization regarding economic development has value, but it can’t explain everything, you need to understand the details. Often, the greatest business successes occur where seemingly universal truths have stopped working. Our economy is full of surprises, so I’m looking forward to the next contest!”

PĒTERIS STRAUTIŅŠ,

member of the Jury,

Economist at Luminor Bank AS

Latvian branch

” The Competition brings out the talents, stories of success or, more precisely, of will and ability. Often, people do not even recognize these companies because their outlets are mainly abroad. However, people need to be informed about them and they must be acknowledged as they help to promote the prosperity of this country and inspire others. The area of innovation in Latvia is currently underappreciated, but from time to time good ideas pop up, and the Jury happens to come across these ideas. And Latvia also has its advantages, for example, great ideas emerge by combining engineering and information technology with the love of music - even the world's attention can then be attracted by innovative solutions - sound enhancement and creation tools, microphones, sound processing software, etc.”

AGNESE RUTKOVSKA,
member of the Jury,
Chief Economist of the
Macroeconomic Analysis Division,
Monetary Policy Department
at the Bank of Latvia

Business philosophy and ambitions of UPB in times of change

The success and image of UPB serve as an example of how to develop business in Latvia and become a significant player in international markets. Unlike many successful businesses, which keep the key to their success a secret, specialists of UPB share their experience, teach, how to retain human values alongside technical and creative solutions and numbers and how to fit into the changing trends of the modern world. In this interview, Dainis Bērziņš, the chairman of the board of UPB, tells us about the achievements and future prospects.

Text by Ērika Šmeļkova



The activities and development of UPB have always been based on the principle of taking the broader view – to the context of current worldwide trends. Long-term achievements in all areas are based on intense work, and this is also the case with UPB. We always keep in mind that the world is changing, and the fact that it's good at the moment cannot be taken for granted. Current trends have to be followed by being able to adapt and look for new solutions.

What significant facts and events characterise the activities and image of UPB?

In the beginning UPB was a small bureau of architects who had a broad view. In the course of time the company was extended with new areas – construction, manufacturing of windows, doors, ready-mixed concrete, reinforced concrete and metal structures, energy and mechanical engineering solutions, and now also with IT solutions. During the development of the UPB group each new direction has served as an addition to those already existing, giving increasingly higher value added to the end product. It is truly a united group of companies which works together in synergy. For example, traditionally, a walled structure is built, windows are assembled and the wall finishing is carried out at construction sites, whereas we manufacture a finished element with windows and finishing that are already integrated. This finished product only has to be assembled. By doing this it is possible to ensure higher quality because all operations are completed at the factory under strict control, without the influence of weather conditions, and also saving a lot of time. It is a significant added value for a customer, and we have all the competences required to create such products. Nowadays we can see that buildings are becoming technologically more complex, therefore it

will be increasingly more difficult to assess the qualitative performance for a number of tasks.

UPB has grown from a small bureau of architects into an industrial group. How do you see the future of the company?

In the future, we see UPB as an international industrial group of companies. From a regional Northern European player we will become a company with global presence. We are now on the verge of achieving this objective. However, the most important thing is not the geographical aspect, but the ability to create products and solutions which make the construction sector more efficient. Doing something without a higher target is not wise; we want to do something that gives value not only to us or our customers, but also globally to the sector in general.

There is a concept called the American dream. Can we also speak about the Latvian dream?

I don't think that dreams have a nationality. To achieve something truly noteworthy one should dream of goals which are much higher to achieve than appear possible. This is also the spirit of UPB – to set goals that are really ambitious, and then work together to achieve them.

Has UPB had any special projects?

We have had projects we are proud of in each group of products and services, and some projects have served as a turning point in our development. In the UPB group we are the proudest of the objects where as many of our companies and specialists as possible have been involved. One such object in Latvia was the cogeneration plant, Veckroģeļi, where almost all the companies in the UPB group were involved – our architects developed the design, the engineering network company constructed networks,

«We take a broader perspective of innovations – it is not only about a new product, but also the continuous improvement of existing products»



Park Tower office and apartment building in Karlsruhe, Germany

construction engineers carried out design of the building, metal, reinforced concrete and glass factories manufactured the structures, builders managed the construction design and assembly, and energy specialists designed and provided the power supply and production equipment for the plant as well as its current daily operation. Another notable project was the major combined 3-structure (glass + metal + concrete) project in Munksjö, Sweden – an 18-storey office building, where designing, manufacturing and assembly of glass, metal and reinforced concrete structures was carried out by our engineers, factories and assemblers. All the groups involved had to work together and the work had to be coordinated simultaneously because a time deviation during one stage of the work meant twice as much deviation at the commissioning of the object. We completed all the work within the planned deadlines and now combined 3-structure objects have become our daily routine. The next level we have conquered is the construction of high-rise buildings. The experience of UPB already comprises 13 such buildings, and currently a construction design is developed for a 36-storey building that will rise 144 metres high. In Sweden, buildings tend to become higher because, for example, in Gothenburg the quantity of building land is decreasing; therefore, the only direction for expanding is upwards.

The name of UPB is well known in Sweden now. How did you manage to convince the demanding Swedes?

In the early 2000s, we deliberately chose to direct our development towards Scandinavian and Western European markets. Back then, supply chains of Swedish construction market were local and international suppliers were a rarity. We were one of the first foreigners and it was a huge task to convince and prove that we were able to meet the requirements of local customers. It was a process where both sides learned to cooperate. Currently, the Swedish market is open for cooperation with foreign suppliers, and also our newly-introduced combined 3-structure offer has become a standard. We feel at home in the Swedish market and we have gained a good reputation among constructors; however, this was only achieved by doing a good job with an excellent team.

What are your future plans in terms of conquering markets? Is there any limit beyond which it is not worth expanding?

Geography or turnover should not be an end in itself. There will only be demand for products and services which create value added. The geographical limits for each product



Carlsberg Group head office in Copenhagen, Denmark

are determined by the aspect, what proportion of the end price is comprised by transportation, and the higher the value added a product is, and the further we can afford to transport it. Therefore, we are continuously working on new products which will be in demand in the future. Although recently completing a major project in Azerbaijan, our main focus of construction offers currently are Western countries. We actively sell construction of industrial objects in the British market which include all three types of structures, as well as engineering competence. The advantage of UPB is the fact that we have worked in Scandinavia with high environmental and labour protection requirements and where 3D designing is also a standard. At the same time, we also have extensive work experience in Germany, where there are high project management, detailing and legal requirements. We compile the accumulated experience and transfer it to other countries. Although in Great Britain there are other additional features, we are always ready to learn. Speaking about other products, our mechanical engineering products can now be found in all continents of the world, except Antarctica. There is a huge potential for our IT solutions in the construction area, for which the logistics component is of minor significance. The same can be said about the competence of our engineers and general constructors.

Which direction are modern building materials developing? Will climate change and ecological standards change architecture and construction methods in the future?

In the construction sector there is an ever-present development of both building materials and working methods. UPB has been operating in the Scandinavian market for more than 14 years and this region is among the most developed in terms of sustainability. We have also been involved in developing various energy efficient solutions; an EPD certificate has been awarded to our reinforced concrete structures, which allows us to follow the process of product development and use raw materials. We have extensive experience that we can transfer to other regions.

In the future architecture we see that the power of biological mechanisms will be used increasingly, combining it with sensors and opportunities offered by artificial intelligence.

How much do you follow technological miracles?

At the present moment it is clear that the construction sector should become more efficient, and technology is the underlying aspect of this. In our factories we introduce devices and systems which reduce the amount of manual work, giving our employees the possibility to do tasks with higher value added. We have also established an IT company, *Alto 4.0*, where solutions for raising efficiency of the construction sector are developed, for example, a company resources planning system has been created which integrates all cycle stages starting from sales, designing and manufacturing, up to assembly at the construction site. We are now selling this system to other industrial manufacturers worldwide.

«Our mechanical engineering products can now be found in all continents of the world, except Antarctica»

Are innovations one of the magic wands of our economy?

We take a broader perspective of innovations – it is not only about a new product, but also the continuous improvement of existing products. Development and innovations are the foundation of company survival because the environment is constantly changing and if we want to stay among the best we have to keep up with these changes.

I would rather call it a necessity dictated by the external environment. On a global scale our country is a relatively small market, which means that a large number of manufacturers/service providers who operate in Latvia can only reach a certain level of development, and further growth can only be achieved by moving outside the local market. Each of such exporting companies directly or indirectly facilitate growth of other companies around it, whereas innovations should be viewed in a broader context – both as new products and services, and as improvements of technologies and processes, and here everyone can choose their own way. We build our development mostly on products and services with a higher added value.

What are the major challenges in Latvia to develop and fit into the general global scene?

At an entrepreneur level the greatest challenge and, at the same time opportunity for Latvia, is the small local market. This also means that the majority of market participants are relatively small, with limited resources for development. I think that Latvian companies have a great potential for cooperation within the sector and joint offer in export markets. This is the so-called cluster method, and UPB actively supports this idea, combining the offer of metal and mechanical engineering companies into a single solution in the global market.

Frequently, company managers devote so much energy to their work that they don't have time for their private life or hobbies. What is your experience and conclusions?

In the short term a person can work with a heavy workload and achieve amazing results, but this is only possible for a limited time. In the long term a person needs balance and has to devote their time to the body, mind and soul.



Stockholm University Campus Albano



Munksjostaden office building in Jönköping, Sweden

VIZULO: LIGHTS FROM LATVIA



The company, VIZULO, in Iecava, manufactures indoor and outdoor luminaires. They illuminate the Porsche building in the Netherlands, Maastricht, and the Freedom Monument in Riga; they are used in France, Kurshevela resort, Mežaparks and Riga airport. In the first seven months of 2019, about 95% of VIZULO's turnover came from exports. The company's major export markets are Israel, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands, Finland, Estonia and Hungary. Chairman of the board Jānis Zeltiņš shares the success story of VIZULO.

Text by Dagnija Leitāne, Jekaterina Kima

What inspired you to switch from lighting to manufacturing?

By selling industrial and street lighting, my wife Linda and I have gained knowledge of LED lighting, which was previously a novelty. We wanted to add more value to business entrepreneurship and realized that we were ready to take a risk and start producing luminaires. By producing the luminaires ourselves we are in a better position to control technical solutions, quality and delivery times.

How did you manage to increase turnover so quickly and purposefully?

The ability to create products that meet international demand allows us to accelerate our pace of development. Currently, we produce street, industrial and indoor luminaires. Ac-

tive work on product development, increasing product range, participating in international exhibitions and regular business trips allow us to increase our turnover every year.

What are the production volumes and turnover for this year?

In the first half of the year, VIZULO had a turnover of approximately EUR 4.3 million. With seasonal activity in this business and much more activity in the second half of this year, we plan to reach a turnover of EUR 12 million this year. In the first 6 months we have produced 29755 luminaires.

What are the goals for further development of VIZULO?

We plan to work in existing markets and actively participate in exhibitions

to enter new markets. It should be noted that a large part of our trade is located outside the EU, which is very different from other Eastern European luminaire producers operating in the EU area.

What were the most interesting projects?

The Illumination of Santa Claus in Rovaniemi, Kuwait Motor City F1 Track, and Kurzevele Ski Track.

What innovations in the lighting market are worth focusing on?

The concept of human-centric lighting is widely evolving in the World – the tone of the light changes according to the day cycle, mimicking the change in sunlight. For example, in the middle of the day (in the active part), the lumi-



naire emits a colder light that encourages work, and in the evening – warm and yellow, which calms and relaxes. Numerous studies have been carried out into the effects of lighting on quality of life and health. In developed countries, businesses, schools and medical institutions are now paying close attention to this.

How do you adapt to global eco-trends?

We try to reduce the amount of plastic in our packaging – we mainly use cardboard and, as far as possible, we also use recyclable materials.

What does a noteworthy luminaire design today include?

In the case of VIZULO, it has a minimalist design and clean lines. The luminaire must be aesthetically pleasing and at the same time functional.

What do you think is the key to the success of the Export and Innovation Award-winning product «The Nightingale»?

It is definitely a combination of quality, price and functional design.

Who are the company's biggest competitors in the global market?

They are mostly large multinationals with a turnover of several billion.

What makes it possible to compete with the advantages of big companies in tenders?

All five values of our company: flexibility, speed, quality, design and desire to win.

How long will the collaboration with RTU alumni and research institutes continue? What successful projects have been developed jointly?

The cooperation has been going on since the foundation of the company – RTU has educated all the engineers of our R&D department. I think the attraction of young engineers is also the most important benefit of VIZULO. We are pleased that Riga Technical University is able to prepare high-level specialists. It should also be borne in mind that much also depends on the students themselves and their desire to continuously learn, and learn something new.

How can the Iecava plant compete with intensive plants elsewhere, for example in China?

This is a great job and we are just at the beginning of the road. We try to automate and digitize most processes, read the literature of world-renowned established manufacturers, attend courses, and so do our staff. It must be clear that in Latvia

we cannot attract employees with experience in this field, so the only way is through training. In general, a large number of Latvian manufacturers are not efficient enough, including VIZULO – it is necessary to increase productivity and added value for each employee. Currently, we are closely monitoring production work and see that we can increase production volume and speed, not by employing more people, but by increasing efficiency. At the same time, we are developing various IT solutions, and now all workers (luminaire operators) must be able to perform basic computer functions to report the start and end of a specific work order to our ERP system. Over time, we also plan to add assembly instructions, electrical circuit diagrams, and other work materials.

What lessons have you learned during the six years of your company?

Nowadays, technology is developing so fast that it is necessary to learn continuously – what used to be current 2 years ago is outdated today. You need to visit export markets and technology fairs – only by doing that can you see and understand the demand, the competition, changes in technology development. It is not enough for employees to travel; the management also needs to be moved.

BRAIN GAMES: FACTORS OF WORLDWIDE SUCCESS

Popularisation of board games in the digital age is a risky idea, but at the same time it warms our hearts, for its goal is real communication and a positive exchange. Could anyone have imagined fifteen years ago that Latvia would supply board games to more than 40 countries around the world? Even the founder of Brain Games Publishing, Egils Grasmanis, could hardly have assumed the possibility. However, today the company's flagship game ICECOOL is the winner of many international awards, and participants from Germany, Poland, Austria, Great Britain, Canada, France, Japan and other countries participate in this game's World Championship. Text by Marianna Hodash



They say the best job is a hobby you get paid for. Is this true in your case?

Absolutely, it all started with a hobby. Back in 2004, my friends and I came across a board game called «Catan» – it was astonishing to see what board games are capable of. The first time I played Catan, we were playing it for

more than 24 hours and I even skipped work. It was Pāvils Jurjāns idea to try to introduce this game to a wider audience in Latvia by localising it first in Latvia and later in Estonia and Lithuania. That is how «Prāta Spēles» was founded in 2004 by Pāvils Jurjāns, Reinis Rubenis and myself.

Didn't you think it was too risky to do something so analog in the age of the Internet?

In terms of sales, board games are the most promising segment of the toy market worldwide. They help us socialize and that is one of the facts that makes them so attractive. Board games can very easily connect generations – I can play a board game with my kids and my mother and we all can have fun. Nowadays there are thousands of games being created every year and the industry is booming. Human communication is exactly what we lost with the development of digital technologies and now it has become particularly valuable, it's now something we are seeking again. Computer and mobile games can not really pro-

vide us with the same socializing level as board games.

Today, new technologies are being integrated almost everywhere. Are board games an exception?

More and more board games have companion apps available that make it easier to enjoy or play the physical game. We are always on the look out for technologies and the options they offer to enhance and improve the playing experience. Many years ago we launched Logic Cards – physical brain teaser cards with an option to solve it using the Augmented Reality APP.

We have also invested in a Finnish start-up APP called DIZED. This app may be a game changer in the gaming industry in a few years. Not many people enjoy reading the rules; the Dized App will teach you the rules step by step by playing the first game in an interactive mode.

When did you start publishing games yourself?

First, we localised and distributed popular board games in the Baltics,



the ICECOOL games are in the top 15 rankings for children's games. However, we also publish family and party games; in August we are going to re-release our next hit, TEAM3 – a party game for teens and an excellent team-building game.

What, in your opinion, is the secret of ICECOOL's success?

The game has a very unique layout that we call «Box in a Box», which immediately draws your attention, as well as an entertaining design and a fun theme. Secondly, its mechanics are simple and easy to learn, which is very important.

There are a few factors that make up a successful game: it has to be unique, have simple rules, and be replayable. There are thousands of games published every year, but people always enjoy unique and simple games. All our this year's new games are simple and small.

In the Export and Innovation Awards, organized by LIAA and the Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia, you received a prize for the best import-substituting products.

Yes, it was a very pleasant recognition from the local market. Unfortunately, in our region and in our segment there aren't many opportunities in terms of awards. LIAA helps us take part in international exhibitions, which is a great export support.

Imagine you met a person who has never played a board game, how would you convince them to try?

Most people still have the stereotype of board games being something childish, but I can assure you there is a huge variety of interesting games, and a possibility for each one of us to find the right one. My favorite game is still «Catan», and I encourage everyone to play it at least once. Board games are perfect tools for socializing, team building and getting to know others better. Playing board games is often like diving into a different world where decisions and actions that might not be possible in real life can be tested and enjoyed. Board games are the new way of entertainment and socialising.

then in 2007 we opened the first board game store in Riga. The next stage was founding the Brain Games publishing house. We first engaged in the export of games in 2012.

How does it all happen? Do game authors contact you offering you a chance to purchase prototypes?

Yes, game designers and authors send their ideas for games through our website form or pitch us their ideas when we meet at the conventions. If we like the concept and the mechanics of a game, we take the prototype and do some more testing. Once we sign a contract with the game designer, it usually takes about 2 years until a proper launch of the game. On average, we publish 4-5 original new games every year.

Do you have competitors in the Baltics?

In terms of distribution, there are of course several players who distribute games and brainteasers, but there are not many companies that work on publishing original board games and sell

them worldwide. Wolff Designa (Latvia) has done a great job launching their games on Kickstarter. 2D6 (Estonia) are publishing more serious games. Logis (Lithuania) are well known for their quality kids games. And we are all good friends. In general, the board game industry is very friendly.

Tell us about the projects you are especially proud of.

Our most popular game is definitely ICECOOL. This game is also special because of the fact that it was designed by four team members of our company. When we launched the game in 2016 at the UK Games Expo in Birmingham it was awarded the UK Games Expo Best Children's Game. A year later ICECOOL was nominated for the «Kinderspiel Des Jahres» award in Germany – this is the most prestigious award ceremony – the Oscars of the board game industry. We were lucky enough to win this important award, along with over 20 other international awards. ICECOOL is already a brand itself. In 2018 we published ICECOOL2 and Pyramid of Pengqueen – both in the ICECOOL universe. All three of

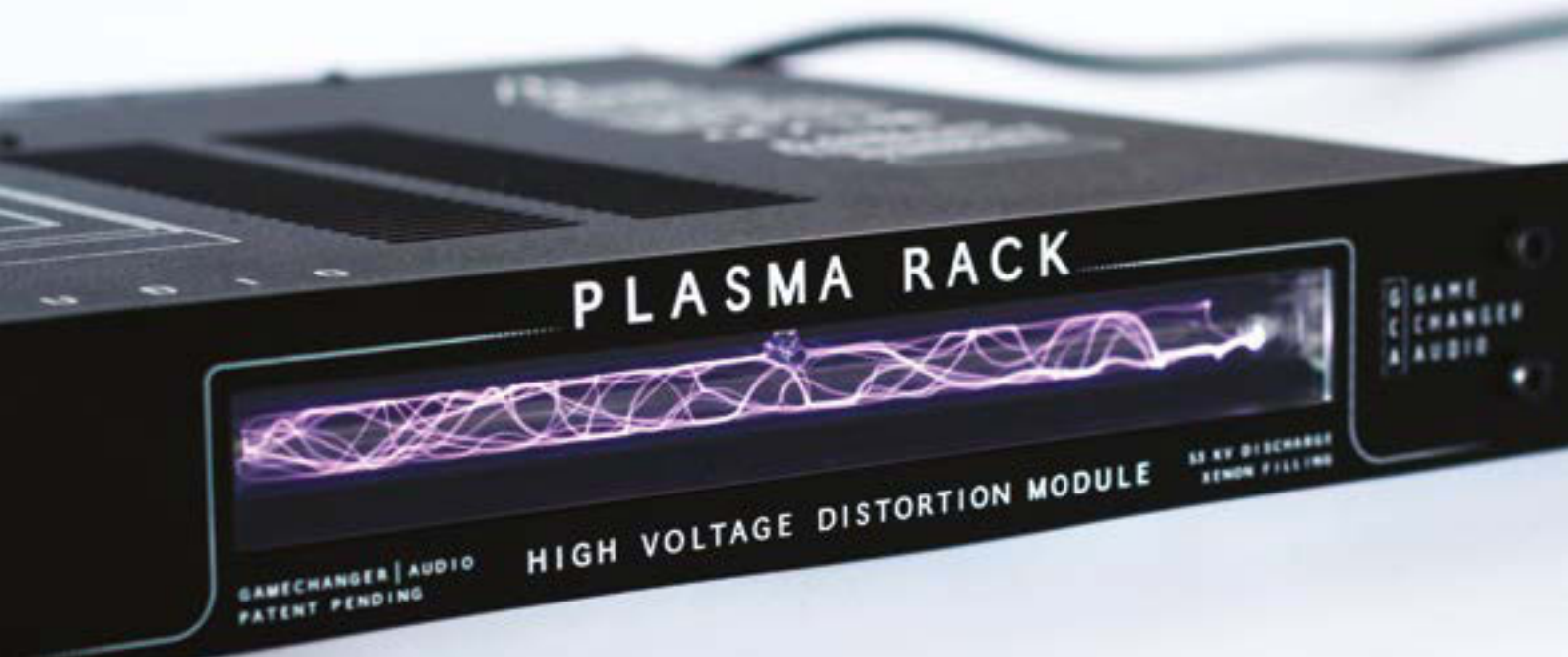
Latvians who have changed the world of music

The Latvian company, Gamechanger Audio, produces pedals for creating previously unseen audio effects, used in their concerts by legendary and just-emerging famous musicians. The first prototype, the implementation of which was managed through the imagination of engineers, was created here in Riga's kitchen and rapidly conquered the international music market.

Now, three years later, the company continues to surprise with new ideas. Matīss Tazāns, a drummer and the marketing and public relations manager of Gamechanger, allowed us to look behind the scenes of musical innovations.

Text by Dagnija Leitāne





«This thing was a true discovery for me,» admitted Richard Kruspe, the guitarist of Rammstein in one of his interviews, holding in his hand a Gamechanger Audio pedal Plasma, which was recently added to the musician's collection. This renowned audio sound transformation tool was given to him as a birthday present from friends of the legendary guitarist who had personally contacted the creators of this tool – musicians-engineers from Latvia who have rapidly entered the international music market in the course of just a few years. Currently, the circle of fans of this tool involves such famous musicians as Roger Waters (Pink Floyd), Rolling Stones, as well as the Latvian jazz musician Deniss Paškēvičs.

Previously, approximately 10–15 categories of sound effects were widely represented in the music market, offering transformations only for fine nuances of sound. The first product of Gamechanger Audio – Plus Pedal for sound extension – offered completely new opportunities for guitarists: to «freeze» the desired chord. This idea emerged in the kitchen of the company founder Ilja Krūmiņš, and it took two years of persevering work and two graduates of RTU, Kristaps Kaļva and Mārtiņš Meļķis, who turned his idea into reality. The kitchen phase was followed by moving to the garage, together with six team members, unexpectedly huge success and a new idea – the pedal Plasma, favoured by Rammstein, for complete transformation of guitar sound, based on the principles of conducting electricity voltage. The garage with wood heating became the main workshop where during winter the first person to arrive also cleaned snow from the driveway and lit the stove. A successful crowdfunding campaign was launched from the garage, which provided Gamechanger Audio with the required funding for the development of the new pedal within the first minute of the campaign.

The pedals were launched for more extensive sales in 2017, and the majority of them are exported to the United States and Western Europe. At the present moment, the company offers three innovative sound generation solutions – Plus for sound extension, Plasma for audio sound transformation and Motor Synth, an 8-engine system that creates a high fre-

quency audio signal for synthesizers through rotation. The industry is eagerly awaiting what new solutions the minds of Gamechanger Audio will come up with.

How did your passion for music start?

10 years ago Ilja and I started to play in the band Acid Rain, which was later renamed to The Big Bluff. I was the drummer of this band. We didn't have a plan B, we wanted to be musicians. Sometime later we got bored of playing in Latvia because the number of places for concerts is very limited, and performing at the same places became monotonous. So, we decided to move the band to London. I got my bachelor's degree, took my things, and we went on an adventure.

What is your greatest musical inspiration?

We found inspiration in the classic rock of the 70s – Led Zepelin, Deep Purple and Jimi Hendrix. In the beginning we had a similar style of music, trying to imitate these musicians, but over the course of time we realised that we wanted to create something of our own. Then we started listening to older American styles of music of the 50s: rock 'n roll blues, rockabilly, country. We started to mix these styles with the energy of classic rock.

For some period you were musicians in London.

How did the big leap to establishing Gamechanger Audio happen?

I lived in London for two and a half years, and Ilja stayed for a bit longer to complete his music school studies. At that time our bassist had already returned to Latvia, so only two of us played in the band: I played drums and Ilja played guitar. When we got to a guitar solo during classic blues songs the rhythm guitar was missing. A guitarist alone cannot ensure full-featured sound. Then Ilja mentioned that it would be great if there was a pedal which could freeze a chord by pressing it, thus ensuring that the chord continues, while the guitarist plays on top of it. At that time he had an arm injury so he couldn't sit the exam, but the school adminis-

tration allowed him to take it by developing a business idea related to the music industry. When Ilja returned to Latvia he remembered this idea and while he was helping his friend, a bass player, to move, he became acquainted with Kristaps (Kalva, production manager, – author's remark), who turned out to be both a musician and an engineer. Kristaps liked Ilja's idea and he promised to make a prototype within one week. Instead of the promised one week, two weeks passed, then six months, one year, and another year. Kristaps invited his friend, a band mate and one of the present co-owners, Mārtiņš Meļķis, to help him. All three of them worked hard every day from six o'clock in the evening to two o'clock in the morning, getting up in the morning to go to their jobs. Two years passed building the first prototype in Ilja's kitchen in the evenings. During this period the team was joined by the fourth member, Didzis Dubovskis, who helped with promoting the business plan.

When the prototype was ready, the guys decided that they should visit the largest American music products exhibition, NAMM, which was taking place in Los Angeles. Another acquaintance, trombonist Vairis Nartišs, who makes wind instruments in Latvia, had acquired a stand at the exhibition, and they were able to display their prototype in a small corner of his exhibition stand. Since that moment, mass media attention and recognition has been rising. Even before the exhibition a homepage was launched, on which the PLUS pedal could be pre-ordered; this website turned out to be a great success. Quite a few orders were made instantly. After returning to Latvia the guys left their jobs and completely focused on developing the company. That was then when I joined the team.

When did you start to believe in this idea?

After the exhibition – when I saw that this pedal was really needed. Before that, none of us knew whether it would be interesting to someone, and then an order was made, for example, by some guy in Australia, who had accidentally dis-

covered a video about this pedal. Then we realised that the idea was worth it.

Is it possible to achieve a unique sound in modern music?

Yes, it happens all the time. Musicians always love to hear new things and look for something new. If it has been possible for many decades, it will also be possible in the future. This is exactly what we strive to achieve, and that's why we have called ourselves Gamechanger Audio. Maybe everything does not happen as quickly as when already existing sound effects are manufactured, but we plan to launch products just like Tarantino does with his movies – rarely, but giving huge and pleasant excitement. People are already starting to wonder what will follow. And so far this is paying off. When we presented our new product Motor Synth the following day we received a message from Jean Michel Jarre, the French electronics legend, who holds a Guinness world record for the most attended concert – 3.5 million spectators in Moscow. Jarre wrote that he likes our synthesizer a lot. Although it is not on sale yet, we sent him one of the first three prototypes, believing that he will promote the synthesizer.

Is the global music industry responsive to newcomers?

In our case, yes. Of course, one has to prove oneself to get into this circle. At the first industry exhibition we were only four guys who travelled there with a single product to stand somewhere in the corner of the department of wind instruments, not even in the guitar pedal department. After the third exhibition, which took place last winter in Los Angeles, I can say that we have fitted in the guitar pedal industry very well. We have established quite friendly relations with other companies, I guess because they appreciate the fact that we do things differently to others. It seems that we are just interesting – some mad guys from Europe who are doing something strange.



The fact that we are from Latvia even helps – factories are within reach, monitoring of the manufacturing process is much easier, so there are far less errors than when sending a batch from China. We are satisfied with where we are located.

How did you manage to conquer the foreign market from Latvia?

We have come to realise that it is not important where you are located. I think that Latvia is equally competitive, and the people in the team are the most important. Our team consists of very smart and nice people who know how to do things. All other aspects are secondary. The fact that we are from Latvia even helps – factories are within reach, monitoring of the manufacturing process is much easier, so there are far less errors than when sending a batch from China. We are satisfied with where we are located. The only obstacle is the cost of travel, for example, when going to exhibitions in the United States, and the time spent travelling.

Last year, the panel of judges in the «Export and Innovation Awards» announced Plus Pedal as the most innovative product of the year. What was the greatest challenge related to this?

It has quite a complicated «brain». Plus Pedal has an integrated powerful computer which has to process a sound very quickly. Probably, the most complicated task was to make sure that this process is smooth and clean. The basic principle is that the internal computer records each sound played and ensures that when pressing the pedal the specific note from the given signal is extended, playing it several times. As a result of this process a smooth sound is created from one note or chord. This process is quite complicated, and we had to learn a lot. It has to be taken into consideration that this was our first product and the starting process is always the hardest. Actually, this pedal, in its current appearance, is similar to that created back then in the kitchen, except with some minor improvements in functionality. Nothing similar had been created before, so we didn't have any books to find instructions. Now, there is a corner for engineers at the office where new ideas can be developed. We hope that it will raise productivity, because the engineers in our team are very smart in their field.

Are all the team members musicians?

Most of them. It is one of the preconditions for selecting employees, so that there is no need to teach basic knowledge of music. Some are higher level musicians, some are amateurs, some others maybe play a few songs around the Christmas tree, but all of them are related to music.

When did you realise that the idea had been successful?

We felt it most vividly at a Rolling Stones concert in the Olympic Stadium in Berlin, where our six-man team at that time had been invited. We spent two days there. Their guitar technician showed us the whole equipment and was very interested in our products. On the second day we installed our pedals and the concert started. It was the last song, Satisfaction, the most famous, which, in fact, made the distortion (sound signal distortion) type of pedals very popular. Also, the Plasma pedal represents this type. Suddenly, one screen shows Keith Richards, another Mick Jagger, a third screen Ronnie Wood, and the fourth, a zoomed-in shot of the Gamechanger Plasma Pedal. It was a moment when we all screamed and gave high fives to each other. This moment was recorded by many spectators, and it can also be viewed on YouTube.

Which musicians have been exciting to meet?

Each of us has had a meeting with musicians that has stayed in our memory the most. I remember walking down the street and having a conversation with the guitarist of a less known band, Unknown Mortal Orchestra, which I was listening to non-stop at that time. I have also met people who have participated in significant events in music history. For example, during the last trip to New York we met the producer, Martin Bisi, who has recorded an album by Sonic Youth and has collaborated with Iggy Pop and The Ramones. Such a special moment has happened to each of us with a different favourite musician, but all of us have had meetings which we later asked ourselves: «Do you understand, what's just happened?!» At that particular moment we pretend to be calm because we want to look like a normal person, but actually we are sweating from the excitement.

What is on your playlist?

I listen to old music a lot, and currently I am also passionate about Royal Blood, because they are our artists. They performed at Positivus 2019, using our pedal. Another great band is Band of Skulls; we made a joint video with them recently and have become our friends.

Do you have time for making music yourselves?

The band's activities are on hold; however, we think that we should return to making music. Thanks to the company, we have gained new experience and learned a lot. We could generate something truly interesting using this experience. Our team has many people who could play in the band. Gamechanger Audio band – it would be cool!

MOTOR SYNTH 

ARP

POLY



148.5 184.0 154.2 172.7

PRESETS
MENU

BACK
SAVE

▶ PLAY
● REC



4dB/BP
24dB/LP

12dB/BP
12dB/HP



OFF
FREQ

MOD

PITCH
TREM

ONANCE

LAUMA FABRICS – A CONVINCING HANDWRITING

Liepāja is not only a city where the wind is born, but also a place where extraordinarily beautiful lace and fabrics for linen are created. Lauma Fabrics, which has been in business for 45 years, is a prime example of how to survive times of rapid change, prosper and bring the name of Latvia out to the world. Edijs Egliņš, chairman of the board, tells us about the company's success and future plans.

Text by Ērika Šmeļkova



Lauma Fabrics has a very impressive production area of 27 ha. With about 470 employees, the company is one of the largest employers in Latvia and the largest manufacturer of linen in Eastern Europe. It exports 85% of its production to more than 20 different countries, and its materials are bought by more than 200 laundry brands worldwide. Lauma Fabrics manufactures a complete set of materials needed to make linen – knits, lace, ribbons, embroidery, molded cups. The whole production cycle – designing, knitting, weaving, dyeing – all belong under one roof.

How do you compete with countries with a long history of lace and linen production?

The production of linen and lace has ancient roots in Germany, France, Italy, Austria and other old European countries. Over the past twenty years many factories have been relocated from Europe to Asia. Each manufacturer has its own different handwriting, and Lauma Fabrics has always gone its own way and never copied anyone. We distribute our products in both Eastern and Western markets, adapting our collections according to them. Our lace patterns feature both romantic flowers and geometry, but overall, the lace of Lauma Fabrics is more classic, functional, perfect for

everyday lingerie. We use only high quality, certified, European-made yarns and dyes.

How does the term innovation appear in the operation of your company?

Our company has a special development department with more than 10 employees – designers and technologists. They are responsible for developing new, innovative products. This process is long and laborious. To achieve the desired result, we experiment with patterns, threads, modes and technologies. Mechanics, knitters, weavers, thread-watchers and other professionals are also involved in the process. Innovation does not simply



mean a new design. Innovation means working with new threads, modes and technologies to develop an original product. In order to achieve the results intended by the designer, it is often necessary to look for non-standard equipment regulations that require a high degree of professionalism from the mechanics.

You export your products to countries with different traditions and cultures. To what extent do you adapt to their requirements?

We have a wide variety of customers from different countries and market segments. I can tell you, for example, that in the Russian market we sell

more lace with romantic floral designs in bright colors, but in the West more with geometric patterns in less bright colours. Modern linen manufacturers like transparent lace, while classic linen manufacturers prefer opaque lace. Lace patterns are heavily influenced by market trends, which are presented twice a year at Interfilie Paris. Our designers go there to gather ideas and ensure that our collections are up to date.

What are your upcoming upgrades?

The market is demanding ever-thinner, softer, more colourful and environmentally-friendly materials. We are actively investing in modernization to

meet this demand, and will continue to do so. This year, we purchased a new drying line for our products, which will cost a total of €1.5 million, and two knitting machines at a cost of over €1 million. The new drying line will make it possible to produce thinner and more flexible materials, consuming less energy. And the new knitting machines will help us to produce lace that we haven't produced before.

The target audience of your business is women. Do you understand what they really want?

It is impossible to understand that, but I am sure that both men and women love beautiful lingerie.

” This competition is very important for the country, especially at a regional level. We rarely hear good words, and bad ones we hear at every turn; in the news and on the Internet, which makes such a distressing scene that the only idea one gets is to leave the country. At this time we especially need information on the achievements of our compatriots. This competition demonstrates that many Latvians are achieving their goals, and a good example is the best sermon. As a teacher, I hope that the competition will inspire a lot of students, and we will rejoice many times at their success in the future.”

INGŪNA GULBE,
member of the Jury,
Head of the Agricultural Market
Development Department
at the Institute of Agricultural
Resources and Economics

” Talent and excellence are the driving forces of life. They are particularly important for small nations, which can only become great with excellence. It is therefore a pleasure to see once again that there are plenty of great minds in Latvia who want to turn knowledge into new products and challenge the world, leading the young David in his victory against the world’s Goliaths. Our role as Riga Technical University is to help them acquire world-class knowledge that allows Latvia to enter the highest league of technical excellence.”

INGARS ERINŠ,
member of the Jury,
Deputy Chairman of the Council
of Riga Technical University,
Vice-Rector for Finance

«Latvia is a fast adopter of change and innovation»

I met with LIAA director Andris Ozols on a sunny afternoon in his office for a cup of tea and a brief chat. Dressed casually that day, he was finishing a phone call when I entered the room. Enthusiastically discussing some chess game he had watched online the night before, he showed me to the chair. The phone call was soon over. We started talking... The tea ran cold but we didn't mind – what has supposed to be a brief chat evolved into a great talk. That kind of talk which keeps you uplifted for a week. That kind of talk which dives deep into the nature of Man, Latvian mentality, and binds together past, present and future.

Text by Olga Barreto Goncalves, Head of Magnetic Latvia Startup, LIAA



Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra
Investment and Development Agency of Latvia



Andris, in the hope of catching you off-guard, let me start big: where do you see our world going? Do you like what you see?

What a great warm-up question! Am I allowed to be somewhat philosophical? (smiles) You see, if we squeeze the 4.5-billion-history of planet Earth into the length of just one year so that the beginning of the planet's existence is January 1 and this very instance we are about to raise a glass of champagne to celebrate the last seconds of the year, we will realize that Man has showed up in the big picture just 23 minutes ago.

Now look at how much he has been able to accomplish. Walking through the generations, we've accumulated so much knowledge and invested so much effort into organizing ourselves, that we have subdued the world. I'm not quite sure it's a good thing – Y.N.Harari summarizes it brilliantly in his «Sapiens» and «Homo Deus» – but at this very moment we are standing, more powerful than ever before, on the verge of yet another industrial revolution but do we really know what to do with all that power?

To tell the truth, I have a feeling that in our pursuit of optimization, automation, efficiency, smartness and achievements, we have somewhat lost the purpose. Or let's rephrase it into a different question – have we ever had a true purpose? This is where, I hope, the world is going now – in the direction which would give us a sense of purpose. Also, a sense of belonging to the very planet we intruded 23 minutes ago.

I didn't succeed in intimidating you with the scale of that question. Very good. Let's bring it back to Latvia. How would you summarize the current state of affairs in our country? What trends do you witness? What do they make you think of the future?

If I needed to answer just in a few words, I would say: things are getting better. Full stop. But it's good I have a chance to expand on this.

You see, I believe, the state of things in a country is always better understood when put into perspective and compared with other countries. Looking at Latvia in the context of the European Union, we see a small country with a small population, with the size of the home market so small one can argue it's insignificant. Correct? Seems so. However, this parameter – size – has become quite an obsolete measure of potential success and prosperity. We no longer live in the Medieval world where the very chance of survival was dependant on how much land and resources you would have or the size of population you would be able to send to fight for you. The Big no longer eats the Small. The Fast eats the Slow. Flexibility and agility come first. And let me assure you: Latvia is a fast adopter of change and innovation. It might not strike you when you live in Latvia and see this and that thing not working, but when you zoom out and look at how fast new things can be lobbied, introduced and implemented

– you'd be surprised. That said, I believe, our future success is subject to the ability to change fast and sustainably better ourselves through that.

To continue the topic of change – can you elaborate on the essence of transformation in the context of our government? What has been changing recently?

The first thing I need to mention: the government's attitude towards technology and innovation has changed considerably over the last decade or so. We've fully embraced the need to innovate – we know that in the modern world, innovating or not is no longer a choice, it's a default-setting. The second thing, which naturally follows when the attitude is right – the government has started growing its capacity and competence to innovate. This is a no-joke process: it takes enormous resources and will, and above all – time. And time means patience.

What comes next, after you've got the competence to innovate, is understanding that you can't be everything to everyone and that you need to find a fine line between being big and being niche. It's a serious thinking process and involves deep understanding of what niches are up for grabs and what niches are worth grabbing. Our government has stepped into this process and it's yet another good piece of evidence that true change is happening.

Apart from our ability to adapt and change fast, what are other advantages we should be placing our bets on?

Our people. I hope I'm not the only person who thinks it's obvious that the people we have in this country are great, and the body of talent these people collectively represent is truly vast. I'm speaking of both technical and creative talent – we just happen to have a great mix of it. What I also want to throw into this mix is our culture and traditions, which lay foundation in how we live and how we do business. And this foundation is solid: our ethics are top-notch and the set of values we keep dear to our heart makes us trustworthy friends and reliable partners to deal with. I don't want to change the tangent of our conversation, but I need to say this – I often look at this through the prism of music.

Music? How so?

Exactly. Music. Latvian music heritage is unique, pure, genuine – there is no doubt about that and it's not something I need to prove. It's a well-established premise. Our music is diverse, complex, immense. Our music has high, the highest organization. So, what I'm convinced about is that people who could express themselves, and live through that of an elaborate system of music, can achieve whatever ambition they really put their mind to. We have this discipline in our DNA.

Another thing about us is we are honest. We are also open-minded and... I'm looking for a right word right now.



PHOTO JOHN SALVINO / UNSPLASH

Tolerant? Would that be the word?

No, that's not the word I would use – actually, it's never been in my dictionary. The very meaning of tolerance implies there is something you need to tolerate, that is – there is something that bothers and annoys you, but you make a conscious choice not to act on it. So you force yourself to be somewhat withdrawn from that... Forgive me for this digression.

What I meant was, we are very open-minded, and we are eager to embrace all things new. We don't judge and we mind our own business, in a good way.

So, I was talking about the talent, right? The issue now is that while we have a pool of great talent, we also face a lack of it. We need to attract more talent. Bad news, we are not the only one competing for the talent. Good news, Latvia has the right appeal for the talent. Strategically located at the intersection of West, East and North of Europe, Latvia offers a nurturing environment for the people. Our country is green, safe, culturally rich. It offers great quality of life. It is truly Magnetic Latvia – irresistible and true. Should we be able to send this message across and utilise this strong side of ours, we will win. With the current mobility which nowadays technology offers, talented people have the ultimate say in where they work. People don't follow jobs anymore, quite the opposite – jobs follow people. And they want to work where they feel good. Magnetic Latvia is the place for them.

Anything else we should work on? What is holding us back?

The first thing which comes to mind is the lack of praise culture in Latvia. See, there is absolutely no doubt that, as a country, Latvia is moving forward, and many great things are being done across all sectors – public, private, education, non-government. However, it often goes unnoticed. Our human – or is it Latvian? – nature takes precedence and we dwell on the mistakes of others, we complain and whine, we dismiss any brightness in the future. And let me tell you this – there is nothing wrong about complaining and talking openly when things go west. It actually takes some nerve and courage. However, it all becomes futile if it's not followed by action. There is only value in criticising if it sparks change; if it sparks just another wave of destructive criticism – please be aware, you've done no one any good.

On a positive side, I see that Latvian mentality has been changing. The ship of the so-called paradigm shift has sailed. We witness more people – I would especially emphasize our youth – taking agency of their own lives and the life of the country. These are the people who see flaws in the system and are ready to engage. We see this happening at many levels: all sectors are being taken by storm by intelligent young people who have the guts to speak up and trigger important change.

To my delight, it has also been happening to LIAA. It might not be obvious to the public, but we've seen a great number of these individuals, coming from different educational and

career backgrounds, and enabling LIAA to do more and to do better. This transformative power is truly inspiring, and as a Director of the Agency, my role is to harness this energy and guide it to the best of my ability.

It's very good you started talking about LIAA – that was my next question. You have been directing the Agency for the past 15 years. How about we do a little before-and-now comparison: if we look what LIAA was when you joined in and what it is today, what do we see?

It certainly has been a great journey! Over the last decade, the role of the Agency has evolved into a holistic support system for entrepreneurs of all calibres, types and mindsets. The old LIAA was a policy-implementing agency with the main function to ease the administrative burden: we helped keeping the machine bureaucracy well-oiled and smoothly running, that's about it. There were no expectations for us to be grassroots and hands-on. Today, LIAA is so much more! Just to remind you, the Agency's two main functions: we attract foreign investors to Latvia and help our entrepreneurs scale-up and go beyond Latvia. So, foreign direct investments and export. It's really that simple – all we do fits into the said scope. However, the way we approach these functions has gone through a radical change.

Take investments for example: the business logic behind attracting foreign capital is no longer the same as 10 years ago when we measured success by the sheer nominal inflow of capital into the country. Today's LIAA says: investment for the sake of investment is a dumb investment. What truly matters is investment's secondary effect: once it is made, does it lead to job creation? Does it open up new markets for us? Does it create new opportunities for the whole Latvian business ecosystem? These positive spill-overs are crucial. Today's LIAA looks whether the match between foreign investor and Latvian business landscape is good, and if it is – we step in with all our enthusiasm. This is what we do today.

Today we are connectors – we have an extensive network in Latvia and beyond, supported by our 20+ representative offices and laid at the feet of the entrepreneurs. Today we are architects of the business ecosystems – we engage with the policy-makers, we fine-tune laws, we suggest change and we see it through. Today we are innovators – we rock the boat of our routine and invite the whole society to step out of the comfort zones and face the unknown. The most vivid example of such effort would be the open-air festival iNOVUSS which will ignite the creativity of Latvian people this coming August. Don't forget to save the dates – be there or be square!

You see, today we are many things. But above all – and forgive me this somewhat tacky remark – today we are people. It boils down to people – always. And LIAA is a great bunch of people – inspired, competent, approachable and so full of life! They bring crazy ideas to my table every day (smiles), and this is the best part of my job and a great privilege: to keep their energy up.

But at this very
moment we are
standing, more
powerful than ever
before, on the
verge of yet another
industrial revolution
but do we really know
what to do with all
that power?

L'OFFICIEL MAGNETIC



www.liaa.gov.lv
@LIAALatvija / Facebook
@LIAALatvija / Twitter

LIAA

FROM LATVIA TO THE WORLD

The Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) is a direct administration institution subordinated to the Minister of Economics, the objective of which is to promote the competitiveness and export capacity of Latvian companies in international markets, facilitate an increase in foreign investment, implement the national policy for tourism development and the national policy in the field of innovation.

LIAA is calling for entrepreneurs who are looking for foreign markets to use the export offer to create new contacts on sales missions, national stands, contact exchanges, individual visits, and attend export seminars. LIAA promotes the development of regulatory enactments favourable to the business environment and also advocates a stable tax policy, as well as the availability of a qualified workforce, infrastructure and support instruments.

This will ensure the attractiveness of Latvia to investors,

LIAA also considers its mission to consider the attractiveness of Latvian tourism abroad.

In order to promote Latvia and carry Latvia's name around the world, showing its achievements in innovations, technologies, literature, art, science and other fields, LIAA has created the brand «Magnetic Latvia». In 2018, the business information centre of «Magnetic Latvia» was created at Riga International Airport – a unique project which introduces visitors to opportunities offered by Latvia immediately upon arrival in Latvia.

The team that implements these activities comprises young, dynamic and initiative-rich innovators, alongside experienced professionals. We present interviews with them.

Text by Marianna Hodash, Karina Evans

LATVIA HAS A LOT TO OFFER OTHER COUNTRIES



FĪLIPS TĀLBERGS, acting head of export promotion division, Foreign trade promotion department, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA). The most important task of the export promotion division is to provide a wide range of export services, including organising events that help Latvian companies from different industries to discover new foreign markets and strengthen their positions in existing export markets. Latvia is one of the countries with a small open economy, and in this flexible economic environment export growth

is especially important. According to Tālbergs, Latvia has excellent export prospects, and local entrepreneurs can undoubtedly count on LIAA's support.

«In general, about 80% of Latvian exports go to the neighbouring countries and the EU,» says Fīlīps Tālbergs. «However, our enterprises don't rest on their laurels, and today they are successfully entering distant markets, out of which the USA and the developing region of Asia are of the greatest interest. Not all product categories can be sold there with equal success, of course, but we have good prospects in the woodworking, chemical, pharmaceutical and food industries. Our IT technologies and startups are also achieving significant success and bringing international interest to our country.

Speaking of the most outstanding achievements, we can mention, for example, Latvijas Balzams, producer of alcoholic beverages whose popularity continues to grow in the Asian markets, in turn, Latvijas Finieris, manufacturer of plywood production, is showing excellent results in the construction sector by serving around 60 countries worldwide. The company is not only successfully entering foreign markets, but also continuing to create new products and achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

I'd go as far as saying that despite common stereotypes Latvia can not only just offer «something» to other countries, but Latvian companies are becoming more and more innovation-driven.

Taking part in international exhibitions is the most effective way of establishing contacts with potential partners. National stands of different sector production that we present in other countries are of great importance for us,

therefore we organize about 30 national pavilions a year. In addition, we coordinate entrepreneur trade missions to our target market countries – last year going to more than 20 different countries; also, LIAA facilitates potential foreign cooperation partner delegations from these and other countries to Latvia. For example, during the recent visit to Vietnam and Indonesia, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was accompanied by a delegation of Latvian entrepreneurs who had an excellent chance to make connections with Vietnamese and Indonesian business community. I believe that in the case of cooperation with distant markets, LIAA's support is extremely useful for our entrepreneurs. Local producers feel more at ease being part of these delegations as they don't have to look out for focal persons themselves; the whole procedure, at least for companies, is greatly simplified. It is also important that our representative offices are being opened in many countries. There are already 20 around the world, and several of them in the Asia region. We try to pay as much attention as possible to the needs of local entrepreneurs and give them appropriate support through LIAA representative offices, in cooperation with the Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies.

LIAA is a fully digital and open organization, so all information on cooperation and trade missions is available on our homepage (<http://eksports.liaa.gov.lv/>). To follow our important events, you can easily subscribe to our newsletter – jaunumi@liaa.gov.lv.

TOURISM IN LATVIA IS ACQUIRING A HIGHER QUALITY



The Tourism department of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) is promoting Latvia beyond its borders as well as attracting visitors from other countries. **INESE ŠĪRAVA**, head of the department, emphasizes the fact that the creative approach and marketing campaigns carried out by the agency over the past few years have borne fruit: the tourism figures are increasing every year.

«Latvia is a small country, and although people in the neighbouring countries and the EU countries know about us, there are still a lot of people in the world who need to be told about Latvia from the very beginning,» says Inese Širava, – that’s why we are actively informing tourists through digital channels – the travel portal, Latvia Travel, as well as social networks, which today play a huge role in creating the country’s image. We are also bringing mass media representatives and tour operators to Latvia, inviting influencers and bloggers who show «live» the country’s interesting possibilities. Having visited and liked Latvia, these people are naturally a good advertisement. We also participate in presentations and business events, tourism exchanges and exhibitions, where we meet tour operators from other countries.

Despite the fact that the main flow of tourists comes to Latvia from the neighbouring countries, guests from far away are showing an increasing interest in us too. For example, tourists from Asia have recently become quite numerous. Everything here seems to them to be rather exotic. We tell them where we are, what the country looks

like; we create a complete picture of what Latvia is for them. Tourism trends, as well as in other areas, are changing. Today, people no longer tend to fit in only popular destinations, but prefer ecotourism, go on gastro tours, show interest in lifestyle tourism, and are more and more often thinking about ways of improving their emotional well-being. We are pleased to note an amazing regional development – tourists have started visiting such cities as Liepāja, Kuldīga, Cēsis and Daugavpils more often. These are fantastic places with unique local flavours, visiting them definitely helps visitors from other countries to better feel the spirit of Latvia. We are receiving excellent reviews by foreign tourists.

Tourists admire Latvia’s beautiful nature, its quiet life, which allows them to escape the oppressive routine and never ending pace of the metropolis, as well as being able to breathe clean air, swim in the sea and see the sky without smog. We are very pleased with the fact that tourism in our country is growing not only in quantitative terms, but also in its quality. One of the goals of the department is to attract people who will enjoy Latvia.»

INVESTING IN YOUTH AND INNOVATION, WE CREATE THE FUTURE



The innovation support division is part of the Technology department of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA). It is the agency's newest department, created to facilitate LIAA's successful performance of its new functions, i.e. technology transfer and innovation. Innovation plays a crucial role in the commercialization of science and promotes export. The department is currently administering two projects of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) – a Technology Transfer initiative and the Innovation motivation programme. One of the main tasks of this LIAA business

unit is to motivate and inform Latvian society, as well as create a more favourable environment for local innovative enterprises. The head of the innovation support division, **SARMĪTE KARLSONĒ**, believes that, thanks to new initiatives, Riga has the potential to significantly increase its technological sector output.

«One of our goals is explaining complicated issues in a simple language to the public», says Sarmīte Karlsonē. – In order to do this we organise a variety of activities. For example, last February, we founded a new platform, which was originally created «under the wing» of Altum as a startup web portal, but we expanded it and added new innovation and technology functions. Our aim is for any Latvian resident or guest, willing to learn more about the events and support tools in this area, to be able to contact the www.labsoflatvia.com web portal.

LIAA is the only governmental institution in Latvia that invests resources in practical business education for young people, for example, supporting the Junior Achievement organization and contributing to the creation of new educational programmes. Young people learning to develop projects, establishing and administering enterprises will become the new generation of active and competitive young entrepreneurs within a few years. In addition, LIAA supports startups, creates networking opportunities and organises hackathons on a regular basis.

We are proud of our new Deep Tech Atelier initiative. We hope that in the next 6–7 years, thanks to this project, Riga will become the deep science centre not only in the Baltics, but also in Northern Europe. In April, we held the second conference dedicated to technology commercialization, and it has the potential to become a major international event with no analogues in the Baltic States. This is not a business forum, but a very

practical event, a place where scientific technologies meet corresponding business opportunities. In the framework of Deep Tech Atelier, master classes are held, new teams are organized, and world-class lecturers come to Riga. We try to facilitate contacts between scientists and entrepreneurs that will allow them to establish mutually beneficial relationships.

We also have so-called technology scouts, who are in fact bilateral agents. Each of them is responsible for their field, whether it is the smart materials, information and communication technology, smart energy, biomedicine or bioeconomy. They know what technologies are available to scientific institutes in the country, and they can speak to entrepreneurs and scientists about the possibilities, of which there are quite a few in Latvia. This way both parties can find a shortcut to each other.

We don't only help beginners; we also look for ways to aid experienced entrepreneurs. For example, together with Riga Business School, we organized a mini MBA – an intensive course for middle and senior managers dealing with innovation. This 12-week multi-functional course is an informational and practical «extract», giving a development impulse to enterprises.

I am optimistic about the future of Latvia. Recent Ministry of Economics reports demonstrate a steady and notable increase in ICT service exports, the highest in the Baltics in the last 2 years. We are developing new initiatives and working hard to make sure everything works out.»



When your flight takes you to sector C at Riga International Airport, you can find the Magnetic Latvia Business Information Centre. The Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) has created a space there where you can learn more about Latvia – get to know the achievements of local manufacturers in the fields of design, technology, literature, food industry, etc. Also, the centre is convenient for travellers who have to spend quite some time at the airport before their flight and is open to anyone who wishes to use it as an office as it is equipped with free, high-speed internet access or to hold a meeting or presentation, as well as to relax before a flight. According to Zane Biteniece, senior project manager of the design industry and creative areas of the export promotion division, and Linda Grīnfelde, head of the customer service division, the Centre helps create an image of a modern and multifaceted country in the minds of Latvian guests. It also encourages an influx of tourists and export sales, and raises the level of patriotism among Latvian travellers.

Text by Marianna Hodash



Zane Biteniece

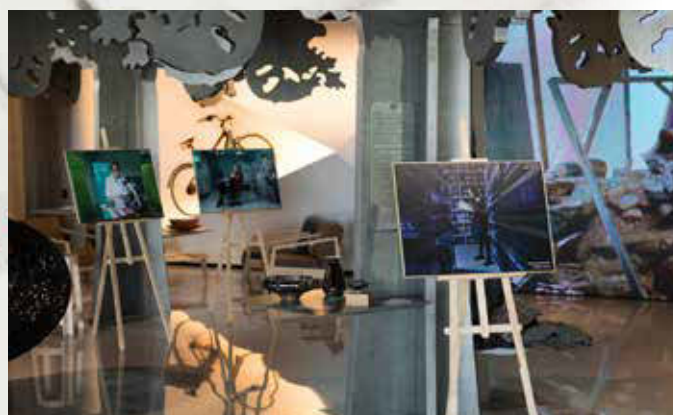


Linda Grīnfelde



A place that makes you proud of Latvia





«Today, one can get introduced to the products of more than 70 manufacturers,» says Zane Biteniece. «Our aim is to create the most varied exposition possible, so we don't limit it to design objects, which, of course, are the easiest to exhibit, but cooperate with the technological and construction clusters as well. The most important thing is to find the best possible way of displaying a product in a non-trivial way.

Our guests are also extremely pleased with the fact that the exhibition items can not only be looked at, but also touched and felt. The augmented reality goggles show the most beautiful places in Latvia, a wall size screen allows us to make live streams from LIAA events, and also to show topic-specific videos. Before the flight you can warm up on a real simulator and you can catch your breath on designer pouffes and chairs enjoying fresh Latvian coffee.»

«There are a lot of guests at the centre, on average up to 200 people per day,» continues Linda Grīnfelde. «I would like to emphasize that the Magnetic Latvia exposition is not static and we are constantly thinking of ways to transform it. In order to structure the centre's functioning we divided the topics according to the

calendar, for example, we had a Literature Month, a Birch Sap Juice Month with tastings of fine local drinks, a Business Incubator Month, when the word was given to young entrepreneurs. The Science Month, organized jointly with the Ministry of Education, also had a big success. During the event, the centre presented achievements of Latvian scientists, as well as possibilities of their commercialization. We want to comprehensively show everything that Latvia is capable of with our work.»

«We receive feedback on our work in real time every day,» says Zane Biteniece. «For example, our guests often say admiring phrases like «wow!», and «is this really made in Latvia?» The most important thing for us is the feeling our exposition gives them. Having learnt that there are so many interesting things in Latvia, they will probably want to come back here. This is the purpose of the centre's work.»

«Tourists say things like «we have never seen anything like this anywhere»,» adds Linda Grīnfelde, «they even offer to start franchises in other countries. Working with such wonderful products and receiving positive reviews every day, we are proud of the country we live in. I would like all Latvian residents to get this feeling more often.»



L'OFFICIEL MAGNETIC

EXPORT AND INNOVATION AWARD

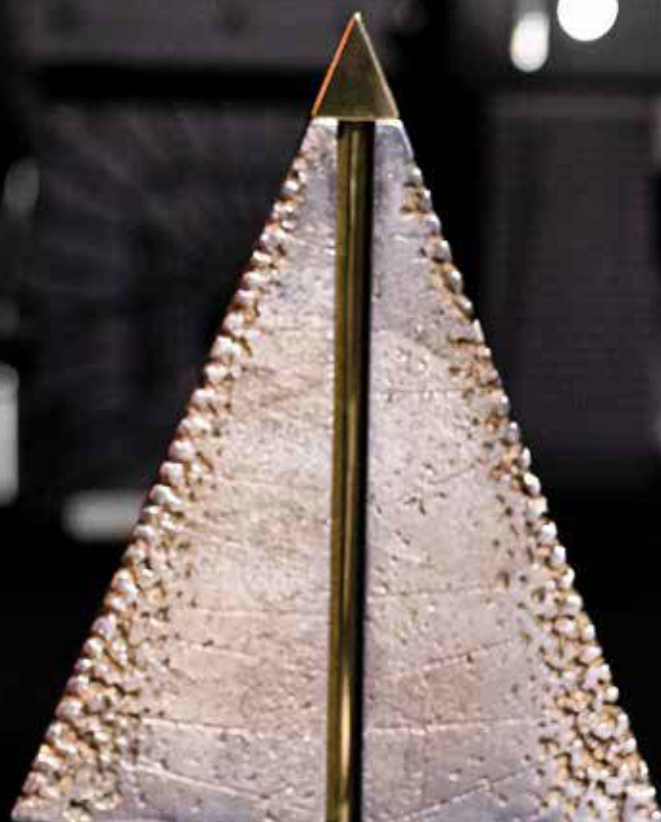
Spogulim otrā pusē

Pasākuma nolūks ir veicināt eksportu un inovāciju, veicināt uzņēmumu izaugsmi un nodarbinātību. Pasākuma mērķis ir veicināt uzņēmumu izaugsmi un nodarbinātību, veicināt eksportu un inovāciju, veicināt uzņēmumu izaugsmi un nodarbinātību.

SIA Overly
ITIS risinātājs platformā



Eksporta un inovācijas balva 2018
Importa aizstājējprodukts
SIA LAT EKO FOOD
biezeņi Rūdolfs stāvpakas



Eksporta un inovācijas balva 2018
Inovativākais produkts
SIA GAMECHANGER AUDIO
skaņas efektu ierīce PLUS Pedal



For the fifteenth consecutive year, the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia in cooperation with the Ministry of Economics, is organising the competition «Export and Innovation Award», celebrating the achievements of the most successful Latvian merchants. Winners of the «Export and Innovation Award» competition are announced at the prize-giving event, which is attended by competition participants, a panel of judges and invited guests.

Award winners and participants with the patron of the competition – the President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis.





iNOVUSS

INNOVATION FESTIVAL

WWW.INOVUSS.LV

