



Familial Ingenuity

Trigema is a family-owned business that is focused on producing high-quality, environmentally conscious apparel while remaining committed to social and economic responsibility.

Images courtesy of Trigema

Trigema was originally founded in 1919 by brothers Josef and Eugen Mayer, who bought a disused factory in Burladingen and established a mechanical knitwear factory with 25 initial workers and seamstresses. The brothers then parted ways in 1922 with Eugen founding his own company and Josef becoming sole proprietor of the mechanical knitwear factory. As the company expanded and introduced new branches, Josef's son-in-law Franz Grupp joined the company and eventually took on important functions in the organisation's management.

Franz Grupp took the reins of the company in late 1956, following the death of Josef Mayer, and

helped grow the company by opening new production plants in the region. Franz's son, Wolfgang Grupp, took over his father's position in 1969 and remains the company's CEO to this day. Wolfgang was on the pulse of current trends during his tenure; during 1970 he had the foresight to note the influence of 'flower power' on fashion, establishing the t-shirt division and tennis apparel under the brand name Trigema. By 1975, the company had become Germany's largest producer of sports and leisure clothing.

Over the years, Trigema has grown into a thriving German textile production company operating textile sales and service stations. Throughout the company's history, it has maintained its strong family

business with a focus on family values and German production. "For us, the social responsibility is very important because we want our brand to stand for high-quality products," Wolfgang explains. "Therefore, our employees have to be motivated. I take full responsibility for their jobs, and I encourage them in what they do so that they feel motivated and have the best output."

The company has always maintained a focus on social wellbeing, making great contributions, particularly to Burladingen. In 2007, the Wolfgang and Elisabeth Grupp Foundation took over the cost of new vehicles for use in the German Red Cross, as well as the welfare centre in Burladingen. In 2011, the >



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The CEO Magazine
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foundation donated €1 million to the construction of a new sports centre in Burladingen called Trigema Arena.

“For the region, social and economic responsibilities are important because they create employment, the employees are motivated, and it strengthens the economy, which reflects positively on the region. Therefore, the CEOs of the region need to work on these responsibilities because they will have positive effects on the living standards and the living quality of the region.”

Trigema has won many awards for its innovative strength and social commitment to the community. In 2006, Trigema was nominated company of the year by the ‘Yes to Germany’ initiative. This demonstrates that commercial success and social responsibility are not mutually exclusive. Since 1969, the company has never introduced short-time work or made employees redundant due to economic reasons.

Operating as a family business, Trigema knows the importance of inclusion and regularly celebrates key company milestones with the entire family and workforce. This is a legacy that has been carried throughout the company’s history. “I am in the third generation of the business and so there have been many benefits from being born into an entrepreneurial family and inheriting this legacy, but for me it’s important to not just use the advantages I’ve received from being born into this family but also to maintain and improve them to ensure that the business can be passed on to the next generation.”

Having led the company for 45-plus years, Wolfgang understands the importance of remaining at the forefront of industry trends and innovation. “As an owner and CEO, my job is not to know every detail of every machine and how they work, but to see into the future—see what’s changing out there—to make sure that the company is prepared for these changes, and to take risks by



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changing the products we offer, or the way we offer them, to ensure that the company can still exist in the future.”

Trigema has enjoyed strong growth in Germany and will continue to do so as it sets its eyes on the greater European region. “Europe is becoming more and more important. While it’s important to focus on Germany, we need to see Europe as a whole. Therefore, we have recently opened a flagship store in Berlin where we aim to show the quality and the values that Trigema portrays, especially the values of being a family business and only producing in Germany, thereby keeping the skills here in Germany and producing high-quality, German-made products.

“We portray this high quality as an inherent part of the brand, which is why we have the flagship stores. We also try to improve our online business, which has already seen us enter other countries in Europe such as the United Kingdom, France, and Switzerland.”

Trigema works closely with its suppliers to ensure the highest quality products are produced

under the Trigema banner. “We see our suppliers as partners and therefore, with regard to pricing, we can’t always pressure them to supply us at lower prices, but we have to ensure that it is the right price for them to produce products of high quality and that they enjoy producing for us without feeling threatened. We know that we pay them a fair price to be able to ensure high-quality products.”

Operating and producing within Germany means that Trigema supports local innovation and creativity, investing in high-quality production. This also ensures that the company maintains control over the entire production process. “In order to be able to supply the high quality made in Germany, we try to have a very vertically integrated production system. Therefore, if you have a t-shirt, for example, only 22 per cent of that product is what we purchase externally; 78 per cent of that product is valued added in-house with our employees and our machines, so a majority of the product is made in-house.

“We have control over the four production stages because we buy the yarn, then we have the knitting



of the fabric, the finishing, the sewing, and the embroidery and printing all done in-house, which means we can guarantee the quality of the products we produce. Since we have all of these production stages in-house, we can also be very flexible in introducing new products.”

In 2006, Trigema collaborated with environmental institute EPEA to develop the first completely biodegradable t-shirt, following the cradle-to-cradle philosophy. “We have a product line that is completely biodegradable. We were the first to produce a biodegradable t-shirt, which means all of the materials are very environmentally friendly. It can be worn by people with allergies, and the production of these products does not harm the environment, so everything, even the buttons, is biodegradable. To be able to manufacture something like this, it is also important to have good relationships with your suppliers because, in the end, we also rely on them to develop certain dyes and certain threads and buttons that fit this process.”

The Trigema cradle-to-cradle t-shirt was exhibited at the

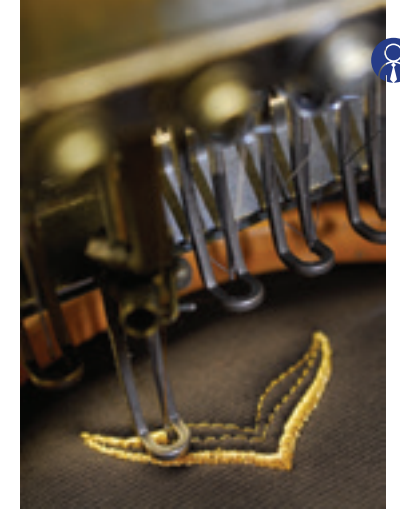
German Pavilion ‘Balancity—Cities in Balance’ at the 2010 EXPO in Shanghai. The employees in the pavilion wore Trigema cradle-to-cradle t-shirts, which were subsequently buried on the premises of the EXPO once the exhibition had closed, in the spirit of the cradle-to-cradle philosophy. It is based on closed cycles, as no waste is produced and precious raw materials are preserved for future generations. The development of this t-shirt has led to the production of the Trigema Change collection, which uses the most ecologically sensitive textiles in the world and stands for healthy and environmentally friendly sports and leisure clothing made from 100-per-cent organic cotton.

As a multichannel enterprise, Trigema markets its products through various sales channels: in 46 outlet stores throughout Germany and since 2004 in its own online shop. Furthermore, the company cooperates with 4,500 wholesale customers and supplies companies, clubs, associations, and schools with personalised clothing.

Trigema has a strong focus on its employees and works closely with them to ensure that every person

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has the opportunity to create a long and successful career within the organisation. For many years, Trigema has been training young apprentices in production, administration, and sales. The children of Trigema’s 1,200-plus employees are guaranteed an apprenticeship or job within the company once they have graduated from school.

“The apprenticeship system we have in Germany is especially important to us because all of the leading positions we have in the company—all of the people that fill them—used to be apprentices. So people know that once they start with the company they have the prospect of staying with the company for their entire working lives. We want to make sure that our employees feel at home and that their workplaces are secure, so we offer their children a place to work within our company.”

Wolfgang notes that remaining German-made means continually focusing on high quality and remaining ahead of current fashion trends and developments to ensure a future for the company. “In order to survive in Germany and other high-wage countries, we have to be able to produce products that are of high standards, high quality, and highly innovative; we shouldn’t produce items that are mass-production items. Therefore, we have to ensure that we’re always at the forefront of these innovations and take them on board. Our vision is to keep on seeing the changes in the industry and the economy in order to be able to pass on the company to the next generation.” ●

