



World Leaders in Small Business

Germany might be more famously known around the world for its car manufacturers, state-of-the-art technology, banking and insurance conglomerates and chemical giants, but it's also home to a number of companies leading the world in small business sectors.

According to a study of companies with sales of up to €50 million conducted by Bernd Venohr, a professor of strategic management at the Berlin School of Economics' Institute of Management, there are 1,300 German firms leading their respective sectors. "On top of that, there are surely another 1,000 micro-world market leaders in even smaller niches" he said in an interview with Germany's WirtschaftsWoche (Economy Week) magazine.

Here we take a look at just a few of Germany's small business world leaders.

Glasbau Hahn (Glass Construction Hahn)

Visit the Louvre in Paris or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and one thing remains the same – the glass cabinets you're looking at were most likely provided by Frankfurt's Glasbau Hahn. Glasbau Hahn also enjoyed the rare privilege of being selected by the U.S. National Park Service to construct a glass cabinet for President Abraham Lincoln's Bible. Founded in 1836 with a staff of 125, the company is the world leader in its market as well as manufacturing other glass products including the bulletproof glass used in banks.

Dresdener Sportgeräte GmbH (Dresdener Sport Equipment)

More than 40 nations have bobsled teams competing for Olympic gold, but only one company supplies most of the world's two and four-man sleds. Germany's Dresdener Sportgeräte GmbH.

Around 36 of the world's 42 teams buy the "made in Germany" sleds, which can often cost as much as a midsize car. Once part of East Germany's VEB Flugzeugwerft (VEB Aircraft Works) which supplied East German teams with closely guarded state-of-the-art sled, the company fell upon hard times in the early 1990s. The company now finds itself firmly back on track thanks to the efforts of Karola Brauer and business partner Stephan Weber who acquired the company in its lean years and helped steer the business to its current success.

Groz-Beckert

The Swabian Alb in the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg was once a hotbed for the textile industry in Germany before the sector fell into decline during the 1970s. However, some companies were able to adapt and even flourish. Groz-Beckert KG is one such survivor. It has been making precision needles and applications for machinery, clothing, leather, shoe and carpet companies across the whole world. Founded in 1852, Groz-Beckert has 7,000 employees in 150 countries and annual sales of €480 million – with only 10 percent of these revenues coming from the domestic market.

Klepper Faltbootwerft (Klepper Folding Canoe Works)

For more than 100 years, canoeists around the world have been using the "Faltboot" or folding canoe made in Germany. In 1907, an inventor by the name of Alfred Heurich turned over the business to a master tailor from Rosenheim named Johannes Klepper. The boat's wooden frame and canvas shell could be taken apart and stowed away in a backpack. A century later, Klepper's company dominates the world with 70 percent market share.

Adco Umweltdienste (Adco Environmental Services)

On first glance, it might not seem like the most glamorous of industries. But Adco Umweltdienste has proven there are market share and profits to be won wherever people come together. That's because Adco is the world leader in portable toilets thanks to its Dixi and Toi Toi brands and operations in 31 countries. It has 56 subsidiaries in places as far flung as the United States and Hong Kong, Malaysia and Taiwan with a global workforce of 1,700. The company can look to annual revenues of around €160 million from its 160,000 portable toilets ranging from its basic Dixi Klo model right through to luxury container models with marbled walls, tiled floors and full-length mirrors used for VIP events.

Pöschl Tabak (Pöschl Tobacco)

100 years ago there were 20 companies in the German town of Landshut producing "Schnupftabak" (snuff tobacco) which is popular in parts of Germany and ingested with a powerful snort into the nose. Of these companies, only one survived – the Pöschl Tabak Group. The 105 year old company only relies on snuff tobacco for 12 percent of its annual sales revenue of €230 million, but it still produces 240 tons of snuff tobacco a year – around one third of which is exported across the globe to 80 countries.

